



## **How to Write “Killer” Subject Lines That’ll Get Your Emails Opened**

An iron-clad rule in marketing, including political marketing, is that the HEADLINE of any written piece is CRITICAL.

If the headline of your press release doesn’t immediately grab the media’s attention, it will be ignored. If the headline of your fundraising letter doesn’t immediately grab the donor’s attention, it will be discarded. If the headline of your op/ed doesn’t immediately grab the reader’s attention, he’ll skip over it and move on to the next item.

Well, the “Subject” line of your emails is your headline and it better immediately grab your audience by the throat and pull them into reading your message or your reader will just hit the “Delete” key and off to the “Recycle Bin” it will go....un-read.

As such, I’m dismayed at reading the kinds of “Subject” lines used by some candidates and their high-priced consultants regularly use. They are vague, at best, and complete marketing disasters. They do NOTHING to cause the email recipient to immediately say, “Hey, that’s something I want to read!”

Here let me give you some real-life examples from the Democrat Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) - which I think may have pioneered the use of useless, meaningless, clueless Subject lines – during the 2012 election cycle.

- ***Avalanche***
- ***Idiocy***
- ***Concocting lies***
- ***No brainer***
- ***Jeopardy***
- ***Awful***
- ***Nightmare scenario***
- ***Doubled down***
- ***Off the table***
- ***Dogged***
- ***Sail***
- ***Catastrophic***
- ***Moments***
- ***Fire hose***
- ***Irresponsible***
- ***Strategy maps***
- ***Cake***
- ***Backwards tattoo***
- ***Bluff***
- ***Petulance***
- ***Nine***

Insane. Reading these subject lines tells you absolutely nothing about what the subject is. And here are some additional ones from the DSCC's mini-me, MoveOn.org, in the same cycle:

- ***A dramatic turn***
- ***The home stretch***
- ***Crisis***
- ***Stunning***
- ***Tonight!***
- ***A dramatic turn***
- ***We're seeing this everywhere***
- ***How much more pain?***

Again, these tell the recipient NOTHING about what the email is about. They're terrible. They suck. They stink to high heavens.

Fortunately, they're from our political opponents.

Unfortunately, however, some of our friends on the Right noticed this tactical change in 2012 and apparently thought it was really, really clever. As such, they played monkey-see-monkey do.

For example, I received an email from Campaign for Liberty with the following Subject line:

***"No"***

Huh?

Here's another one from Herman Cain's campaign:

***"Leadership"***

Huh?

Look, if you're a Herman Cain supporter and you saw that headline with his name in the "From" box, maybe you opened it. Then again, maybe not.

But if you were NOT a rabid Herman Cain supporter, how in the world does an email with the Subject line “Leadership” make you want to immediately open it and find out what the whole thing is about?

Got this one from a tea party organization:

***“The Establishment Lash Out”***

Huh?

Here’s another one:

***“Part 2”***

I’m not even going to TRY to explain that one!

But let me ask you the following about it to further drive home this point: Do you think it came from a conservative or liberal group? Did it come from a Republican or Democrat group? For that matter, did it even come from a political organization at all? What is the issue involved? Where does the group stand on the issue?

But most importantly, why should you care enough to immediately open the “Part 2” email and find out?

See what I mean?

So what’s a GOOD Subject line look like?

Well, it’s one that arouses interest about a specific subject that the intended audience should be interested in, in addition to conveying a sense of immediacy - often with a call to action - which causes the recipient to open it right away. For example, here’s the Subject line of an email from Americans for Prosperity:

***“Stop Obama’s tax-heavy budget ‘fix’ by August 2<sup>nd</sup>”***

Now if you’re a conservative, which is obviously the intended audience, this immediately captures your attention. It also calls for action NOW. Before August 2<sup>nd</sup> - not after. See what I mean?

Here’s another good one from our friend Ilario Pantano, a congressional candidate in North Carolina:

***“Stop the Nanny State; Sign the ‘Cut, Cap and Balance’ Pledge”***

The American Conservative Union usually has some good Subject lines, including these gems:

- ***Obama Campaign Investigated For Illegal Contributions***
- ***Urge your Senator to say "NO" on the McConnell cloture vote!***
- ***Help STOP Goodwin Liu - Obama's Worst Judicial Nominee!***
- ***Help Save the Light Bulb - Tell Your Congressman to Repeal the Light Bulb Ban!***

Some of the best conservative Subject lines come from The Political Insider e-newsletters:

- ***Breaking News: Obama in Office and Gas Prices more than Double***
- ***Gangster Government - Obama and His Union Buddies***
- ***For the Republican Woman in your Life!***
- ***Stop Union Bosses from Buying another Election***
- ***What Obama Can't Do, These SIX Events Could***
- ***Gingrich and Pelosi: Same Ad, Same Beliefs?***
- ***Taking Back the Senate Starts Right Here, Right Now***
- ***Gear Up and Tell the Dems That We've "Seen" Enough***
- ***Iran's Plan For Israel - Urgent Warning?***
- ***Block Dems Demand of Higher Taxes and Another Stimulus***
- ***Obama's campaign is already on the attack!***
- ***Act Now: Did filling up your gas tank empty your wallet this weekend?***
- ***Obama plans Back-Door Amnesty for Illegal Aliens***
- ***News Update: Media Matters Uses Tax-Free Funds to Attack Fox News***
- ***Alert: Obama chooses terror organization over American security***
- ***Stop George Soros from Controlling another member of Congress***

Seriously. Is there any doubt what the emails attached to these Subject lines are about? Can you tell immediately whether or not these are subjects you want to read more about?

The Political Insider doesn't make you guess what the subject is the way the DSCC and MoveOn do. One might even draw the conclusion that the DSCC's positions and issues are so offensive to so many people that the only way they can get *anyone* to open their emails is to fool them with these vague Subject lines!

As for an individual candidate or elected officials, I've found that Sen. Tom Coburn does an excellent job in writing compelling Subject lines. Here are some sent out from his office:

- ***9,000,000,000,000 Ways to Balance the Budget***
- ***Coburn, Levin to Hold Hearing on Tax Cheating Stimulus Contractors***
- ***Dr. Coburn Releases New Oversight Report Exposing Waste, Mismanagement***
- ***Shrimp on a treadmill and Jello wrestling at the South Pole, paid for with your tax dollars***
- ***77,000 federal employees paid more than governors***

- ***Dems distorting fundamentals of GOP plan to reshape Medicare***
- ***U.S. government giving billions in foreign aid to same nations we are borrowing from***
- ***RELEASE - Dr. Coburn Introduces Enumerated Powers Act w/ 24 cosponsors***
- ***Lawyer paid \$25,000 in stimulus funds for writing two sentences***
- ***Two unfinished Navy ships costing \$300 million will now be scrapped***
- ***\$2 million being spent on a 3 mile trail to nowhere in Texas***

Again, you don't have to guess whether or not you want to open these emails and read further. The Subject line tells you all you need to know about whether or not to read the message....or delete and move on. Why waste your supporters' time?

If you are a campaign or head of an organization, do not imitate failure. Do not fall for this strategically foolish "fad" of sending out emails with vague, meaningless Subject lines. Tell your readers what you're gonna tell them...and then tell them what you told them you were gonna tell them.

So let it be written; so let it be done.



Dr. Chuck Muth, PsD  
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P.S. Just for your information, the group behind the "Part 2" headline was a pro-life organization. The name has been withheld to protect the guilty!

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