



Getting Clients to Read Your Emails

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Today, we're seeing a sea change in how clients and prospects respond to information.

Everyone is swamped by the sheer volume of email and communication – people talk about drowning in communication, with the result that they're incredibly pushed for time.

As a result, it's harder to get clients' and prospects' attention and harder to keep their attention – that's true in face-to-face meetings and it's even truer on the phone or in writing.



So if you want to communicate effectively you have to change your approach – via email, over the phone and in person.

Getting emails opened

People today are much less likely to read anything you send them.

And if they do read it, it's because you've grabbed them with a catchy subject line or headline and what you've sent them is short and punchy.

In fact, the most important part of any email is the subject line, followed by the first two sentences.

Subject lines need to be short and tight, getting the recipient's attention. Ideally, they should be intriguing, so they're prompted to click to open the email.

Remember, you either grab someone when they glance at the subject line or risk losing them entirely.

To get you started, here are some recent subject lines on my own articles that have had a good response:

- Warren Buffett on investing in a climate of fear
- Three words to blow away clients
- Hard lessons from a lost account



- Breakthrough research from the Harvard Business Review
- A small thing that made a big difference
- Four words of advice from a top producer

The three-second rule

The battle for attention doesn't end when someone opens your email.

I recently heard an interview with a music executive who said that years ago songs would often open with an introduction and then get into the main melody several seconds later.

Today, you have three to five seconds to grab your audience's attention or you lose them – some of the most popular songs of late grab the listener right off the top, with no introduction at all.

As an example, the song Tik Tok by Kesha set records for most downloads ever by any female artist. (You may be familiar with the song from its line "Brush my teeth with a bottle of Jack.")

One of the reasons the song is successful is that there's no intro at all before getting into the body of the song.

Once someone has opened your email, the first two sentences should really sell the benefit of continuing to read – and clearly identify why you're sending them that email, why they should read it and what you're going to do or ask them to do as a result.

And once you're done that, try to keep everything short – short sentences, short paragraphs.

Use subheads in *italics* or **bold** to break it up

And if it's going to be longer than one screen so that people have to scroll down, understand that you will lose some people

Having articles read

I'm a big fan of sending third-party articles from credible sources – for example an article from the *Wall Street Journal* or the *New York Times* on Warren Buffett's recent investor meeting in Omaha.

Remember, though, that fewer and fewer people are reading what you send them carefully – they may scan it but few are reading it in depth.



A better solution is to send clients and prospects a link to part of the interview Warren Buffett did on CNBC the Monday after his investor meeting.

Video is the big growth area on the internet – Cisco estimates that by 2012 video will make up 60% of Internet traffic. And advisors have to reflect this in how they communicate.

Getting voice mails returned

The same principles apply to leaving voice mail messages – short, tight, benefit-focused, and designed to create a sense of urgency in terms of returning your call or acting on your message.

One way is to take ten seconds before placing the call to jot down the key points you want to make. Once you hear the beep, it's too late to start thinking about what you want to say – we've all heard long-winded, meandering messages on our voice mails, and we all know that those do not motivate us to act.

When it comes to voice mails, what you say is obviously important – but just as important is your tone in how you deliver your message. You need to convey a sense of energy and a sense of urgency.

Keeping people focused on the phone

Even if you're fortunate enough to get a client on the phone, the problem with many telephone conversations is that people are distracted. They hear you but often they're looking at their computers or their minds are wandering, so they're not really listening.

As a result, on phone conversations it's critical that you involve clients or prospects and get them talking.

Consider using web meeting software that emails clients a link that they click on. When they do that, you take over their computer screen, and you can show an agenda, client statements and walk through key points.

This lets you use visual support – charts and graphs – that will help hold your listener's attention.

A number of companies offer this – the top three are Citrix Go to Meeting, Webex and Microsoft Live Meeting.

Effective face-to-face meetings

When meeting in person, the impact of shortened attention spans is less pronounced compared to mail, email and voice mails.



That said, it's still important to adapt how you communicate to the time-pressed world in which we operating today:

- Keep presentations as short as possible
- Be sure to involve our client.
- If you've got a proposal or a financial plan that's ten pages, have a one page executive summary at the front.
- And again, use charts, graphs and visuals to support your key points.

Like it or not, we've entered the short attention span world – one from which we're unlikely to exit anytime soon.

You have to change how you operate in response– and take a hard look at how you communicate with clients as a result.

** Dan Richards conducts programs to help advisors gain and retain clients and is an award winning faculty member in the MBA program at the University of Toronto. To see more of his written and video commentaries and to reach him, go to www.clientinsights.ca.*

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