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# CRAFTING SUBJECT LINES THAT WORK MAKING EMAIL APPEALS MORE EFFECTIVE

When it's time to develop the content for an email appeal, the subject line is typically the last thing to get written. Ironically, it's the usually first thing your reader sees. The success of a holiday appeal relies on your ability to tell a compelling story, and with such a small window of opportunity to engage readers with your message—especially during the busy holiday season – you need to start that story off with a great first line.

***Here are some simple steps to help you break through inbox clutter with interesting, relevant subject lines that get results:***

## 7 Tips for Breakthrough Subject Lines

### 1. **Substance over Style**

The subject line is an opportunity to make a good first impression and establish that what you have to say is relevant to your readers' interests and concerns. Does your subject line paint an accurate picture of what's inside? Email can build or break a trusting relationship with your readers, so be clear about what they'll get if they open the email. If the content within doesn't live up to the promise of the subject line, it may be the last time some recipients open your emails.

### 2. **Watch the Length**

Remember, messages are not always displayed consistently across various email clients and platforms (Outlook, Yahoo!, Gmail, Hotmail, AOL, etc. may all display the subject line differently). Most email clients allow for 50-60 characters to display in a subject line, which is not that much to work with!

If you're aware that a substantial number of your supporters may be reading your emails on a mobile device, consider condensing your subject lines even shorter. Some mobile devices (iPhone, for example) can show most of the characters in a subject line, while others (such as the BlackBerry) tend to show fewer than 10. In these cases the "from" line may be more important for getting recipients to open your email.

### 3. **Support the "From" Line**

When deciding whether to open an email, readers sometimes look at the "From" line

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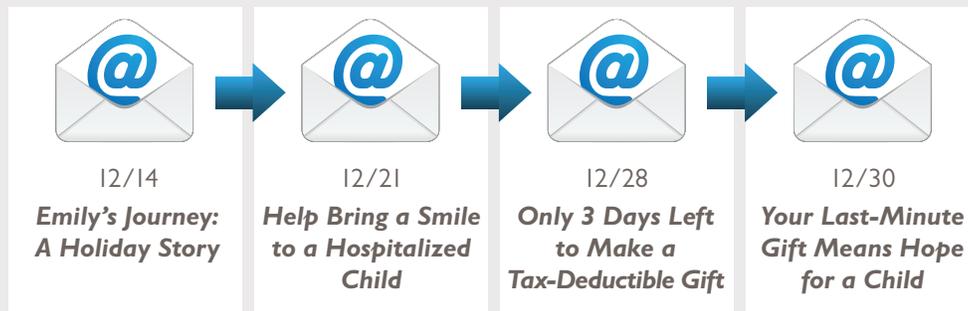
before the subject line. Support brand recognition by using a consistent “from” address for your email appeals. If your “from” line lists your organization’s name, you don’t have to repeat it in the subject line, which frees up space in the subject line.

#### 4. **Write for Deliverability**

The success of your email campaign is also subject to the email deliverability rate. Spam filtering technology often blocks legitimate email if it detects spam-like phrases. To ensure your appeal makes it to the inbox, run your email copy and subject lines through your email marketing software’s spam checker to identify and correct any violations. Your spam checker should tell you which words and phrases to avoid, but rely on common sense as well: if it sounds at all like it could be spam, many recipients will delete the email unopened, even if it does get past their spam filter.

#### 5. **Utilize Deadlines to Create a Sense of Urgency**

As the year-end nears, gradually increase the level of urgency in your subject lines. Because of the high volume of email this time of year, people are not reading every item they receive and may actually appreciate the reminders. Sending with a higher frequency is okay, but keep an eye on opt-out rates and adjust accordingly. The goal is to stand out without annoying your supporters. Here are some subject line examples in a series of touches that lead up to the end of the year with an increasing sense of urgency:



#### 6. **Be Proactive**

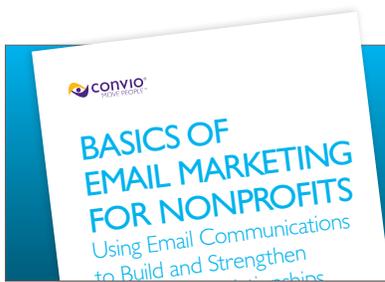
Don’t think of your subject line as the last (and most rushed) step in creating your appeal. Start thinking about it as soon as you start planning the email campaign—it may help focus the content of the campaign. The sooner your potential subject lines are narrowed down, the sooner you can begin pre-testing to a seed list, especially if you plan on using multiple subject lines.

#### 7. **Test, Test, Test**

Once you’ve got the basics down, start testing! [Convio Email Marketing](#) allows

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you the opportunity to perform A/B split tests to understand which subject line your constituent base responds to best. Here's how it works: you send two or more identical email messages with different subject lines to a subset of your target audience to determine which is most effective at soliciting a response, then send the most effective message to the remainder of the audience. When evaluating the results, remember to look at click-thru rates as well as open rates. If you're pressed for time, you can run your subject lines past a small focus group of others in your organization.



For more tips on email marketing that supports your mission, download **Convio's Basics of Email Marketing for Nonprofits**: <http://www.convio.com/emailguide>. Or contact us at **888-528-9501** or [info@convio.com](mailto:info@convio.com).