

2020 EDITION

# The Definitive Guide for Email Outreach

Best Practices, Benchmarks,  
and Recommendations for Messaging  
Passive Talent



# The Landscape of Talent Acquisition is (Still) Shifting

If you're in talent acquisition, any number of circumstances in the industry are making your job more challenging right now—whether it's talent shortages for certain roles, a new flood of inbound applications, concern about continuing to prove the value and relevance of recruitment amidst temporary hiring freezes, ongoing competition from TA teams who are eyeing the same talent you are, or your team's examination of your diversity and inclusion initiatives in light of the Black Lives Matter movement. Annual industry surveys show that recruiters find their jobs more and more difficult year-over-year. Many of you might say that 2020 already wins in the “challenging” category.

## Table of Contents

1. Sequence Stages	4
2. Sequence Cadence	6
3. Subject Lines	8
4. Send Times	13
5. Message Length	17
6. Personalization Tokens	19
7. Message Content	21
8. “From” Names	31
9. Calls to Action	33
10. Further Testing	35



## The Current State of Talent Acquisition

We're re-publishing the Definitive Guide for Email Outreach, with updated data, at a time of great uncertainty in the market. But outreach as a recruitment concept might be more important than ever right now. Your reqs may be on hold, and recently-open positions may have been cut entirely. Yet we can't think of a better time to be focusing on human relationships—initiating conversations and building pipelines of talent that might be interested in coming to work for you when hiring ramps up again. At that point, those outreach labors will pay off in a ready talent pool that felt seen by your company in a time of crisis.

And for those of you who are still hiring? You're under the same pressure as ever to nurture—and ultimately to capture—top talent, which means you're spending a lot of time at the top of the funnel. Until recently, that top-of-funnel work hasn't been centrally tracked; and platforms haven't been available to help you understand the data at hand. All that's changed now. Talent acquisition has access to metrics such as email open rates, click-through rates, response rates, and content stats, which allow them to measure and examine the impacts of their efforts to refine future outreach strategies.

Soon enough, every talent team will be internally equipped to discover its own best practices. In the meantime, teams should know what kinds of messages are statistically more likely to resonate with prospects and encourage responses. This can serve as a starting place as they undertake the journey of discovering which methods drive engagement for them. In the following report, we dive into both our own data and expert opinion to offer both best and most effective practices for prospect outreach.

And we wish you the exhilaration of discovery on your own journey.

### By the Numbers

**82%**

of HR professionals have reported difficulty recruiting

**12 - 20**

The number of touchpoints it takes to influence a career decision

**68%**

of organizations say their top recruitment priority is sourcing candidates directly

**2X**

Sourced candidates are hired at more than twice the rate at which inbound applicants are hired

**90%**

of candidates prefer to be contacted by email (rather than phone or InMail) about job opportunities

**90%**

of all talent (active and passive) is open to hearing about new job opportunities, even if they aren't looking

## Number of Stages in an Email Sequence

Data from over one million prospect outreach campaigns show prospects responding to recruiter emails at the following rates:



**One Email**  
received a  
13%  
reply rate



**2 Emails**  
received a  
25%  
reply rate



**3 Emails**  
received a  
30%  
reply rate



**4 Emails**  
received a  
32%  
reply rate

## Best Practice

### Don't Fear the Follow-Up!

As a general rule, the total number of responses goes up as the number of emails in a sequence increases—even if the number of responses to a single stage doesn't increase. This rule continues to hold past the first 4 emails (a 5-email sequence sees a 39% response rate, for example); but when we broke out responses by “interested” vs “not interested,” we started to see diminishing returns.

### Why Follow-Up Messages Work

The data proves that multi-stage sequences are more effective at eliciting responses from candidates. Yet in practice, many recruiters still only send one follow-up, if any.

If followups are so important, why aren't recruiters sending email #3 or #4? Our conjecture is that this is the case for a few reasons:

- 1 **We don't have time**
- 2 **We don't want to come off as aggressive**
- 3 **Rejection is hard! And we don't want to feel it, *again***

### A 4-stage sequence strikes the right balance between connecting with talent and preserving employer brand.

That said, at Gem we recommend a long-term nurture mindset. Give prospective candidates some space after that initial outreach sequence, then continue to send emails with company updates a few times a year. This will ensure your org is top-of-mind when talent is ready to make a move.

To the first point, time constraints—not to mention the tediousness of manual follow-ups—disappear with automation. (Recruiters who use Gem work, on average, 5x more quickly through follow-up outreach with our automated follow-up feature.)

As for points 2 and 3, remember that passive candidates are less likely to respond to that first (or second, or third) email for one simple reason: They're employed full-time, meaning they're busy a greater proportion of the time than active candidates are. Follow-up messages are effective because they let you experiment with timing, eventually catching prospects when they can process what you're offering.

## The Takeaways

Silence  $\neq$  Rejection

Emails have short lifespans; candidates are less likely to return to your initial email than they are to respond to your most recent one

The best recruiters know the power of the follow-up



## Spacing Sequence Cadence

Our data shows that sourcers' messaging cadence remains fairly consistent as sequence stages get sent. The median number of days between messages is 5-6-6 (5 days between the first and second email, 6 days between the second and third email, 6 days between the third and fourth email.) Note that a 5-6-6 cadence leads to email delivery on a different day of the week throughout the sequence. Last year's data showed a different common cadence: 6-6-3. The fact that message 4 often came so quickly on the heels of message 3 in 2019 gave a sense of urgency to this cadence. This year, it appears that recruiters are giving talent a little more breathing room.

### The Most Common Wait Times Between Emails



**Best Practice****Sequence Cadence: Keep Yourself Top-of-Mind Over the Long(er) Term**

It's worth noting that many of our customers *do* send more than four messages to prospective talent—but they let enough time lapse between stages so as not to overwhelm or agitate prospects, or injure their talent brand. We imagine this is the case because recruiters are recognizing the importance of longer-term nurture. A four-stage sequence spread out over 2-3 weeks

catches talent during a small and specific window in their lives. Our customers who decide to send a fifth stage wait an average of 24 days—nearly one month—to send that outreach. Many of them wait longer. This gives talent time to consider the offer being extended, and leaves enough room for their lives or career plans to change between messages.

**Remember, There are Two Types of Cadence**

Send cadence (delivery timing) and conversational cadence (the rate at which you move your messaging forward). Take both into account with every email.

**Pro Tip on Sequence Cadence**

One pattern our team at Dropbox has observed is that six days is a bit of a magic number when it comes to email outreach cadence. It means we're always catching the prospect on a different day of the week, which increases our chances of eventually hearing back from them. It also means we're allowing enough breathing space between touches to give the prospect time to turn over what we're offering.

**Mike Moriarty**  
Global Head of Talent Acquisition



## Subject Lines

Naturally, there's a direct correlation between subject lines and open rates. For our best practices on this element, we pulled data on our customers' token usage, then combed through thousands of subject lines and observed the characteristics of those lines that saw the highest open rates.

Tokens represent values that are either auto-captured from the prospect's LinkedIn profile (i.e. {{company}}) or manually entered by a sourcer (i.e. {{reason}}). These variables can be dropped anywhere in subject lines or message copy when the sourcer is creating the email sequence. The value will automatically populate the email, replacing the token when the outreach is sent. In short, tokens offer the best of both worlds: personalization and automation.

## The Power of Personalization Tokens

The majority of sourcers and recruiters (74%) aren't using tokens in their subject lines. Messages with impersonal subject lines see decent open rates (60%); but our data suggests that personalized subject lines beyond `{{first_name}}` see better open rates than those that aren't personalized.

We say "beyond `{{first_name}}`" because it turns out that first name alone might not cut it anymore. `{{first name}}` is the most popular subject line token among our users (22% of subject lines use `{{first name}}`); but those messages only see a 55% open rate—5% worse than subject lines that aren't personalized. This data suggests it may be worth it to recruiters to think beyond `{{first name}}` and experiment with more deliberate and rigorous subject line personalization.

Our 2020 data reinforces what we saw in 2019—the power of the `{{reason}}` token. A `{{reason}}` token alone sees a 71% open rate. Here are the tokens—or the combination of tokens—that see the highest open rates among our users.

`{{reason}}` + `{{first_name}}` + `{{last_name}}` → 79% reply rate

`{{reason}}` → 71% open rate

`{{company}}` + `{{title}}` → 70% open rate

`{{first name}}` + `{{company}}` + `{{title}}` → 64% open rate

So experiment with mixing-and-matching and keep track of your open rate data. You'll land on the right token combination sooner than later.

## Best Practices

### Personalize

Personalized subject lines increase open rates by nearly 20%. Prospects have been leaving digital footprints for years. Do your due diligence and research them—on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and elsewhere. Then drive opens with a personalization token.

If you're using Gem, we recommend a short `{{extra}}` token in the subject line (the prospect's first name, alma mater, current company, etc.), and a longer `{{reason}}` token in the body copy (a recent success, a blog post they wrote, an interest that would make them make them a great add to your company culture or a career aspiration they appear to have... whatever might inspire them to respond).



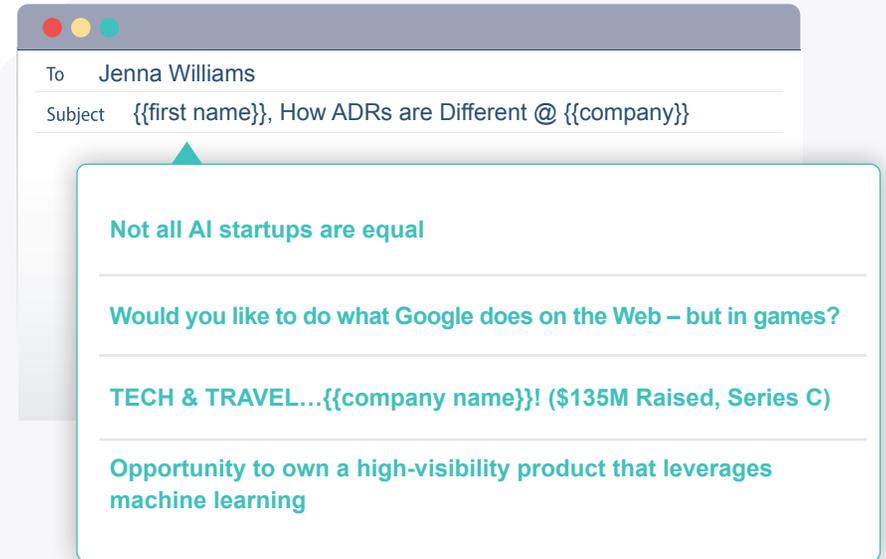
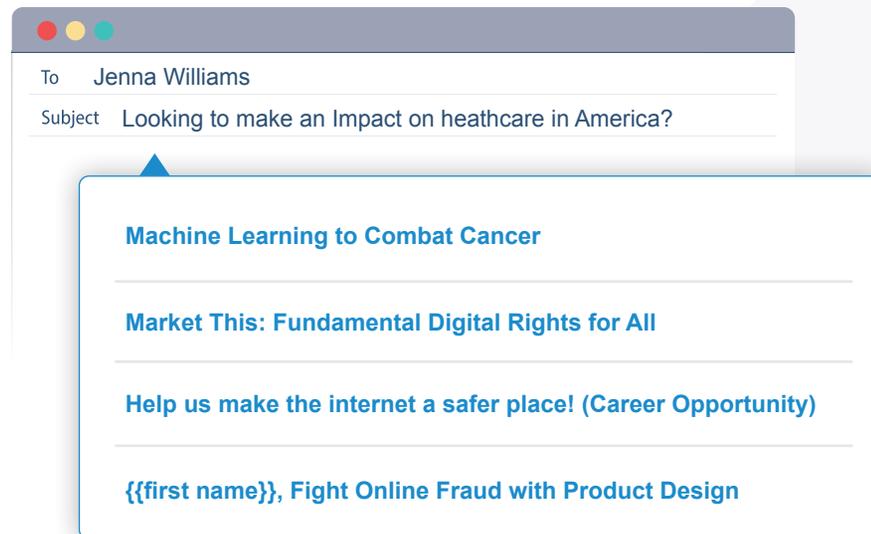
### Mutual Connections Can Help



Another personalization strategy is to mention a mutual connection or referral in the subject line. This functions as an immediate endorsement, evoking trust in the prospect. Keep in mind that passive candidates won't exactly be interested in introducing risk into their lives with a career change. Having a common connection—especially one who already works at your company—psychologically minimizes that risk.

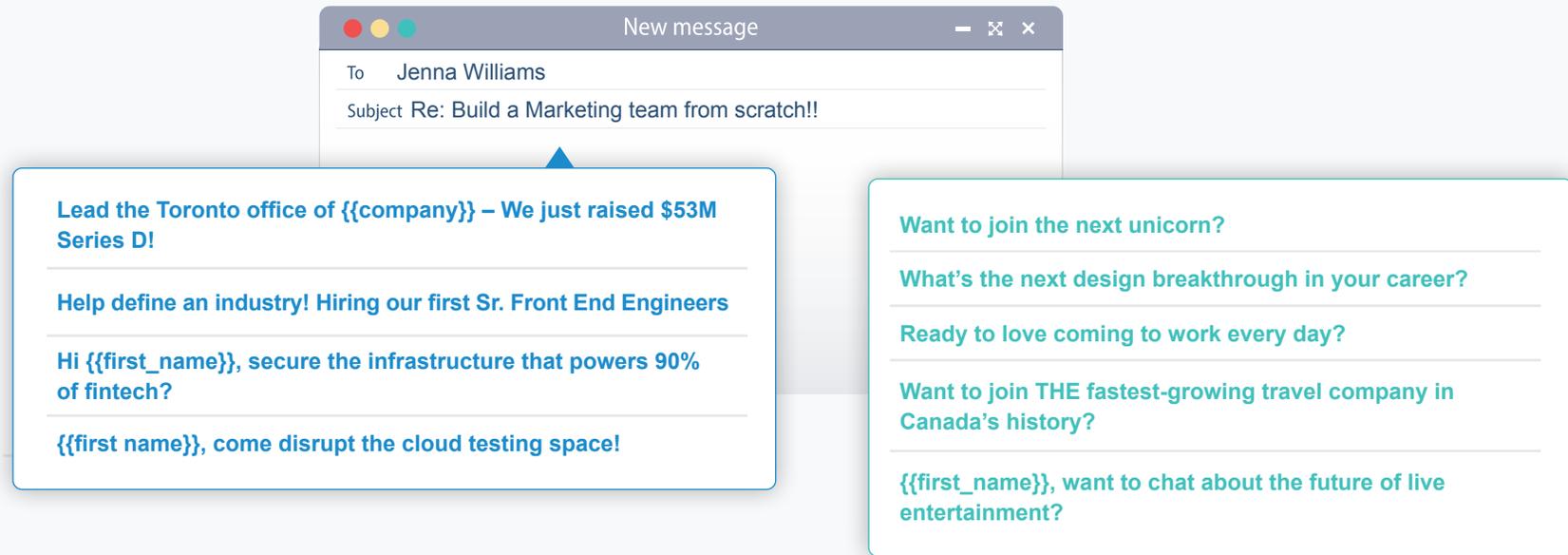
## Appeal to Values

Passive talent may be checking their email in sprint-mode; but their hearts go with them even as they scan their inboxes. Think about “the greater good” your company is ultimately trying to offer, the demographic it most wants to support, or the values and causes it hopes to honor. You might confirm through research whether you share those values with your prospects—but chances are pretty high that you do.



## Appeal to Curiosity

The prospects you’re reaching out to are top professionals and problem-solvers in their fields: They already possess an instinct for inquiry. In the context of talent outreach, let’s define curiosity as the urge to understand “language events” (subject lines) that are ambiguous, uncertain, or partial. Curiosity is one of the most influential drivers of human behavior—in this case, email opens. That’s because it releases dopamine, a chemical associated with motivation. Consider the questions the subject lines above invoke.



## Recognize The Power of (Powerful) Verbs

If you'll allow us to state the obvious, action words inspire action. When prospects are presented with powerful verbs, they'll feel both implicitly challenged (in a good way!) and empowered. Verbs also help passive candidates better visualize what success could look like in that role you're offering. "Build," "lead," "define," "secure," "disrupt," and "reinvent" are among the more compelling verbs we've see talent teams use.

## Experiment With Questions

Questions place recipients in an instant dialogue with your email—even before they open it. Prospects will naturally pause and respond internally—and will then be lured in to find out (or be affirmed in) the answer.

## Avoid Words That Trigger Spam



While we're discussing punctuation, remember that your message will pass through two "spam filters": the one built into the email platform, and the prospect's own two eyes. While questions can be effective, avoid ALL CAPS, over-exclaiming (!!!), excessive dollar-signage (\$\$\$), and phrases like "make money."

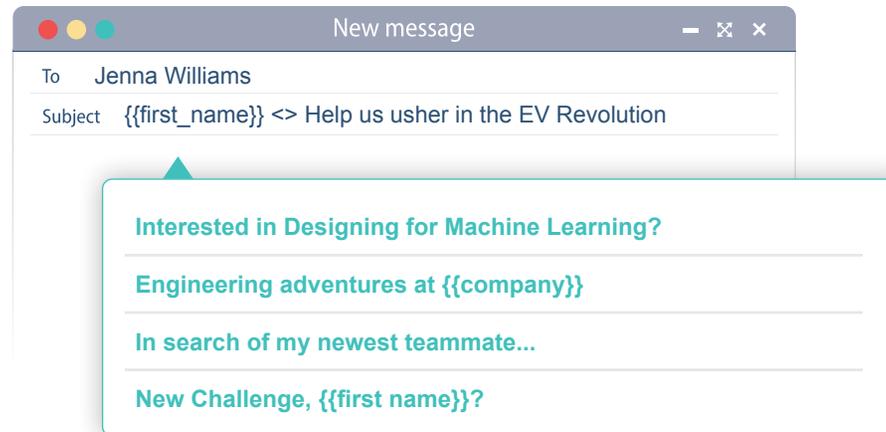
## Flattery (Might) Get You Everywhere

Compliments trigger reward centers in the brain, which leave us wanting more of the resulting “mini high.” Prospects are likely to try to extend this feeling by clicking in. Note that flattering the egos of prospects’ future selves (“come be our expert”) can be as impactful as flattering their current selves.



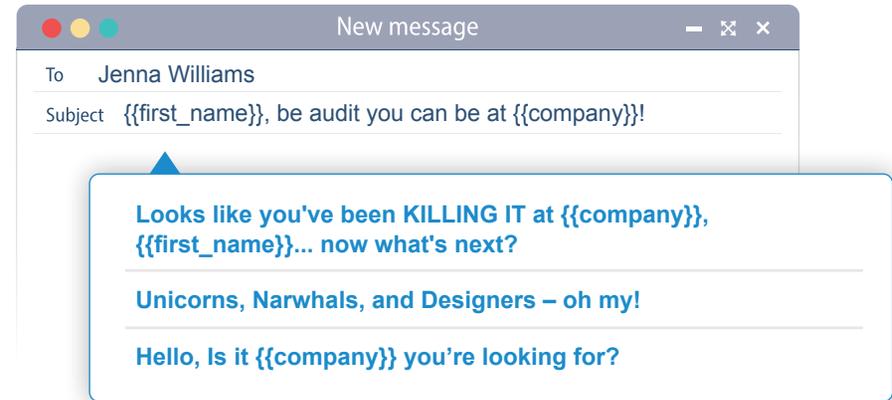
## Consider Brevity

Depending on whom you ask, somewhere between 46% and 59% of email opens occur on mobile. You don't want your subject line cut short on smaller devices. Test subject lines between 32-49 characters to determine “most effective length”—but our guess is that the language in your subject line will carry more significance than the length will. (Just keep below 50 characters!)



## Consider Personality

Of course, how much personality you inject into prospect outreach will hinge on your overall brand personality, not to mention what you know about your prospective candidates. But if it fits your company style, a little pun never hurt anyone—indeed, it probably only ever caught their attention. (Note the subject line that plays on the word “audit” below opened to an email about a Senior Accountant position.) Pop culture references, emojis, and humor of all kinds also fall into this category. Experiment with these as you see fit.



## Send Times

When your outreach is competing with 120+ daily emails for prospects' attention—and when passive talent in particular doesn't have the luxury of carefully attending to every message they receive—you want to put your email in a position to get noticed. Great subject lines will get you great open rates, sure. But a subject line is only as great as it is visible. And this means getting it as close as possible to the top of prospects' inboxes.



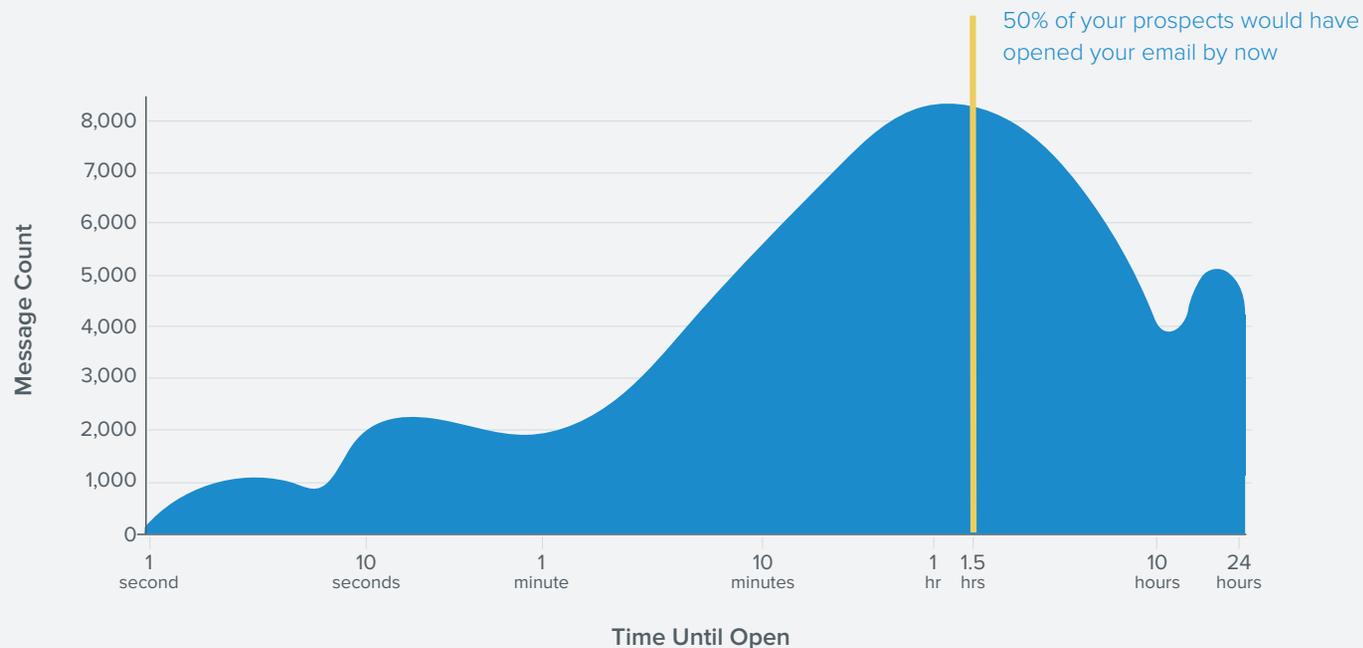
## Best Practice

### Send Times: Plan Outreach Based on Seconds-Until-Open

More than 50% of prospects open emails within the first 1.5 hours of send time—data that underscores the importance of catching passive talent at the right time. In other words, you’ll want to send as close as possible to when prospects will be sitting down at their computers next to tackle email. That’s because most people take a top-down approach to email, reading the messages that came in most recently *first*. The ones they don’t get to get archived—which often means they remain unopened.

You’ll discover the best window for your prospective candidates through testing, over time. In the meantime, what we’ve discovered at Gem is that weekend outreach—

particularly outreach sent on Sundays—tends to do surprisingly well; but “best times” were much more nuanced when we dug in by role. After all, different roles have different relationships to email; and it may be worth it to you to hypothesize why some of the following numbers are what they are. (For example, we imagine that outreach for sales roles performs so much better on Saturdays and Sundays because that’s when sales folks are online, planning for the week ahead. On the other hand, weekdays during lunch are likely great times for recruiting outreach because recruiters are *already* on email all day; they may just use lunch breaks as a time to switch over to personal email to see what’s happening there.)



## Email: Best Send Days & Times by Role

### Engineering Managers

Emails sent  
Sunday afternoons  
perform

**9%**

**better** than the average

Emails sent Thursday  
afternoons from  
3 pm - 5 pm perform

**3 - 5%**

**worse** than the average



### Engineers

Emails sent Sunday  
before 4 pm perform

**6 - 11%**

**better** than the average

Emails sent after 10 pm any  
day of the week perform

**3 - 27%**

**worse** than the average

Emails sent before 5 am  
any day of the week perform

**3 - 15%**

**worse** than the average

\* "When to send" is based on an open rate within 60 hours of send time. We used opens rather than replies as our metric, since the latter is biased by message content.

## Email: Best Send Days & Times by Role

### Product

Emails sent Saturday and Sunday before noon perform

**5 - 10%**

**better** than the average

Emails sent at 4 pm on Thursday and Friday perform

**7 - 9%**

**worse** than the average

### Design

Emails sent Mondays and Tuesdays at 8 am perform

**8 - 9%**

**better** than the average

Emails sent on Sundays perform

**11%**

**worse** than the average

### Data

Emails sent at 9 am Monday - Friday perform

**5 - 8%**

**better** than the average

Emails sent Wednesday evenings and Thursday afternoons/evenings perform

**5 - 6%**

**better** than the average



### Sales

Emails sent Saturday and Sunday from noon - 5 pm perform

**9 - 14%**

**better** than the average

Emails sent Tuesday-Friday at 5 pm perform

**8 - 13%**

**worse** than the average

### Recruiting/HR

Emails sent Monday - Friday at lunchtime perform

**3 - 5%**

**better** than the average

Emails sent Wednesday - Friday after 4 pm perform

**10 - 12%**

**worse** than the average

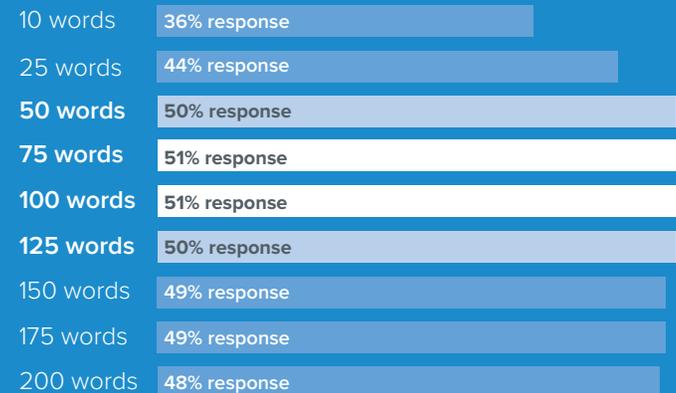
## Best Practice

## Message Length

### Err on the Shorter Side

Based on our data, there seems to be no meaningful correlation between message length and reply rate. It's worth noting, however, that the majority of messages we looked at were between 90 and 220 words long. (Sourcers typically use hyperlinks directing prospects to webpages on careers and company culture when they want to offer more information. This keeps the messaging simultaneously rich and short.)

Our hypothesis is that our users are already following a “best practice” of shorter outreach messaging. Indeed, studies have suggested a “sweet spot” of 50-125 words, which yield response rates of 50-51%:



Source: BoomerangApp.com

## Pro Tip on Message Length



I'm definitely in the shorter-is-better camp. Of course, the shorter the message, the more compelling its words need to be. The essential thing is to make sure you're always adding value for the candidate, whether it's in 20 words or 200 words.

**Chinsin Sim**  
Recruiting Manager



## LinkedIn Recommends 200-500 Words For InMail

Indeed, its study of InMail data from recruiters in San Francisco concluded “that the shorter the InMail, the higher the response rate.” (The same, by the way, was true for subject lines.)

There's a commonsense element to the argument that short-and-to-the-point outreach (assuming it's also personalized and genuine) will outperform long emails. Remember, passive candidates aren't exactly swimming in free time. And you can deliver the essentials—personalized mention, a compelling detail or two about the opportunity, a call to action—in fewer than 10 sentences. Then there's mobile to consider: An iPhone will show about 120 words at a time—even with breaks between paragraphs. An implicit best practice you might draw from this fact is to include the most important information of your message within the first 120 words. Don't make passive talent scroll for the good stuff.

## Make the Email Easy to Read

A more nuanced hypothesis about word count also takes structure into account: A 200-word email is only as good as the breathing space between sentences. Break those words up into shorter blocks of text so that the message contains 3-4 paragraphs.

From a UX perspective, this is easier on the eyes—and easier for the recipient to scan and digest than one big block of text would be.

## Using Tokens in Email Message Content

Our data shows email outreach that uses tokens in the message content performs better than outreach that doesn't personalize at all. The only outreach for which this is *not* the case is outreach that only uses a {{first name}} token. The takeaway? Once again, talent is looking for messaging that's more personalized than their first name.



## Experiment with Different Combinations of Tokens

Email outreach that doesn't contain any personalization tokens sees a 29% response rate. Compare that to the response rates for these single tokens, or token combinations:

**{{title}}** → 39% response rate

**{{company}}** → 38% response rate

**{{first name}}** + **{{company}}** + **{{title}}** → 37% response rate

**{{first name}}** + **{{company}}** + **{{reason}}** → 34% response rate

**{{reason}}** → 34% response rate

**{{first name}}** + **{{reason}}** → 33% response rate

## Introducing the {{reason}} Token

The {{reason}} token is a concept unique to Gem's platform that allows recruiters to personalize the motivation for reaching out to each prospect while on their LinkedIn profile (i.e. "I'm reaching out because I see you worked at [Company X] for four years; and it looks like you have rare industry expertise for an opportunity that just came up here"). This variable is then inserted into respective prospects' messages when sequences are sent in batch.

### Best Practice

## Get Personal

A study of nearly 8,000 recruiting emails showed highly personalized messages outperforming both *somewhat* personalized and *impersonal* outreach. Highly personalized messages saw a 73% engagement rate, while reply rates for *somewhat* personalized outreach were no better than reply rates for outreach that wasn't personalized *at all*. So experimenting with personalization—both at scale with tokens and in a more focused way for highly sought-after talent—may deliver terrific ROI.

## Highly Personalized Messages are Way Better



## Experimenting with Personalization at Scale with Tokens

Because each prospect—or each prospect pool—will have their own “sweet spot,” sourcers should experiment with and test tokens at scale. Some questions worth asking:

*Do {{company}} tokens or {{role}} tokens get better response rates?*

*Is it better to mention prospects' current company or your company?*

*How long after graduation does the {{school}} token have value?*

*Do more tokens earn more responses? Or are there diminishing after returns after a certain point?*

## Message Content

Our hypothesis is that best practices for message content should be shaped by candidate sentiment. Seems obvious? Perhaps; but sometimes the self-evident is worth saying aloud.

Here's what candidates say they want to know about the job opportunity:

Career trajectory

Expectations and workload

What a "day in the life" looks like

Employee perspectives

Here's what they say they most want to know about your company:

Culture 66%

Perks 54%

Mission 50%





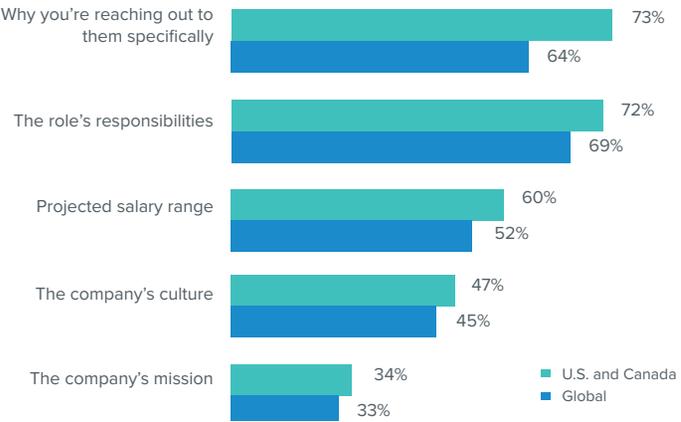
Here's What Talent Most Wants in a Job:

Career advancement      Challenge      Fair compensation

The Most Common Reasons Professionals Give for Leaving Their Jobs are:

Lack of career opportunity & advancement	Want more challenging work	Unhappy with compensation & benefits
<b>43%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>29%</b>

Here's What Talent Wants to Be Told in Your Initial Outreach



Source: LinkedIn.com

In other words, top talent is already *telling* you what to include in your outreach. But alongside those questions prospective candidates want answered, it's worth considering what they want in a job—and why they may be willing to leave theirs. This should help you determine what information to lead with.

The Most Important Factors Candidates Take into Account when Accepting a New Job are:

Compensation	Professional development	Better work-life balance
<b>49%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>33%</b>

**In light of COVID, one thing we'd add to this section in 2020 is the importance of messaging that tells talent:**

1. Why your company is still a strong option despite economic instability (what's your runway, for example?); and
2. How well your leadership took charge during the shift to remote work. Is your culture still strong? Was employees' mental health prioritized in the transition?

How your company treats its employees in times of crisis is revealing, and talent will want to hear these things.

## Best Practices

### Explain Why You're Reaching Out to *Them*

This is another way of reiterating: *Personalize*. And we don't just mean mentioning mutual interests here, though that's been shown to work in subject lines. You've done your research. You know what projects and initiatives your prospect has been undertaking at their current company in recent years. You know their interests and skill sets, and have a strong sense of what they could bring to the position (or to a specific current project) and offer your company. Tell them as much. It'll flatter them, yes. It'll also make you look instantly trustworthy.

Hey {{first\_name}},

{{reason}}.

[company name] is an account aggregation technology looking to make big waves in fintech. Last year we opened our second engineering hub in Chicago, raised \$147M in funding... and now we're ready to scale!

We'll need to grow by about 70 engineers (currently ~15) over the next two years, so we're looking for the right people to have a hand in shaping the engineering culture of our new office. {{extra1}} tells me you might enjoy, and add a lot of value, to our building process.

When do you have some time to jump on the phone this week? I'm flexible and would love to hear more about your background, interests, and of course, share more about [company name].

Hey {{first\_name}}, I hope your {{day\_of\_week}} is going well.

I partner with our Success Engineering Managers at [company name] to identify new technology focused customer centric individuals for our team. Your experience {{extra1}} caught my eye and I thought I'd reach out to tell you more about our team. This is a truly ideal time to join -- it's still early enough to have a huge impact and to create an amazing home in the greater Denver tech-community. We're outgrowing the startup phase and running to power the entire customer data ecosystem, and we need the best people to take the market.

I realize that you might be happy at {{company}} and not actively planning a move right now, yet my hunch is that this would be a great conversation at least. I'm adding a few links below in case you want to dig in more.

Let me know if you're interested. The next step would be to have an intro call with me to help familiarize you more with the customer-facing Success Engineer opportunity. Open to learning more?

### A Note on Personalization

Remember, there's a difference between *somewhat* personalized messages (which see the same response rates as impersonal messages), and *highly* personalized messages. Go deep with your outreach. We recommend 1-2 details unique to the prospect in your opening paragraph. Then dedicate a full paragraph to what you know about their work and how you believe their skills and experience would make a terrific fit for your company.

That full paragraph is an essential best practice for connecting with highly sought-after talent (diversity candidates or leadership roles, for example), or talent pools in which there are only a small handful of people that are qualified for the job.

Hey {{first\_name}},

Pleasure to meet you. My name is [name] and I work for [company name], a Series B NEA backed data analytics company that is starting to explode with growth.

Straight to the point: We are about to double in size and we're looking to hire a Solutions Architect (Professional Services/Consultant). This role will work on implementation / analytics consulting for our top clients and simultaneously create scalable processes for a new org as we take on more customers next year.

Why you: Your experience at {{company}} is exactly what we are looking for in our first SA team! We need someone who has both customer facing experience as well as the right set of technical expertise. {{reason}}

Why [company name]?

- Backed by NEA and Menlo
- Crushing our sales goals quarter after quarter
- Going through huge growth (35 --> 85 in headcount 2018, doubling again in 2019)
- Our product is vertical and dept agnostic
- Extremely competitive pay

I hope to hear back from you and if there's any information I can provide, please don't hesitate to reach out.

At Gem, we know how important personalization is to the sourcing process. That's why we've made it easy for you to personalize your "why" with {{reason}} tokens, so you can customize your outreach alongside LinkedIn without ever leaving the platform.

## Talk About "Opportunities," Not "Roles" or "Positions"

You need only look at the stats on the previous pages for the logic on this one. "Positions" are static; "opportunities" are dynamic. 87% of millennials say professional development or opportunities for career growth are very important to them in a job. Think of this as the value proposition for your prospect. (Your mantra should be: "Upward trajectories, not lateral transfers.") Why would top talent who isn't even *looking* for work consider your open position a better opportunity than what they've got now? The ability to build a team from scratch? Increased organizational impact? The opportunity to learn a new skill set (and ultimately to be more attractive in the market)? Whatever it is, speak to that.

Hey {{first\_name}},

My name is [name] and I head up Sales Recruiting at [company name]. We are looking for a Sales Operations Manager to drive operations for our fast-growing sales team. As the first Sales Operations Manager, you'll be instrumental in solving critical business problems and building the blueprint to help our organization scale. Our Director of Sales Operations was impressed with your experience at {{company}} and thought it would be a great fit for what we're looking for. Do you have 15-20 minutes for an exploratory conversation in the next week?

More about the opportunity:

- Amazing culture
- \$88M in funding from investors including Union Square Ventures, First Round Capital and Sequoia
- Opportunity to work closely with Sales Leadership team coming from Atlassian, Twilio, Optimizely and Google
- Ability to build the blueprint and operationalize the infrastructure to help a young sales team scale 4x from today
- Strong revenue growth (100% YOY growth) and impressive portfolio of customers: Twilio, Airbnb, Jet, Zillow

## Give Them What They're Not Getting Now

This best practice is an extension of the last: It's one thing to speak to opportunities; it's another to speak to the opportunities prospects *aren't* experiencing in their current role. Where does their current company fall short—in terms of growth opportunities, benefits, company culture, work environment? If your company offers something more energetic, substantial, or successful, emphasize those elements—*without*, of course, mentioning their company's weakness. (Your prospect will figure that out for themselves.)

Hi {{first\_name}},

My name is [name] and I'm working alongside our CTO at [company name] to find product-focused Mid to Senior Web Engineers to join at our San Francisco HQ. Based on your experience with {{reason}}, I feel you would be a great fit.

In the past two years, we've raised \$35M in funding, opened in 4 cities, and are on track to double in size by next year. We've proven our business model, are generating revenue each quarter, and now need your expertise to scale, optimize, and automate our operations.

What it's like to work here:

- No product managers. You own and drive the product from start to finish.
- Lots of growth opportunity as we grow from a small team of 6 Engineers to 20+ by the end of the year.
- Tackling technical challenges across internal tooling, guest experience, finance, and data.
- Work on a very collaborative team of forward-thinking, creative, and product-focused people.

{{first\_name}},

I'm checking in one last time, hoping to chat with you about the Head of Information Security role at [company name].

Here are 5 reasons why you should work for [company name]:

1. Hot, early-stage start-up with big-name backers – Founders Fund, SV Angel, and Sequoia Capital
2. We are solving a real-world problem in a \$1.75T industry ready for disruption
3. [company name] is positioned to win in an unsaturated market – already captured 5% of US market
4. Build your dream team and have a massive impact
5. Work among wonderful people and peers as we build this business – 5 stars on Glassdoor

Hi {{first\_name}},

I noticed you have a great Infra-Eng Leadership background with {{company}} in a {{title}} capacity. [company name] is hiring for a Platform Manager who will take over a high performing SRE/SETI style team due to growth in the organization. I'm curious if you might be open to considering a career opportunity if the company/team/tech are right?

[company name] has an incredible origin story which has led us to now serving 1.4M registered developers who build with [company name]. Outside of our incredible open-source culture, one of the aspects which I'm particularly excited about is our focus on user privacy & community impact. We are also big proponents of creating a diverse culture and building a company based on values and a moral compass.

The Platform Team practices the playbook outlined by the Google SRE visionaries. We believe in empowering & growing teams to reach their full potential which is demonstrated by our CTO's Story and Philosophy. A quick note is that we live in containerized SPOT instances on AWS which allows us to pay 10-20% of list price for our service needs as we scale. There's a lot of great work in place already but so much left to do.

Would you be open to learning more about what we could offer you in a career opportunity?

## Mention Company Mission and Culture

You're not just selling an opportunity; you're selling a daily experience. It's worth noting that the biggest roadblock candidates face when changing jobs is "not knowing what it's really like to work at the company." So describe it for them.

Consider work-life balance, collaborative environments, paid time off, continuing education, remote options. (24% of talent says work-from-home options are attractive in a prospective employer; 18% say having the option is "extremely important.") Consider what you know about the prospect's interests and how they'd fit in with your current team. Granted, you won't have time to expound. Make a brief mention about culture or values, and link to a page on your website dedicated to company mission or culture.

Hey {{first\_name}},

Happy {{day\_of\_week}}! I wanted to see if you had any questions from my last message.

Right now, [company name] has over 60k+ customers which is just 1% of the small business market in the US. For the next few years, our business strategy is centered around growing our customer base. There's a ton of opportunity for the Growth team to be at the core of how we think about scaling our business. We've got some really ambitious goals for what we want to achieve, and we've got a fantastically supportive team to go chase them.

Any interest in a quick chat? I'd love to tell you more about what we are working on!

Here are a few more links about our engineering culture and what we are up to:

- A day in the life of an engineer (how we work day-to-day!)
- Engineering values and principles (what we stand for – we're working on making these values & principles crisper, so feel free to ask if you have any questions. One of my favorites is the 'humility' value)
- [product name] (our hot new product! But also a very crucial way to financially empower the thousands of people that we pay who might need a more flexible approach to getting paid than the typical two paychecks a month. Solving this problem is particularly near & dear to my heart, and I'm so happy we're exploring this space)

## Offer Social Proof

“Social proof” is the psychological phenomenon in which people look to others to determine “right action” in a given situation. While it’s originally a marketing term, the concept is just as relevant to talent outreach. Typically, social proof in sourcing comes in the form of employee confirmation that the company culture is as dynamic and supportive as the recruiter says it is: If you’re sourcing diversity prospects, maybe you link to a blog post written by your female head engineer, for example. If you don’t yet have that first-degree connection, other strategies include media mentions and acknowledgments that others have taken a particular action with you (“Candidates whom we’ve recently interviewed have said [X]”). The point is to give voice to those people top talent most want to hear from.

Indeed, in a recent study from LinkedIn, candidates said they wanted to hear employee views. So link to your careers page, your about page, or a page on company culture where employee quotes are featured—or forefront employee sentiment in the email itself.

Hi {{first\_name}},

Sharing with you a blog post one of our top reps wrote detailing the unusual DNA of [company name]’s sales org. If you feel you have DNA superseding the “traditional salespeople” you work with or popularized in Wolf of Wall Street, give this piece a read.

A key quote:

“The Account Development team includes an Olympic hopeful in Atlanta, a former professional rugby player in San Francisco, and a ballet-dancing, chess-playing, part-time DJ in London. In fact, the team is led globally by a former biomedical engineer and a special operations veteran – it’s not your traditional group of deal-closers. But it is a group of multi-talented individuals who draw upon a diverse range of backgrounds to challenge their prospects to think differently.”

[name] joined in [date] and a few months later was promoted from our team to a field Account Executive role.

Hi {{first\_name}},

My name is [name] and I lead the Enterprise Outbound team here at [company name]. I came across your profile and felt compelled to reach out. Your experience at {{company}} is ideal for what I’m looking for as I build my team of Enterprise reps.

With our strong product-market fit, opportunity in the enterprise, and talented leadership, [company name] is a place where you can have a tangible impact and continue to accelerate your already impressive career.

I joined [company name] just under 6 months ago to work with incredibly bright people, on a uniquely positioned product that solves real problems for engineers and marketers. [company name] has an insane growth trajectory and we’re looking for top-tier talent to assist with that growth. I’ve led high-growth teams a few times in my career, but have never been part of an organization that values the SDR team as much as I’ve seen here. We just had two promotions from the SDR team, one into the SMB AE org and one into the customer success org and I’m eager to share my experience with you.

I realize you’ve been a {{role}} for {{duration}} now and probably on track for your next role, but I would welcome the chance to share why this would be an amazing opportunity for you and answer any questions you might have about the team. At the very least, it would be great to have another connection in the space.

## Consider Conversational Cadence

Conversational cadence is exactly what it sounds like: the speed at which you move the conversation forward (even if that “conversation” looks more like a monologue). Remember, you have four emails in which to motivate engagement and elicit a response... and you have plenty of information about your company to offer. So introduce it in small doses. If your initial outreach about how the opportunity could advance your prospect’s career doesn’t elicit engagement, perhaps your first follow-up describes company culture, and your second shouts out the Series C funding you just received.

Every prospect will have their own “sweet spot”—that nugget of information that finally animates them into action.

Hey {{first\_name}},

Are you starting to think about a new jumping off point for your career? [company name] just got named on the 2019 Career-Launching List and I’d love to chat with you about growth and learning opportunities here.

Thanks!

Hi {{first\_name}},

I wanted to follow up on my previous message. You’ve got a unique background that is exactly what we need to strategically lead the design of [company name]’s products. Since we are a small team, there’s a huge opportunity to influence our organization and the direction of growth. Check out why [name and title of colleague] joined [company], and learn why you should too.

I’m stoked to tell you more about what we are working on at [company name]! I’ve included more information on the team and the role here for you to look over.

Thanks!

Hey {{first\_name}},

I wanted to share the latest news with you that [company name] has been awarded one of the Best Workplaces in Technology by Great Places to Work and Fortune Magazine! This means a lot to us as we continue to try to push the boundaries of technology and workplace culture. Read more about it here: [bitly URL]

If you’re open to discussing opportunities here at [company name] or learning more, what’s your availability for a 15-20 minute chat?

Thanks!



## Make Your Breakup Email Unforgettable

Done well, the breakup (aka “Hail Mary”) email may very well be the hook that finally gets prospects’ attentions. After all, loss aversion—the notion that the fear of loss is more powerful than the pleasure of gains—is real. It can be difficult for prospects to hear you confirm for them that they’re not moving forward in the process—so try it, and see if that’s what gets a bite.

Some of the best breakup emails we’ve seen propose that the sourcer/prospect relationship take a new form—whether through blog subscriptions, company events, or referral programs (“I have a philosophy that good people know good people!”). Parting gifts are memorable. Humor is memorable. And poems will likely leave their mark for a long time.

Hi {{first\_name}},

The bad news is I haven’t heard back from you. The good news is that you are probably loving your current role.

Since this will be my last email, I wanted to sign-off with a gift as a thank you for reading.

It’s one of my favorite tools from Sourcing Master Glen Cathey – a handy Candidate Sourcing Funnel Calculator to help you estimate how many people you need to identify to find your purple squirrel.

Hopefully you will find it useful.

Hey {{first\_name}},

I’ve reached out a few times because I really wanted to share [company name] and the role I thought you’d be a great fit for. Since I haven’t heard back, I’ll assume the timing isn’t right and I won’t continue to pester with emails.

If anything changes for you in the future or even if you are just curious about what we are building, please don’t hesitate to reach out. Consider me your [company name] resource! Check our blog to keep up with growth and to get free industry tips!

Hey {{first\_name}},

I figured I would try bugging you one more time. Totally understand if you’re not ready to make a move or talk to me.

Maybe we can interest you in coming to one of our events: we have one called [event name] where we talk about infrastructure disasters (and learnings!). It would be great to see you at our next one in SF.

Hey {{first\_name}},

I’m not going to lie, I’m a little sad we didn’t get to connect but I wanted to leave you with a poem.

Roses are red  
Violets are clear  
I wish you the best  
In growing your career



### Body Copy “Dont’s”

Don't paste a full job description in the email. Remember: The *end goal* may be getting candidates in the door for an interview; but the goal of initial communication is an interested response from prospects.

Don't drone on. Remember our best practice on message length: You're aiming for short and curiosity-piquing. A lot can get lost in a lengthy message. You'll get to the juicy details once you've got them on the phone or in your office.

Don't offer a laundry list of required skills. The professionals you're reaching out to already know what's required to do the work. Focus on opportunity instead.

### Pro Tip on Body Copy



Being in the office is a great benefit for many reasons, one of which has to do with uncovering central motivators. When I'm recruiting for a position, I often spend time with engineers on the teams I support to ask them questions that help me understand the in's and out's of their role: What makes this team attractive to join, what the day-to-day work is like, and what they'd say to a candidate considering a role like theirs. Their responses often go right into the body of my sequence emails. In that sense, the outreach is a joint effort across team members at Slack.

**Olivia Duran**  
Senior Technical Recruiter



**Best Practice**

## “From” Names

### For Hard-to-Fill Roles, Vary Your Sender

Our customers' data shows that sending-on-behalf-of (SOBO-ing) a hiring manager or executive in the company significantly increases response rates. In fact, some of our customers have seen tripled and quadrupled response rates with SOBO. With Gem, you can send-on-behalf-of multiple teammates in the same sequence: stages 1 and 2 could come from the recruiter; stage 3 could come from the hiring manager; and stage 4 could come from the Director of Engineering. Maybe the senders even reference a conversation they had about the prospect in those messages to make it all the more personalized. *Now* you've got a very high-touch engagement strategy from multiple people. When prospective candidates feel there's a whole collective that's excited about them, they're all the more likely to reply.



## Using Multiple Senders Can Mean Multiplying Response Rates for Hard-to-Fill Roles



At Segment, we put extra time into partnering with our recruiting team to craft the right message and cadence for each role. By crafting tailored messages and reaching out from multiple senders at the leadership level, we see a 2x response rate for hard-to-fill roles.

**Albert Strasheim**  
Senior Director of Engineering



### Stage 1

From: kerianne@company.com

Intro to Micheal?

---

Hi {{first\_name}},

I hope to be finding you in the middle of a great week!

Your experience {{extra1}} coupled with your impressive career progression caught my eye. Here at [company name], we are building the future of data infrastructure to enable companies to deliver better experiences to their customers. We are looking for an experienced product designer to partner with product managers and engineers to drive the design strategy of one of our most important product verticals here at [company name].

We would love to give you some more insights into what we're working on, company and product initiatives the Design team is driving along with our plans to scale the team. Make sense to jump on a call with Micheal, our Head of Design, so he can share more?

Kerianne  
Design @ [company name]

### Stage 2

From: micheal@company.com

Time for a quick chat, {{first\_name}}?

---

Really great to meet you, {{first\_name}}. My name is Micheal and I am leading Design at [company name]. I am hiring a Sr. Product Designer to drive some critical initiatives for us as we expand our scope and reach of our core product. The impact of this role is unprecedented as you help us design and scope new product offerings for the untapped Customer Data Infrastructure market.

Do you have some time to connect this week or next? I would love to hear about your career aspirations and see if we can draw some parallels between the team's growth plan, [company name]'s product and our exciting plans to upend the CRM space.



## Calls to Action

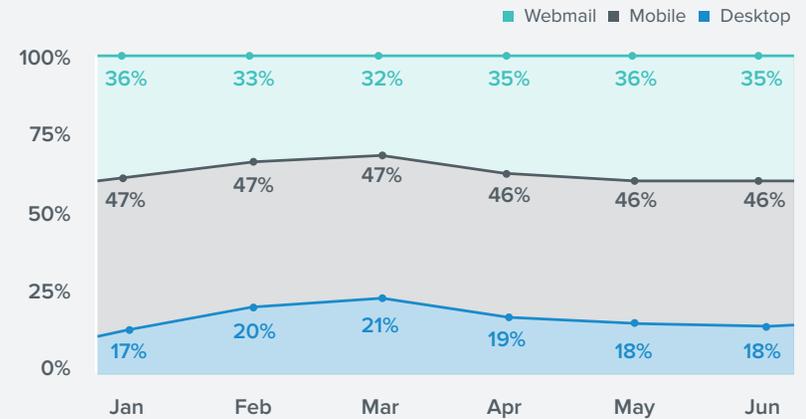
Talent sourcers have a few available options when it comes to calls to action. Of course, the obvious “best practice,” broadly speaking, is to close every email with a crystal-clear next step for prospects to take. At Gem, we’ve seen everything from Calendly links, to links directing prospects to job descriptions or careers pages, to requests that prospects respond with best times to talk—the latter of which necessitates more back-and-forth before a time is confirmed. These CTAs certainly have their place.

## Consider the Conditions Under which Prospects will Read Your Email

- 1 Passive talent is likely receiving your email at work and may lack the mental energy to respond
- 2 There's a 50/50 chance that your prospect will read your email on their phone

In other words, even the “simple” request that they open their calendar, note the times they're free next week, and pitch you those times in a response may be more than they're willing to do.

Opens by Reading Environment



### Gem's Best Guess: Make Calls to Action (Literally) Effortless

With the above in mind, the most effective practice we can recommend is to simplify your CTA to a one-word (or no-word!) response: “If I don't hear from you here, I'll try calling this Thursday at noon. Of course, if there's a time that works better for a 15-minute chat, just let me know, and I'll make it happen.”

Unless the prospect tells you otherwise, they'll know that phone call is coming—and they'll be ready to pick up if you've piqued their interest. If that time doesn't work for them and they're interested, they need only respond with an alternate time.

Mental energy expended on the prospect's part? Next to nothing.

## The *Best* Best Practice: Always Be Testing

It's worth stressing that the real "best practices" will be the things that get your team the most engaged responses and move the most qualified prospective candidates through your hiring funnel. What we've given you in this guide are starting points only. If you're using Gem for your sourcing activities, you have access to analytics such as open rates, reply rates, interested rates, click-through rates, number of follow-ups sent, who entered process, how far into the recruiting funnel they got, and more.



## Elements of Your Email Outreach Worth Testing

While it's easy to fixate on reply rates as the metric of your most successful outreach strategies, remember that open rates and click-through rates offer no less actionable insight. (Exceptional open rates mean you've hit upon compelling subject lines; great click-through rates mean you're linking to interesting content.) In other words, you'll know which prospects have “conveyed” interest even if they haven't directly expressed it.

These metrics should inform your judgement about which prospects to follow up with and how quickly, as well as what additional information to send them. (Did they click through to your careers page, or into that blog post by your head engineer that you linked to? Which of the LinkedIn profiles you provided saw the most views? Gem's analytics will offer insights into click-throughs. Use that intelligence to strategize your next step.)

Hands down, data will be your most priceless asset; and we recommend testing for the following metrics. Note that this list isn't inclusive, and that you won't be able to discover the answers to all of these questions through analytics. Some elements, like tone, there are no metrics for—but the questions are still worth asking:

After **how many follow-ups** does your team start seeing **diminishing returns**?

What's the **most effective wait time** between initial outreach and **each of your follow-ups**?

In subject lines, **which tokens** statistically attract the **most opens**?

Do **more tokens** in the message copy earn **more responses**? Or are there eventually **diminishing returns**?

Do you get **more opens** by appealing to **values or opportunities** in your subject lines?

What **subject line “power verbs”** get you the most clicks?

What's the **average length** of your best-performing **subject lines**?

What's the **average length** of your best-performing **body copy**?

What is the **average length** of your best-performing **{{reason}}** **tokens**?

What **send times** are statistically **most effective** for which roles?

Do you see statistically **better response rates** when you send from a **recruiter or from someone in a leadership role**?

At **what stage** in the sequence is it best for a recruiter to **switch to SOBO**?

For which roles is **SOBO best**?

Is there a **tone** in your email copy that seems to motivate the **highest levels of engagement**?

Which **links** get the **most clicks**?

What forms of **social proof** are most **compelling to your prospects**?

Which **break-up strategies** get the **most responses**?



Lauren Shufan

**Author**

Lauren is a content strategist with a penchant for 16th-century literature. When she's not trying to tap into talent teams' pain points, she's on her yoga mat or hiking the hills of Marin County. Come at her with your favorite Shakespeare quote.



Drew Regitsky

**Contributor**

Drew is a founding engineer at Gem. He knows Gem data better than anyone, so when we asked him to help us identify best practices backed by our data, he generously gave his time to help. When he's not working with data or building the Gem product, you can find him at Mission Cliffs, staring at a 5.11 and regretting that big bowl of ramen he just ate.

**Methodology**

Over the last three years, Gem has worked with hundreds of customers across a wide range of industries, including tech, finance, healthcare, and professional services. In that time, we've analyzed well over a million outreach emails, sent from thousands of sourcers and recruiters. The data in this report was drawn from both those analyses and our own research in the industry. Big gratitude to our very own Drew Regitsky for pulling all our user data.

[Click here for resources](#)



Gem is an all-in-one recruiting platform that integrates with LinkedIn, email, and your Applicant Tracking System (ATS).

We enable world-class recruiting teams to find, engage, and nurture top talent.

With Gem, recruiting teams can manage candidate pipeline with predictability.

To learn more and see a demo, visit

[gem.com](https://gem.com)

©2020 Gem, Inc 061220