



# THE COUNTERINTUITIVE GUIDE TO WARMING UP NEW SUBSCRIBERS

Lessons from Sending Billions of Emails



[www.trafficgrid.com](http://www.trafficgrid.com)

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## LESSONS FROM SENDING BILLIONS OF EMAILS

Hey there, I've spent years in the trenches of email marketing, overseeing the delivery of billions of messages for publishers, brands, and newsletters. What we've learned might surprise you: the traditional "slow and steady" approach to onboarding new subscribers often backfires. Instead, a more proactive, counterintuitive method, hitting them with immediate value that solves their real problems, turns lurkers and non-openers into engaged readers, clickers, or buyers faster than you'd think.

Whether you're selling products or monetizing through sponsorships in a newsletter, the goal is the same: get them hooked on your brand early. For product sellers, that means showcasing your best-sellers with quick wins. For newsletter creators, it's about linking to your most-viewed editions, top guides, or must-read articles that drive clicks to those sponsor ads. The secret? Strike while their interest is hot, weed out the uninterested quickly, and create genuine urgency around solving their pain points.

Before we dive into the step-by-step tactics, let's talk about the three core principles that underpin an effective welcome series. These aren't textbook theories, they're battle-tested insights from real-world data.



### Principle 1: Timing – Strike Fast or Lose Them

Email leads immediately. "Time Kills all Deals." It's true in sales, more so in marketing. Do not wait, have your initial email set to send to new leads while your brand is top-of-mind. Send within 15 minutes of receiving the leads. The biggest problems around matched leads happen when you don't email them quickly enough. Some businesses wait a week or more to start communicating. Way too late! The longer you wait to message leads, odds are mounting that they will forget your brand, product, or service.



### Principle 2: Unsubscribe – Make It Easy to Say Goodbye

This one raises eyebrows: encourage unsubscribes? Absolutely. Make opting out super simple and prominent. Why? It weeds out the uninterested fast, keeping your list clean and your deliverability high. Frustrated subscribers hit "spam" if they can't escape easily, that's the real killer. Counterintuitively, easy exits mean better engagement from those who stay, whether they're clicking your sponsor links or buying your products.



### Principle 3: Urgency – Don't Let Them Procrastinate

Most marketers play it safe with vague calls to action. But urgency done right prompts immediate response. Highlight why now is the moment, maybe a limited-time access to your top guide on a common problem, a shrinking spot in your newsletter's exclusive content, or social proof from recent readers who've solved similar issues. Without it, "later" becomes "never." Our billions of sends prove: urgency converts lurkers into action-takers, driving clicks, reads, or sales right away. These principles flip the script on "best practices," but they work because they're rooted in how real people behave with emails.

## BUILDING YOUR WELCOME SERIES: THE STEP-BY-STEP

Now, let's get practical. This isn't about reinventing your content, clone an existing series and tweak it for these new subscribers. Track metrics separately to see what resonates.

### How Many Emails? Aim for 5 (But Start with 3)

We recommend 5 emails as the sweet spot, enough to build momentum without overwhelming. Too few, and you miss chances for engagement; too many, and you risk complaints. The goal? Spark opens, clicks, or actions (like reading a guide or clicking a sponsor ad) to identify who deserves more attention.

### What to Send: Focus on Solving Problems, Not "Thanks"

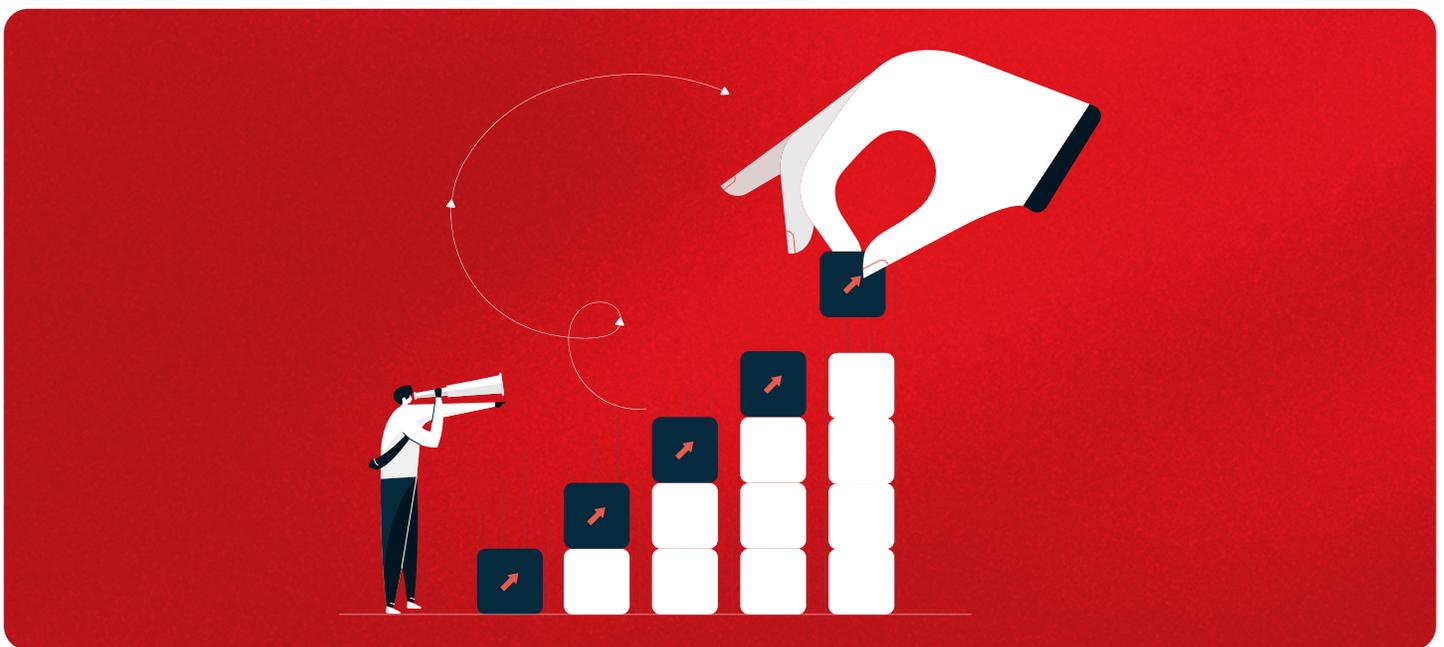
Avoid "thanks for signing up", it feels generic. Instead, introduce your brand with curiosity: "Here's a peek at what makes us different" or "Discover why thousands are loving this." Frame it around common subscriber problems. For example, if your audience struggles with productivity, link to your most-viewed video on "Beating Procrastination in 7 Days." For newsletters, highlight your top article that dives deep into a hot topic, encouraging clicks to embedded sponsors. Always include an easy opt-out at the top.

Some of your subscribers will be ready to go deeper (like upgrading to paid), so offer them a frictionless way of doing it with an irresistible deal if they act early. It won't be for everyone, but it lets you get the people who are ready to get to the better stuff. You can offer instant bonuses if they sign up here, think exclusive access to a decision matrix tool or a private rewrite guide.

### Your First Email: The Immediate Hook

Send it right away, within minutes of sign up. Use it to share your unique value, set expectations (e.g., "Expect insider tips, problem-solving guides, and exclusive deals"), and feature something irresistible: a best-seller with a problem-specific discount, your most popular content piece that addresses a key pain point, or a top video that viewers rave about. Tone: Friendly and intriguing. Tips: Obvious from address, emoji in subject, key info upfront, multiple CTAs.

Remember, **people react best when you solve the problem they're facing right now.** If they're signing up for investing advice, don't just welcome them, link straight to your top guide on "Step by Step guide to start investing in the next 24 hours" or "Why most DayTraders Fail" or a matrix for choosing the right tool, saving them from the usual chaos



## EMAILS 2-5: BUILD MOMENTUM AND DRIVE ENGAGEMENT

Reminding subscribers about opportunities to engage—whether clicking into captivating content or exploring a product offer—isn't pushy; it's smart. It aligns with how people naturally behave: they often need multiple touches to build familiarity and act, plus a gentle nudge of urgency to overcome inertia. This series leverages that by progressively sharing your best assets, encouraging opens and clicks to keep them on your engaged list. Tailor the examples below based on your business type, but the timing and structure work for both newsletter operators (focusing on content hooks) and product sellers (focusing on value-driven introductions).

Keep the flow progressive, surfacing stronger hooks each time to encourage action. This multi-touch approach caters to human nature, turning warm interest into lasting engagement without feeling forced.

### ENGAGEMENT-BASED SEGMENTATION: THE KEY TO PROTECTING DELIVERABILITY

Keep the flow progressive, surfacing stronger hooks each time to encourage action. This multi-touch approach caters to human nature, turning warm interest into lasting engagement without feeling forced.

Here's where things get really counterintuitive: to keep your emails landing in inboxes (not spam folders), stop mailing everyone equally. Instead, focus exclusively on **engagement-based segmentation**. This means sending regularly to your active or recently engaged subscribers, those who open, click, or interact, and mailing less frequently (or not at all) to non-openers and inactive ones. Why? Email providers like Gmail and Outlook use engagement as one of their top signals for deliverability. High engagement from recipients tells them your emails are wanted, boosting your sender reputation. Low engagement drags it down, increasing spam risks and creating a vicious cycle where fewer people see your emails, leading to even lower interaction.

- **#2: 5 hours after #1** – Reinforce initial interest with a relatable teaser tied to a common pain point or curiosity. For newsletters: "What if one article could shift your perspective on [topic]? Readers loved this one, dive in." For products: "Struggling with [problem]? See how our top-rated [item] helped others just like you."
- **#3: 24 hours after #2** – Deliver deeper value by spotlighting something proven to resonate, building trust through social proof or quick wins. For newsletters: "Our most-discussed guide on [issue] is full of insights—click to uncover what everyone's talking about." For products: "Explore the features that make our best-seller a game-changer for [pain point]—real results from satisfied users."
- **#4: 24 hours after #3** – Tackle potential hesitations head-on with community or customer favorites, making it easy to see the fit. For newsletters: "Wondering if our content clicks for you? Check this highly commented thread that's sparked real debates on [topic]." For products: "Curious about [product]? Here's a demo of our most-reviewed option that's solved [objection] for thousands."
- **#5: 12 hours after #4** – Close the loop with an intriguing highlight of your flagship content or offering, creating a sense of timely discovery. For newsletters: "Unlock our all-time favorite piece on [problem]—it's the one subscribers keep coming back to." For products: "Don't overlook our flagship [item] that's earned rave reviews for fixing [issue], see why it's a must-have now."



The good news? Most Email Service Providers (ESPs) like Mailchimp, Klaviyo, ConvertKit, or ActiveCampaign let you do this out of the box, no custom tagging required. They have built-in tools to filter sends based on recent activity, so you can set up your broadcasts to automatically target only engaged subscribers. This keeps your list healthy, complaints low (under that critical 0.1% threshold), and opens/clicks high (aim for 20–30% opens and 2–5% clicks overall).

### Why Engagement Matters So Much for Deliverability

- **High engagement = Healthy list:** Opens, clicks, replies, or forwards signal to providers that people want your emails. This improves your reputation, helping more messages reach the inbox.
- **Low engagement = Red flags:** If you're mailing inactive subscribers, providers see it as a sign of unwanted content. Complaints rise (new or inactive leads complain 5–10x more than engaged ones), and your overall rate could hit 0.1% or higher, leading to filtering or blacklisting.
- **The vicious cycle:** Low engagement + high complaints make providers treat your emails as spam, so even fewer people engage. Break it by only mailing those who show interest.

New leads start unengaged, so use your welcome series to warm them up quickly. Once segmented, you'll see better results: For newsletters, more clicks on sponsor ads; for products, higher conversions.

### How to Set Up Engagement-Based Segmentation (Step-by-Step)

It's simpler than it sounds, most ESPs handle the heavy lifting with pre-built filters. Here's how to get started, even if you're new to this:

#### 1. Identify Your Engaged Subscribers:

- In your ESP, look for built-in segments or filters like "Opened an email in the last 30 days" or "Clicked a link in the last 90 days."
- Example in Mailchimp: Go to Audience > Segments > Create Segment > Activity > "Was sent" and "Opened" > Set timeframe (e.g., last 30 days).
- In Klaviyo: Use Metrics > "Opened Email" or "Clicked Email" > Filter by time (e.g., within 60 days).
- Start with a 30–90 day window for "recently engaged", adjust based on your audience (e.g., shorter for fast-moving newsletters, longer for evergreen content).

## 2. Create Your Broadcast Segments:

- For regular sends (e.g., weekly newsletters), set the audience to only your “engaged” filter. This automatically excludes non-openers.
- Example: In ConvertKit, when creating a broadcast, select “Filter” > Engagement > “Has opened an email” > Last 60 days.
- For re-engagement: Occasionally send a “win-back” campaign to inactives (e.g., every 3–6 months) with a strong hook like “Missed our top guide? Here’s why readers love it.” If they don’t engage, suppress them fully.

## 3. Automate and Monitor:

- Set up automations to move subscribers in/out based on activity, no manual work needed. Most ESPs do this dynamically.
- Track metrics: After setup, watch your open rates climb (target 20–30%) and complaints drop (under 0.1%). If engagement dips, refine your content to solve more subscriber problems.
- Clean regularly: Every 3–6 months, remove or fully suppress subscribers inactive for 180+ days to keep your list lean.

## THE DANGERS OF GROWING TOO FAST: PACE YOURSELF FOR SUCCESS

Overloading with leads spikes complaints if they’re not engaged quickly. Match adds to your mail volume and frequency, infrequent mailers, be conservative (1–2% of send as newbies). Use segmentation to ensure only actives get your main blasts, diluting risks and boosting overall health.

## Safe List Growth: Tie It to Engagement

When adding new leads, pace yourself to avoid overwhelming your engaged base. A simple rule: New leads shouldn’t exceed 10–20% of your daily send volume, as they complain more until warmed up. For a 100,000–subscriber list mailing weekly, cap adds at 5,000–10,000 per cycle. Bigger lists or daily mailers have more buffer, e.g., a 1 million daily list can handle 10,000–20,000 adds safely. Always integrate with segmentation: New leads go through your welcome series first, then filter into engaged sends only if they interact.

This approach is semi-actionable right away: Log into your ESP today, create an “engaged” segment, and test a send to it. You’ll protect deliverability and see stronger results from those who truly want your content.

## Wrapping Up with More Counterintuitive Wisdom

Many chase brand stories in welcomes. Skip it unless it shows direct benefits, subscribers want “what’s in it for me?” Share gains, not glory. For thank you pages or upgrades, offer instant bonuses like tools or guides that solve problems fast, we’ve seen annual upgrades soar when you highlight 3–4 top pieces solving common issues.

As Zig Ziglar said: “You can have everything in life you want, if you will just help other people get what they want.”

Apply these lessons, and watch your conversions (or clicks) soar. Questions? Hit us up at [TrafficGrid.com](https://TrafficGrid.com).