



The Fool-Proof Guide to Cold Email

How to build, execute, and optimize personalized cold email campaigns at scale



How Ambition Got 73 Replies from a Cold Email Campaign	2
About Ambition	2
About Salesfolk	2
Why Ambition Hired Salesfolk	3
Part 1: How to Set Up Your Campaign	4
1. Background Research	4
2. Brainstorming For Your Cold Emails	5
3. Architecting Your Cold Email Campaign	5
Part 2: How to A/B Test Your Email Campaign	8
How to Judge & Optimize Your Campaign Performance	9
What do you do if your campaign IS struggling?	12
Part 3: Cold Email Best Practices from Ambition Campaign	13
How to Scale Up Your Outbound Sales Efforts	16

How Ambition Got 73 Replies from a Cold Email Campaign



ABOUT AMBITION

Ambition is a sales productivity and analytics platform. They help companies such as Dropbox, Coyote Logistics and Clayton Homes track real-time employee performance and improve office productivity through competitions, TVs, Leaderboards and automated reporting.



ABOUT SALESFOLK

Salesfolk is a sales enablement startup that helps B2B companies accelerate their sales through a combination of persuasive copywriting and game theory. They are able to 2-3x their clients' response rates on outbound email campaigns, increasing these companies' qualified leads significantly.

WHY AMBITION HIRED SALESFOLK

Ambition saw a problem with how they were doing cold email outreach to prospects. Their approach consisted of two methods:

- 1) Devote time to researching and crafting a tailored message.
- 2) Save time and blast out a series of impersonal touches.

Neither approach felt scalable, so they decided to try something new. With the help of Heather R Morgan from SalesFolk and email tracking and automation platform PersistIQ, Ambition efficiently set up a highly personalized series of emails to go out to 572 targeted prospects. Salesfolk crafted 8 emails with A/B variants for each of Ambition's 2 personas (VP/Director of Sales and VP/Director of Sales Operations) based on Ambition's unique value propositions and their prospects' pain points.

In a 6 week campaign over the holiday season Ambition generated positive replies from 73 of the recipients. Here's how:

Part 1: How to Set Up Your Campaign

So, what do you need to do to create a new email campaign?

1. BACKGROUND RESEARCH

You need to do your homework if you want to get responses:

- **Step 1: Understand your buyer persona** — are they VP Sales, VP Marketing, HR, CEOs, etc? Do they work at Fortune 500 Companies, or at startups?
- **Step 2: Think carefully about your prospect's pain points**, and how your business solves them. Are they trying to scale their sales? Are they trying to fight churn?
- **Step 3: Research Competitors** — What's your competition doing? Do they have useful messaging that you could repackage to use for your own campaign? Look at their websites and sign up to their mailing list with an alternate email to collect research.



PROTIP

Write with a specific person in mind.

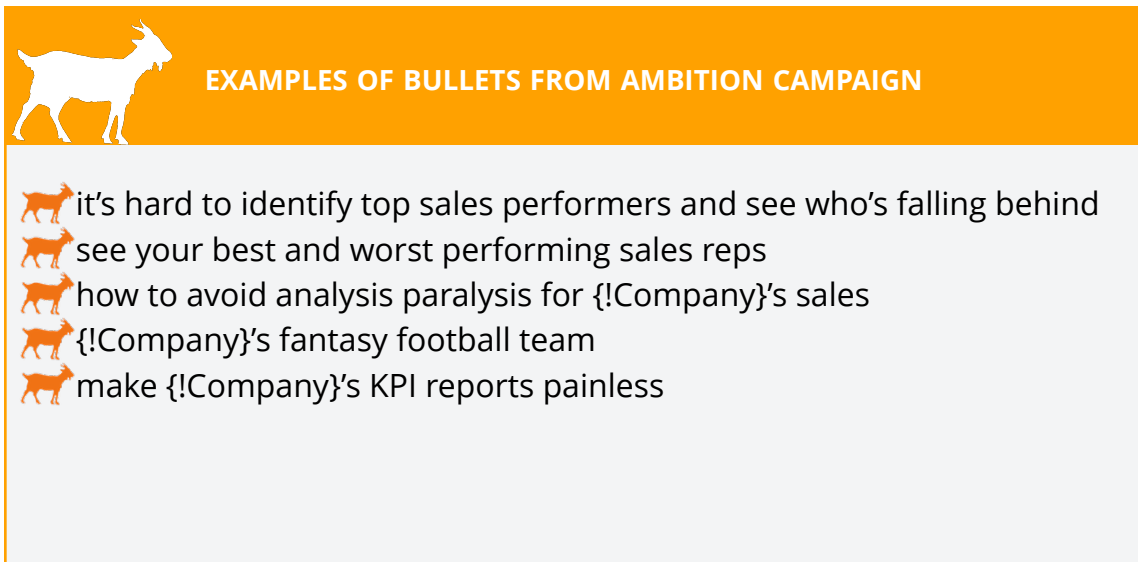
Take a few names from your list and try writing a draft email to them. Even use their name.

Once you're done you can reverse engineer that email and make it work for a larger audience with shared pains and priorities.

2. BRAINSTORMING FOR YOUR COLD EMAILS

Now that you've done your homework, it's time to start drafting ideas for your email campaign. The best emails are usually created through a classic copywriting process used to create headlines.

Instead of trying to write each email all at once, I like to create lists of bullets, features, and other ideas to use for architecting the campaign:



EXAMPLES OF BULLETS FROM AMBITION CAMPAIGN

- it's hard to identify top sales performers and see who's falling behind
- see your best and worst performing sales reps
- how to avoid analysis paralysis for {!Company}'s sales
- {!Company}'s fantasy football team
- make {!Company}'s KPI reports painless

3. ARCHITECTING YOUR COLD EMAIL CAMPAIGN

Once you've written down all your ideas, it's time to create the skeleton of your cold email campaign.

We like to send 8 emails to every prospect, and A/B test our list, which requires 16 emails per persona (emails 1-8 A/B). Because we have many emails to write, the brainstorming process is helpful for creating a skeleton to make sure the campaign is testing the right things and has a good flow overall.

Steps to Architect Your Cold Email Campaign:

1. **List out all your value propositions** (You usually test these in your first 3-4 emails). Here are a few examples from Ambition's campaign:
 - "save time in Salesforce with reporting"
 - "increase productivity/sales through competition amongst sales teams"
 - "better visibility - see your top and bottom sales reps"
2. **Choose which psychologies** you want to cover for each value proposition (fear of loss, competition, greed, etc). Examples:
 - Fear: "{!Company}'s worst sales rep"
 - Value/Greed: "faster Salesforce reporting for {!Company}"
 - Competition: "how {!Logo} increased outbound sales calls by 50%"
 - Vanity/Curiosity: "see {!Company}'s sales score"
3. **Decide the order** of value propositions and psychologies you want to test, keeping in mind that the sequential flow also matters (Usually you want to be more general/vague in earlier emails, and get increasingly direct/aggressive). Here's an example of a sequence you could use:
 - Email 1A/B social engineering
 - Email 2A—value add; Email 2B—fear of loss
 - Email 3A—fear of loss; Email 3B—value add
4. **Craft your subject lines** (see section below for examples)
5. **Finish fleshing out your emails and proofread them.**
6. **Pick a cadence** (usually sending an email every 3-7 days is best)

How to Create a Powerful Subject Line That Gets Opened Every Time

Subject lines are the gateway to the rest of your email. If you can't write a compelling subject line no one will ever open or read your message. Here are a few approaches to creating effective and persuasive subject lines:

1. **Social Engineering:** *"join {!Company}'s Fantasy Football sales team"*

This subject line sounds like an invite to something fun and interesting that other team members may already be a part of.

2. **Ask a Question:** *"how competitive is {!Company}'s sales team?"*

Open ended questions like this subject line, are harder to ignore because they make your prospects think about the performance of their business. If you present a question or problem to your prospects, the body of your email should always give them a definite solution.

3. **Offer Valuable advice:** *"idea for {!Company}'s sales objectives"*

Incentivize your message by creating subject lines that offer value to your prospects. If your prospects feel they'll benefit from your message, they're more likely to open it.

It's important to test all of these approaches in your campaign because different techniques will resonate differently across various audiences.

Part 2: How to A/B Test Your Email Campaign

Once you're finished creating email copy and deciding your cadence, you're ready to start A/B testing, assuming you've written A/B variants.

We typically test value propositions against each other in the first 3-4 emails, but you might want to test other things. We take a more holistic approach around sentiment when it comes to A/B testing our emails, and base our tests on messaging and psychologies.

Open rates and response rates are helpful metrics to consider when A/B testing your campaigns, but the bottom line that determines a winning email template is the number of positive responses we get to set appointments with qualified leads.

Assuming you've written A/B variants for your campaign, this is what you do to A/B Test:

1. Divide your list of prospects into 2 by assigning random variables (0 and 1) in excel in another column of your campaign.
2. Filter and sort the variables by 0 or 1 and "Paste Special" to paste the values into a new CSV. Do so for variable 0 and 1 separately, so you can have group A and group B.
3. Group A gets the A variants, and group B gets the B variants.
4. Schedule email campaigns to send to each list at the same time.

You need to divide them randomly to remove bias from your email campaign.

To be successful with A/B testing, you need to only test one thing at a time. You can't simultaneously test different times while also testing different messaging, or there will be too much noise to make accurate inferences.

HOW TO JUDGE & OPTIMIZE YOUR CAMPAIGN PERFORMANCE

There are many different things you can test in your cold email campaigns, but here are a few valuable things to test that can also be used to improve other aspects of your sales and marketing efforts:

1. **Value props** —Subject lines with high opens can be transformed into ideas for white papers and headlines for your web copy.
2. **Messaging** —Emotional appeals that resonate well with your audience(s) should be applied to your sales and marketing efforts to accelerate sales cycles.
3. **Calls to Action** —Emails with higher response rates should be closely examined to see how you can increase your web conversion rates with similar messaging.

VP Sales: 1A									
Touch	Contacted	Bounced	Reached	Opened	Open Rate	Replied	Adjusted Response Rate	Do Not Contact	
1	142	14	128	77	68%	0	0.00%	0	
2	128	0	128	55	43%	3	5.45%	0	
3	125	3	122	40	34%	3	7.50%	0	
4	119	0	119	45	38%	3	6.67%	0	
5	116	1	115	54	47%	2	3.70%	0	
6	113	0	113	27	24%	2	7.41%	0	
7	111	0	111	43	39%	1	2.33%	0	
8	109	0	109	49	45%	3	6.12%	0	
Totals		18				17			

VP Sales: 1B									
Touch	Contacted	Bounced	Reached	Opened	Open Rate	Replied	Adjusted Response Rate	Do Not Contact	
1	150	15	135	73	60.83%	1	1.37%	0	
2	134	0	134	61	45.52%	6	9.84%	0	
3	128	4	124	52	43.33%	1	1.92%	0	
4	123	1	122	71	58.68%	3	4.23%	0	
5	119	2	117	62	53.91%	2	3.23%	0	
6	115	0	115	55	47.83%	5	9.09%	0	
7	110	1	109	42	38.89%	1	2.38%	0	
8	108	1	107	47	44.34%	3	6.38%	0	
Totals		24				22			

Notice how high Ambition’s response rates are from email 2B (6 replies) and 6B (5 replies)? Ambition will definitely continue to use those email templates and similar messaging in upcoming campaigns, but It’s very worthwhile to examine what worked to try to understand why.

Getting conclusive data may require additional testing before we can understand if it was a strong Call to Action, or if earlier emails helped build up to that response rate.

Without revealing too many of Ambition's cold email secrets, let's review the template for VP Sales Email 5A. (This email had a 47% open rate & 2 replies)



EMAIL TEMPLATE #5A

SUBJECT: {!Company}'s most important sales KPI
Hi {!First},

Do you know what changes you need to make with your sales team to ensure your {!Company} meets its quota for Q1 2015?

Tracking profit-per-sale doesn't tell you enough. Companies like [Client example] realize improving sales performance requires knowing KPIs like profit-per call, email reply rate, etc. Our software shows them their sales teams' stats in real time and plots trends so they can see what drives peak sales performance.

I'd like to share some important sales KPIs with you that {Company} should be tracking. When can we do a quick call?

Thanks,

Why wasn't this as effective as Ambition's other emails? Here's our guess:

- The call to action around "KPIs" isn't that compelling or strong as others
- Although KPIs are an important topic, they are not as close to the bottom line and straightforward as a subject line like "how [Client x] doubled their sales revenue"

WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOUR CAMPAIGN IS STRUGGLING?

Here's how to diagnose an unhealthy email campaign:

High Bounce Rate: Your bounce rate should NEVER be higher than 3%, and ideally should be under 1%. If you go above 3% you risk not “inboxing” properly, and getting a reputation as a spammer.

Solution: Improve the quality of your list.

Low Open Rate: We aim for open rates of at least 50%, but you should be at least getting a 30-35% open rate.

Solution: You need to improve your subject lines and/or your list quality.

High opens, but low response rate: Assuming you have a healthy open rate, you should be getting a minimum of 5% response for at least 2 or 3 of your cold emails in your 8-touch sequence. (We aim for 10%)

Solution: Strengthen your Call-To-Action and consider changing body text.

Part 3: Cold Email Best Practices from Ambition Campaign

Successful cold emails campaigns connect with prospects through highly personalized messaging. Here are some cold email best practices to help you create personalized messages for hundreds, if not thousands of prospects:

Lesson 1: Make your messages benefit, not feature focused

If you want your prospects to respond, you need to motivate by offering an incentive. Instead of pointing out all the bells and whistles of your product/service, your messages should focus on adding value. Prospects want to know how your product/service is going to help make them solve their business problems and make their lives easier.

Lesson 2: Choose one value prop to highlight

Your messaging will be more powerful if each email focuses on a single idea or customer benefit. Avoid simply listing all the features and benefits of your product/service in one email. Too many facts and figures can distract from your message and confuse your prospects.

Lesson 3: Keep your cold emails to 5 sentences (2-3 is ideal)

Emails any longer than that run the risk of turning off your prospects. Remember, the point is to get them to talk to you; not to overwhelm them with information about your product/service.

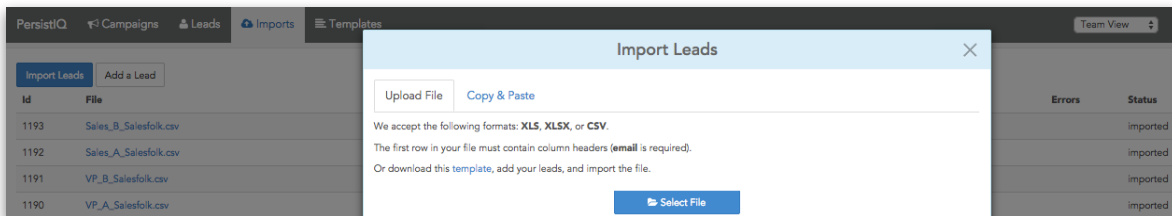
The goal of a cold email campaign is to pique your prospects' interests just enough to get them on the phone. If your emails are too long winded and unfocused, your prospects will get bored and lose interest.

Lesson 4: Include custom inserts like {!Company} & {First}

These custom inserts, as well as {!Industry} & {!Competitor} let you tailor mass email campaigns to each of your prospects. This personalization has a big impact on the open and response rates of messages. Prospects are more likely to respond to an email that is highly targeted at them.

To add custom inserts to your messages:

1. Create a CSV file of your contacts.



2. Create columns for every custom insert you want to include. The headers should be labeled to match the custom inserts you plan to use in your mail merge, such as "First Name," "Company," "Title," etc. Make sure you have a column for emails as well.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	email	first_name	last_name	title	website	company_name	snippet	snippet2
2	john.buyer@visa	John	Buyer	VP of Sales	https://visa.com	Visa	Credit Card	New York City
3	freddyquota@int	Freddy	Quota	VP of Sales	https://intel.com	Intel	Information Tech	San Francisco
4	lisa.r.moneybags	Lisa	Moneybags	VP of Sales	http://nike.com	Nike	Apparel	Portland
5	Etc.							

3. Double check to make sure your CSV file is formatted correctly, so that your inserts are loaded properly into emails.
4. Import your CSV file to the email client you are using to create a mail merge.

5. Write an email template with fields corresponding to the headers based on the encoding of your mail merge program. This could vary between: `{!First}`, `<<First>>`, and so forth depending on the tool you are using.
6. Send yourself a test email before sending the entire campaign to make sure everything works smoothly.

Lesson 5: Provide proof that your product/service is effective

Leverage your case studies and testimonials to illustrate your value and build credibility. Remember, you're asking your prospects to take a risk by investing their time and money in your product/service. You can ease those doubts by offering real numbers that illustrate how you're helping clients improve their businesses.

Don't just tell your prospects about your successes; show them. Name drop a few of your customers in industries relevant to the prospects you're targeting.

Lesson 6: Time of Day to Send

It's critical the timing of your cold emails. It goes without saying that a cold email received over a holiday or on a weekend may not be as likely to be opened or read thoroughly.

To this point, we can look at the results from one of Ambition's sub-campaigns, which targeted 148 VPs of Sales. Barely half of the recipients even opened the initial email. Of the 77 that did, not a single one felt compelled to send a positive response or begin a conversation.

The email's send date: 10 p.m. on a Saturday.



PROTIP

It's important to test sending time out for yourself though!

Some personas do actually respond better to weekend emails than a Monday or a Tuesday.

Lesson 7: Send 8 Emails for Every Cold Campaign.

Of the 72 positive responses Ambition received, 49 occurred at touch points 1-5, with 23 occurring at touch points 6-8. In other words, nearly one-third of the positive responses Ambition earned during the campaign occurred after reaching out to a cold prospect 6 or more times.

The bottom line: Persistence matters. Prospects respect it, and in Ambition's experience, the old adage that "it takes 7 touches to get through to a prospect" definitely has merit.

HOW TO SCALE UP YOUR OUTBOUND SALES EFFORTS

Once you have sent an entire outbound email campaign (with all 8 touch points to all of the personas that you have chosen to test), and determined what is and is not working, you are ready to scale your email campaigns. You may choose to continue to test different variants in future campaigns, or you can just use the best performing templates from your campaign.

Generally you want to move the messages with the highest open and response rates toward the beginning of the campaign. For example, if "Email 6b" had the highest response rate, you may want to move it to the first or second email in your campaign, assuming that makes sense for the flow of your overall campaign. Remember, you typically want to start out more passive/indirect with your calls to action to grab responses from highly targeted prospects, and then become increasingly more aggressive/direct as your campaign proceeds.

Assuming you've optimized your cold email campaign correctly, you should see similar open, response and conversion rates as you scale up the campaign. That's assuming that you maintain a high quality with your future lists, and that you're still targeting the same persona of course.

These statistics typically do not change unless there are major industry changes or seasonal fluctuations with your business. Of course you don't want to reuse the same email templates on the same prospects in the future. However, as long as you're emailing new prospects, you should be able to reuse the same templates until you have a major change in your product/value proposition, or if you decide to target a new type of buyer.

For more advice about optimizing cold emails, check out the Salesfolk website at www.salesfolk.com to get information and advice about your email campaigns.