

Here's why your prospecting emails aren't being read by execs, according to an exec



To fill your [sales pipeline](#), you're sending 5-10 prospecting emails per day. You've Googled how to write the best subject lines and the best times to send your messages. So why is your response rate so low?

"Your prospecting emails aren't being read by execs because they're about you, not the executive," says Todd Caponi, author of the bestselling book *The Transparency Sale*, Managing Director at VentureSCALE, and former CRO of PowerReviews.

We interviewed Caponi to find out why executives don't read most sales emails (and how to write the kinds of sales emails they will read).

Emails don't address an executive's priorities

As you move up in your career, Caponi says, you're going to receive more emails. By the time you reach a C-suite level, everyone in the organization is contacting you. And on top of these messages, you're receiving a flood of [prospecting emails](#).

However, it's not difficult to determine which prospecting emails stay and which ones go. You're quickly scanning and deleting [generic ones](#) that don't match your [top three priorities](#): your team, your customers, and your prospects.

“Unknown Potential Vendors” (aka sales reps) come in at number 14 on the executive priority list. “If you’re coming in at #14, you’re low on the priority list of who I’m going to engage with,” Caponi says. “And if your email is all about you, #14, and not how you can help me with my top three priorities, I’m going to ‘select all’ and delete.”

To get executives’ attention, write about one of their top three priorities:



1. Their team

An executive’s goal with his or her team is to create low anxiety, high engagement. Look on LinkedIn, company hiring pages, and social media platforms to understand the size of an executive’s team and who’s on it. Send something that helps with team management, such as resources on hiring or compensation benchmarks.



2. Their customers

Research your executive’s target customer through the company’s website. Look at things like testimonial pages to see who’s currently using their product or service and what their biggest challenges are. Offer a resource, such as a competitor analysis report, to help the executive retain these customers.



3. Their prospects

Take the research about the company’s target customer and apply it to their prospects. Could you connect the executive with a valuable industry contact to help with prospecting?

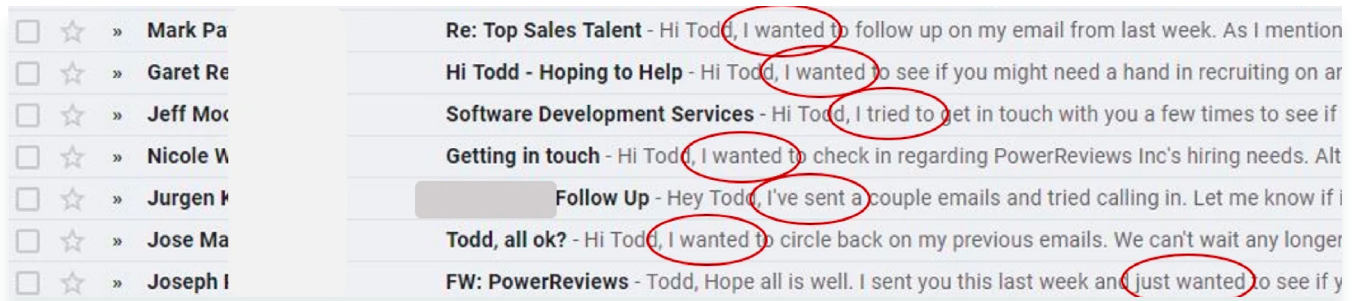
“My joke is that, as an executive, email was always like the instant lottery that I had to check because there could be a winner in there — one that stood out among the crowd,” Caponi laughs. If you can meet one or all of an executive’s top priorities in your prospecting email, you’ll increase your chances of busting through inbox noise and getting your message opened.

Email preview statements aren't personalized

“Most companies are still teaching reps and marketers to optimize the subject line. But my phone, my Gmail, and my Outlook all have a preview of the email’s first 10 to 15 words, and nobody seems to be optimizing them,” Caponi says. “These words need to stand out.”

Also called an email snippet, the preview statement gives the recipient a peek at an email’s first lines of content. Unfortunately, most preview statements of prospecting emails immediately reveal that the email is all about the sales rep.

Executives have no interest in reading messages that start with phrases like “I wanted” and “We believe” and “I’ve tried.” Messages like that blend in with every other email in their inbox, and none of them have anything to do with an executive’s top three priorities.



A few additional tips: Your preview statement shouldn't be longer than 10-15 words or about [40-50 characters](#). It should continue the theme of the subject line. Also front-load the first 40-50 characters or 10-15 words with the most important info from your email.

Emails are longer than War and Peace

According to Caponi, our brains crave simplicity. “When you open an email and it’s littered with words, your brain actually cringes a little bit on the inside,” he says. “It’s just like, ‘I don’t want to read this. It’s too much work. Now I’ve got to invest a bunch of time in this email from somebody who’s #14 on my priority list.’”

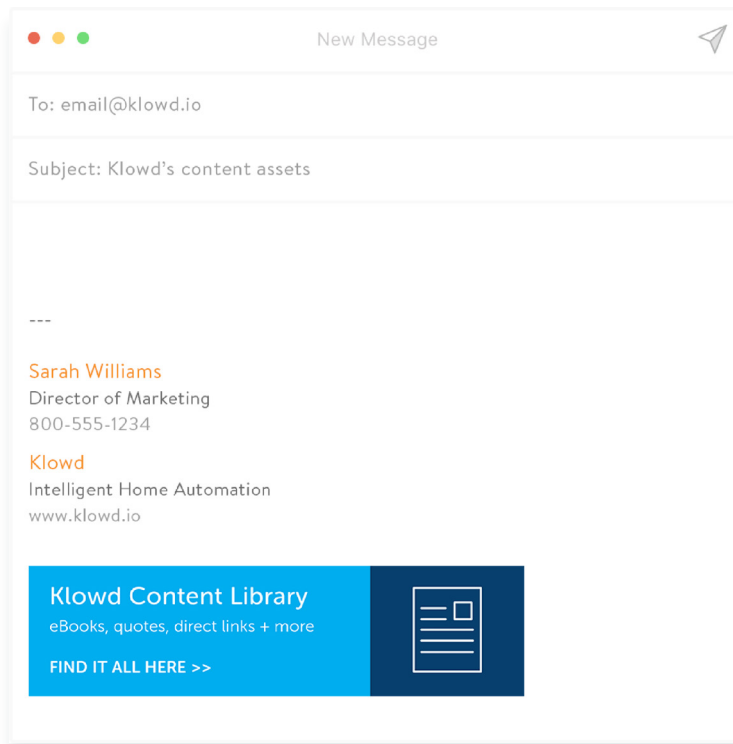
An email is meant to be a quick communication mechanism. Trying to fit a conversation that should be done on the phone or in a meeting into an email is painful. Instead, use your prospecting email to open the door to future discussion.

Todd recommends creating an email that’s the length of a tweet or around 280 characters or less. Difficult? Yes, but it also ensures that you’re sending emails that get right to the point, which is important for a busy executive. It also guarantees that the preview text will be stellar. So how do you write succinct prospecting

messages? Well, instead of including company or product/service info in the body of your email, invite the recipient to read more about you through a banner ad under your email signature.

The email signature tool Sigstr (<https://www.sigstr.com/>) allows you to customize your e-signature and banner ad. For example, maybe in your prospecting email, you send an eBook that you believe will help the executive. With Sigstr, you also include a clickable “Learn more about XYZ company” below your message, complete with the executive’s company name. If the executive is interested in learning more, she or he can simply click on the ad.

Your email is then an invitation rather than a pushy sales pitch to someone you don’t even know. A short email combined with the opportunity to learn more feeds the brain’s hunger for simplicity.



Emails don't offer anything valuable

Caponi advises sales reps to [stop trying to sell](#) in your prospecting emails and send something to make an executive smarter that will help their team, their customers, and their prospects.

“When I was CRO of PowerReviews, we posted on our Careers page that we were hiring sales development reps,” he says. “A couple of days later, a company emailed me saying, ‘Hey, you just posted these roles. Here’s a salary survey of what sales development reps are making in the Chicago market.’”

Caponi thought that the message looked interesting and was something he could use — after all, it was personalized to his current situation. He opened it. The email contained exactly what was promised and helped Caponi and his sales development team during their hiring process.

Two weeks later, when the quarter ended, the same prospect sent a board meeting template to help Caponi get ready for his next board meeting. The message went something like, “Hey, your quarter just ended. You’re probably preparing for a board meeting. Here’s a template to help save you some time.”

In both messages, the prospect didn’t even pitch what his company did. “The board deck and the salary survey had nothing to do with their company, but they built trust with me,” Caponi says. “Just having that mindset in your email prospecting changes the game.”

Here are a few best practices to sending something of value to an executive:



Talk with marketing to determine the types of things that are going to be helpful to your targets. Ensure that resources are available in a [shared resources library](#) and refer back to the list when emailing prospects.



Take 10-20 minutes to research your target executive. Determine what challenges they’re facing on a company and personal level. Send something that’s relevant to their current problem (e.g., a template, benchmark study).



Get creative. You’re not limited to sending studies and surveys. Caponi cites a company in the corporate social giving space. The company began a podcast where they interviewed heads of e-commerce for retailers. Their prospecting emails asked for an interview instead of a sale. Their open rate went from 4% to 68%.

A hard pitch isn’t very valuable in a prospecting email because you haven’t built enough trust. Focus instead on sending something that will help the executive with his or her top three priorities. Don’t expect a response. You’re helping first and engaging with the prospect.

Emails are sent too frequently

There are two ways to wear out your welcome in an executive's inbox. One way is constantly sending emails "reminding" executives that they haven't responded to you. Reps put the guilt trip in their emails with messages like, "I tried to reach you a number of times."

"If I see an email from somebody that I don't know that's coming at me every single day, I'll probably put a little spam flag on it," Caponi says.

The other way is constantly emailing an executive you've already spoken to that starts, "I haven't heard from you in a while. What's going on?" Maybe you've been working with the executive through the sales cycle when, all of a sudden, they go quiet. However, pounding the executive for a response makes you seem desperate.

If you haven't interacted with the executive before, don't expect a response to your emails. There will come a time when you can ask for something like an appointment. But you've first got to prove that you're a giver and earn the right to ask for something back. Just remember that you're in the process of building trust with these executives.

If you've already been working with the executive and they're not responding, wait three to seven days between emails to follow up.

"If you're not getting a response, I coach people to start giving again. For example, you could offer a data point that might help the executive in their next meeting. Those types of things actually inspire people to respond more than anything," Caponi says. "When a rep consistently provides me with a resource that I can use, I'm more apt to respond with, 'Thank you for this. I know I owe you a response. Sorry it's taken so long. Here's what's going on.'"

Emails make you look too available

In addition to pounding the executive, being completely available for an appointment hints at a rep desperate for customers. Sales reps typically ask for an appointment in one of two ways:

1. They ask the exec to pick any time next week, which makes it look like the sales rep has all the time in the world to meet or is so desperate for a meeting that they'll rearrange their calendar if necessary.
2. They ask the exec to use their calendaring application, which (if it shows mostly open time slots) also makes the sales rep seem desperate (and bad at their job).

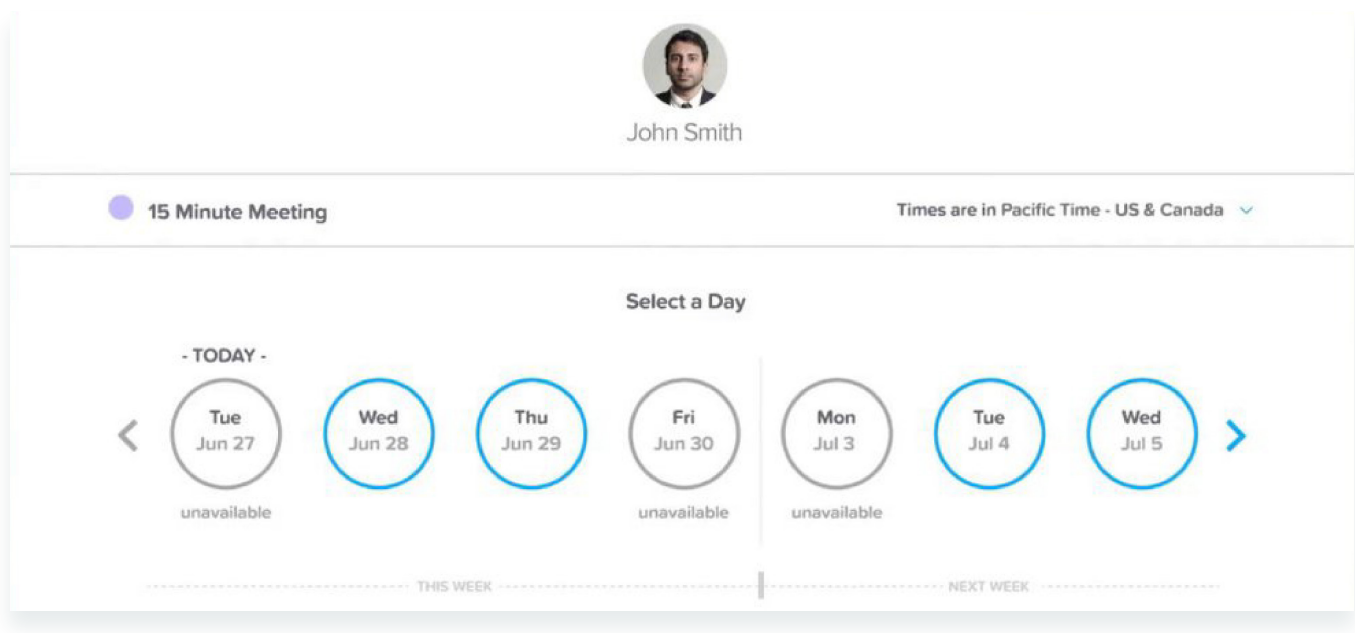
"Imagine going through a town you've never been in before and you're trying to choose between two restaurants. One looks empty, and one has people in the windows and waiting out front," Caponi says. "You're drawn to the one that's got the energy, the one that's gotten the demand. You assume that the empty one isn't a great restaurant. It's got no bearing on whether the food is good or not, but we're just drawn that way."

The same mindset works for prospecting emails. When you say something like, "Just pick a time next week, anytime; I'll make it work," you sound like you're the empty restaurant. You sound desperate.

To avoid the "empty restaurant" impression, be specific with a time and date when asking for an appointment. For example, you could say, "How's Tuesday at 10 or Wednesday at 11? I've got those times open." You're not lying, but what you're doing is being specific, creating the impression that you're in demand and also controlling your own calendar.

Similarly, if you use a scheduling tool like [Calendly](#), give the impression that you're in high demand. Even if you don't have a full calendar, block off the time during the most productive hours of the day.

For example, between 9 am to noon are typically good times for important meetings. You could make those times available and block off your afternoon. According to Caponi, optimize for when you're at your best and ensure that your calendar isn't completely empty.



Focus on the executive's priorities, not your own

The problem with prospecting email “hacks” is that, eventually, everyone starts doing them, causing emails to become lost in the [noise of the inbox](#) once again. So how can reps [continually improve](#) their emails to executives?

“I like to say that tricks are for your 8th grader’s magic show,” Caponi says. “Personalized and valuable emails that meet an executive’s priorities will always win.”

Download our [5 Prospecting Email Templates](#). Customize to provide value to each recipient.

[Learn more about how Sell can help.](#)