We Analyzed 12 Million Outreach Emails. Here's What We Learned

Email outreach stats from a new, large-scale study

BACKLINKO AND PITCHBOX OUTREACH EMAIL ANALYSIS:
Methods & Results

BACKLINKO

BACKLINKO AND PITCHBOX
OUTREACH EMAIL ANALYSIS:
METHODS & RESULTS

The goal of this study was twofold. First, we aimed to benchmark current email outreach reply rates. Second, we wanted to see whether or not certain factors (including subject lines and personalizations) correlated with an above-average reply rate.

To our knowledge this is the largest study of this kind (in regard to sample size) conducted. However, this type of research is far from the first of its kind. For example, Michael King from iAcquire analyzed 300,000 outreach emails in a 2012 report.

Other large-scale, email-focused studies (like this one), tend to analyze newsletter engagement rates. While there may be some overlap in terms of deliverability and best day and times to send, cold outreach emails are very different than email newsletters.

We hope this study helps provide a broad understanding of the current state of email outreach. Also, our data will hopefully help inform best practices around outreach.

WHAT WE DID—
STUDY METHODOLOGY

We analyzed 12 million emails sent to 3 million different websites that were sent through the Pitchbox outreach platform. Before analysis, emails were anonymized. And for confidentiality reasons, all data was analyzed in aggregate.

The benefit of using Pitchbox data is that we are able to analyze data from actual outreach email campaigns at a large scale. The downside is that our data might be biased as it's possible a certain type of person or business tends to run their outreach campaigns through the platform.

Overall, our data focused on "Reply Rate", which is the number of replies received per emails sent. For example, if someone sends 100 emails and receives 10 replies, that's a reply rate of 10%.

Most of the factors that we analyzed (like subject line length) are fairly straightforward.

The only variable that needs a bit of explaining is follow-ups. These follow-ups were largely automated and set up in advance using Pitchbox sequencing. Once the initial email doesn't receive a reply, the Pitchbox system automatically sends another message until a reply is received. Then, if still no reply, the system moves onto the next contact in the database and starts a sequence of emails to them.

PITCHBOX SEQUENCE
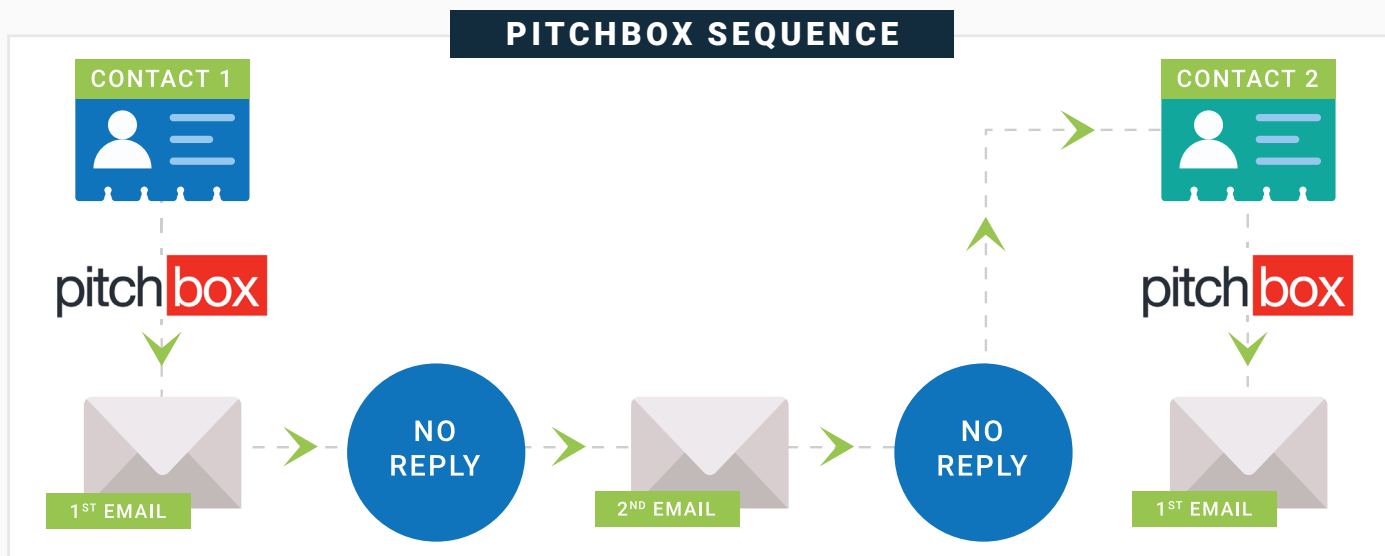
FACTOR-BY-FACTOR
BREAKDOWN

AVERAGE RESPONSE RATE

The percentage of individual outreach emails sent to a single contact that received a reply.

SUBJECT LINE LENGTH

Measured by character count. And placed into "buckets": short, medium, long, very long and extremely long.

FOLLOW-UPS

2nd or 3rd emails sent to the same contact.

CONTACTS

A contact was defined as a unique email address. Multiple contacts were different email addresses at the same organization.

PERSONALIZATION

The presence or absence of personalized fields in an email subject line or body (for example, first name, website name etc.).

DAY OF WEEK

Response rates days were indicated by the day an email was sent out (not necessarily when it was opened or replied to by the recipient).

SOCIAL PROFILE LINKS

These were determined by the presence of links to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or Instagram in the body of an outreach message.

OUTREACH TOPICS

We identified outreach topics based on various keyword-based searches. If the content of an email message "matched" the keyword search, it was deemed to fall under that category.

TOPIC	KEYWORDS
Link Building	Link, links
Guest Post	guest, column, contribute, contributor
Sponsorship	sponsor, sponsorship, pay, payment, paid, price, cost
Infographic	infographic
Resources	resource, resources, asset
Reviews	review, reviews, sample, samples
Mention	mention
Roundup	roundup

RESULTS

RESPONSE RATE BY ATTEMPT (SINGLE CONTACT)

Description: Multi-attempt sequence to a single contact

Attempt 1 Response Rate: 8.5%

Attempt 1+2 Response Rate: 14.1%

Attempt 1+2+3 Response Rate: 17.1%

RESPONSE RATE BY ATTEMPT (MULTIPLE CONTACTS)

Description: Multi-attempt sequence to multiple contacts at a single organization

1 Attempt to Multiple Contacts Response Rate: 16.45%

2 Attempts to Multiple Contacts Response Rate: 17.27%

3 Attempts to Multiple Contacts Response Rate: 22.15%

PUBLISHED DAY OF WEEK AND SOCIAL SHARES

ATTEMPTS	SINGLE CONTACT SEQUENCE	MULTI-CONTACT SEQUENCE
1	8.50%	16.45%
2	14.10%	17.27%
3	17.10%	22.15%

NUMBER OF CONTACTS

Description: *Email sequence (2-3 attempts) response rates by number of contacts per website.*

CONTACTS PER WEBSITE	RESPONSE RATE
1	15.40%
2	18.60%
3	21.40%
4	22.35%
5+	22.82%

SUBJECT LENGTH

SUBJECT LINE LENGTH RANGE (CHARACTERS)	RESPONSE RATE
1-15	16.8%
16-35	19.6%
36-50	22.3%
51-70	22.2%
71 plus	20.6%

SUBJECT LINE PERSONALIZATION

No Personalization in subject line response rate: 16.7%

Personalized subject line response rate: 21.8%

EMAIL BODY PERSONALIZATION

No Personalization response rate: 15.3%

At least one personalization data/point response rate: 20.3%

OUTREACH RESPONSE RATE BY TOPIC

Description: *Do certain words have an effect on response rates?*

TOPIC	RESPONSE RATE	KEYWORDS
Link Building	21.90%	Link, links
Guest Post	24.70%	guest, column, contribute, contributor
Sponsorship	21.80%	sponsor, sponsorship, pay, payment, paid, price, cost
Infographic	20.20%	infographic
Resources	20%	resource, resources, asset
Reviews	21.60%	review, reviews, sample, samples
Mention	15.64%	mention
Roundup	23.80%	roundup

SOCIAL PROFILES IN SIGNATURE

Description: *How does the presence of social profiles in email signatures affect response rates?*

NETWORK	WITH	WITHOUT
Facebook	20.16%	20.04%
Twitter	21.64%	20.01%
Instagram	24.7%	20.02%
LinkedIn	22.31%	20.01%

BEST DAY OF WEEK TO SEND OUTREACH EMAILS

WEEKDAY	EMAIL RESPONSE RATE
Monday	7.5%
Tuesday	7.54%
Wednesday	7.64%
Thursday	7.6%
Friday	7.54%
Saturday	5.65%
Sunday	5.95%