

The Email Marketing AI Playbook

Write better emails faster. Every prompt you need to build, grow, and monetise your list.

1. Email Strategy Fundamentals

Before you write a single subject line, you need to understand what you're building. Email marketing isn't one thing—it's three distinct systems working together.

The Three Email Types

Transactional emails are triggered by an action: order confirmations, password resets, shipping updates. They get the highest open rates (60-80%) because people expect them. Most businesses treat these as afterthoughts. That's a mistake. Every transactional email is a branding opportunity.

Lifecycle emails are automated sequences tied to where someone is in their journey with you: welcome sequences, onboarding flows, cart abandonment, win-back campaigns. You build these once, then they run forever. This is where AI saves you the most time.

Broadcast emails are one-to-many sends: newsletters, product announcements, flash sales. These keep your audience engaged between lifecycle triggers. They're also where most people start—and where most people get stuck staring at a blank screen.

List Building That Actually Works

Your list is your business. Full stop. Social media algorithms change. Ad costs rise. Your email list is the one audience you truly own.

The rules are simple: never buy a list (it destroys your sender reputation), always use double opt-in (it keeps your list clean), and give people a genuine reason to subscribe. That reason is your **lead magnet**—a PDF, checklist, mini-course, discount code, or free tool that's valuable enough to trade an email address for.

AI Prompt — Lead Magnet Ideas: "I run a [type of business] serving [target audience]. They struggle with [main problem]. Suggest 10 lead magnet ideas that would be genuinely useful, quick to create, and directly related to my paid offering of [product/service]. For each, give me a compelling title and one-sentence description."

Segmentation That Matters

Forget complex segmentation matrices. For most small businesses, three segments cover 90% of what you need:

1. **Engagement level** — active (opened/clicked in last 30 days), warm (30-90 days), cold (90+ days)
2. **Purchase status** — never bought, bought once, repeat buyer
3. **Interest** — what they signed up for or clicked on most

Start with engagement level. It's the single highest-impact segment because it determines whether your emails even land in the inbox.

Deliverability Essentials

None of your clever copy matters if emails land in spam. The non-negotiable basics:

- **Authenticate your domain** — set up SPF, DKIM, and DMARC records. Every email platform has guides for this.
- **Warm your sending** — new domains should start with 50-100 emails/day and scale up over 2-4 weeks.
- **Clean your list quarterly** — remove hard bounces immediately, soft bounces after 3 attempts, and unengaged subscribers after 90 days of silence.

- **Watch your spam complaint rate** — stay below 0.1%. Above 0.3% and Gmail will start throttling you.
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2. Subject Lines That Get Opened

Your subject line is the most important piece of copy you'll ever write. It doesn't matter how brilliant the email body is if nobody opens it.

Here are 10 proven frameworks, each with an AI prompt that generates options tailored to your business.

Framework 1: The Curiosity Gap

Create an information gap the reader needs to close.

Prompt: "Write 5 email subject lines using the curiosity gap technique for [business type]. The email is about [topic]. Each subject line should hint at surprising or counterintuitive information without being clickbait. Keep them under 50 characters."

Framework 2: The Direct Benefit

State exactly what the reader gets.

Prompt: "Write 5 benefit-driven email subject lines for [product/service]. Focus on the end result the customer achieves, not features. Use specific numbers or timeframes where possible. Keep them under 45 characters."

Framework 3: The Urgent Question

Ask something the reader can't help but answer internally.

Prompt: "Write 5 question-based email subject lines for [audience]. The email covers [topic]. Each question should challenge an assumption or tap into a common frustration. Avoid yes/no questions—use 'how', 'why', or 'what if' instead."

Framework 4: The Personal Touch

Use the reader's name or reference their specific situation.

Prompt: "Write 5 personalised email subject lines for [business]. Use the merge tag {first_name} naturally. The email is about [topic]. Make them feel like a message from a friend, not a brand."

Framework 5: The Social Proof

Leverage what others have done or said.

Prompt: "Write 5 social proof subject lines for [product/service]. Reference customer results, popularity, or collective behaviour. Use specific numbers (e.g., '2,847 people already...'). Under 50 characters each."

Framework 6: The Scarcity/Urgency

Create genuine time pressure (never fake it).

Prompt: "Write 5 urgency-based email subject lines for [offer]. The deadline is [date/time]. Convey urgency without being spammy or using ALL CAPS. Avoid the word 'hurry'. Under 45 characters."

Framework 7: The Story Tease

Open a narrative loop.

Prompt: "Write 5 story-teaser subject lines for [business]. Each should hint at a real scenario, mistake, or transformation related to [topic]. Make the reader want to know what happened next. Under 50 characters."

Framework 8: The Contrarian

Challenge conventional wisdom.

Prompt: "Write 5 contrarian email subject lines for [audience]. Challenge a common belief about [topic]. Be thought-provoking but not offensive. The email argues that [your actual point]. Under 50 characters."

Framework 9: The List/Number

Promise a specific, digestible quantity.

Prompt: "Write 5 number-based subject lines for an email about [topic] aimed at [audience]. Use odd numbers (they outperform even). Each should promise clear, actionable value. Under 45 characters."

Framework 10: The One-Word or Ultra-Short

Sometimes less is more.

Prompt: "Write 5 ultra-short email subject lines (1-4 words) for [business]. The email is about [topic]. Each should be intriguing enough to open on its own. Think text-message energy."

A/B Testing Your Subject Lines

Never guess when you can test. Send version A to 15% of your list and version B to another 15%. Wait 2-4 hours. The winner goes to the remaining 70%. Most email platforms automate this.

Test one variable at a time: length, emoji vs. no emoji, question vs. statement, personalisation vs. generic. Over time, you'll build a mental model of what your specific audience responds to.

What Kills Open Rates

- ALL CAPS or excessive punctuation (!!!)
 - Spam trigger words: "free", "guarantee", "act now", "limited time" (used carelessly)
 - Misleading subject lines that don't match the content
 - Sending too frequently without enough value
 - Not sending frequently enough (your audience forgets you)
 - Poor sender name — use a human name, not "noreply@"
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3. Welcome Sequence

Your welcome sequence is the highest-leverage automation you'll build. New subscribers are at peak interest — open rates for welcome emails average 50-60%, compared to 20-25% for regular campaigns.

Here's a 5-email welcome sequence with full prompts for each.

Email 1: The Warm Welcome (Sent immediately)

Deliver your lead magnet, set expectations, and start the relationship.

Prompt: "Write a welcome email for [business name]. The subscriber just signed up for [lead magnet]. The email should: (1) deliver the lead magnet with a clear download link placeholder, (2) introduce who I am in 2-3 sentences — I'm [brief background], (3) tell them what to expect from my emails — I send [frequency] about [topics], (4) ask one simple question to encourage a reply (this helps deliverability). Tone: [warm/professional/casual]. Keep it under 200 words. British English."

Email 2: The Quick Win (Sent Day 1)

Give them an immediate, actionable result related to your lead magnet.

Prompt: "Write a follow-up email for [business name], sent one day after someone downloaded [lead magnet]. Share one quick, actionable tip related to [topic] that they can implement in under 10 minutes. The goal is to demonstrate value fast and build trust. End with a soft mention of [product/service] as a way to go deeper, without being salesy. Under 250 words. British English."

Email 3: The Story (Sent Day 3)

Share your origin story or a customer transformation.

Prompt: "Write a story-driven email for [business name]. Tell the story of [choose one: my journey starting this business / a customer who achieved X result]. Structure: problem → turning point → transformation. The lesson

should naturally connect to the value of [product/service]. Keep it personal and conversational, not polished-corporate. Under 300 words. British English."

Email 4: The Value Bomb (Sent Day 5)

Your most useful, shareable piece of content.

Prompt: "Write an email for [business name] that provides a genuinely useful [framework/checklist/guide] about [topic]. This should be the kind of email someone bookmarks or forwards to a colleague. Structure it with a brief intro, then the framework in numbered steps or bullet points. Subtly position [product/service] as what makes step [X] easier. Under 350 words. British English."

Email 5: The Soft Pitch (Sent Day 7)

A clear, honest invitation to take the next step.

Prompt: "Write a soft-sell email for [business name]. Recap the value delivered so far in the welcome sequence (the [lead magnet], the [quick win tip], and the [framework]). Then introduce [product/service] as the natural next step. Address the top 2-3 objections [list them]. Include a clear call to action. Be direct but not pushy — think trusted adviser, not car salesman. Under 300 words. British English."

Timing and Cadence

The spacing above (Day 0, 1, 3, 5, 7) is a solid default. Front-load value in the first week while attention is high. If you're in e-commerce, compress to Days 0, 1, 2, 3, 5 — purchase decisions happen faster.

Personalisation That Works

Beyond {first_name}, use what you know: - **Sign-up source** — tailor the story to match where they found you - **Lead magnet chosen** — if you have multiple, reference the specific one - **Quiz/survey answers** — if your opt-in includes questions, use the data

4. Sales Sequences

Sales emails are where most people either go too hard (spammy) or too soft (invisible). The prompts below are calibrated for the sweet spot: clear, honest, and effective.

Launch Sequence (5 Emails)

For new product launches, course openings, or limited-time offers.

Email 1 — The Announcement (Day 1):

Prompt: "Write a product launch announcement email for [product name] by [business name]. Price: [£X]. The product solves [problem] for [audience]. Lead with the problem, introduce the solution, and create excitement without hype. Include 3 key benefits and a clear CTA. Mention that [launch offer/bonus] is available until [date]. Under 300 words. British English."

Email 2 — The Deep Dive (Day 2):

Prompt: "Write a launch email that explains what's inside [product name] in detail. Walk through the key components/modules/features. For each, explain the benefit in terms of what the buyer can do or achieve. Include one customer

quote or result if possible: [provide it or write 'create a realistic placeholder'].
End with CTA. Under 350 words. British English."

Email 3 — The Objection Handler (Day 4):

Prompt: "Write a launch email for [product name] that addresses the top objections: [list 3-4 objections, e.g., 'I don't have time', 'Will this work for my industry?', 'I've tried similar things before']. Handle each objection honestly and specifically — don't dismiss concerns. End with CTA and reminder of [deadline/bonus]. Under 300 words. British English."

Email 4 — The Social Proof (Day 5):

Prompt: "Write a launch email for [product name] built around social proof and results. Feature 2-3 customer stories or testimonials: [provide them or write 'create realistic placeholders for a [type] business']. Frame each as: situation before → action taken → result achieved. End with CTA. Under 300 words. British English."

Email 5 — The Final Call (Day 7):

Prompt: "Write a last-chance email for [product name]. The offer ends [tonight/tomorrow]. Be direct: summarise what they get, what they miss if they don't act, and make the CTA unmissable. Create genuine urgency without manufactured panic. This is the most direct email in the sequence. Under 250 words. British English."

Cart Abandonment (3 Emails)

Email 1 — The Gentle Reminder (1 hour after abandonment):

Prompt: "Write a cart abandonment email for [business name]. The customer left [product/item type] in their basket. Keep it helpful, not guilt-trippy. Ask if something went wrong. Include a link back to their cart. Under 150 words. British English."

Email 2 — The Objection Buster (24 hours):

Prompt: "Write a second cart abandonment email for [business name]. Address the most common reasons people don't complete a purchase of [product type]: [e.g., shipping costs, not sure about sizing, comparing options]. Offer helpful information for each. Mention [guarantee/return policy] if applicable. Under 200 words. British English."

Email 3 — The Incentive (48 hours):

Prompt: "Write a final cart abandonment email for [business name]. Offer [incentive: e.g., 10% off, free shipping, bonus item] as a nudge. Make it clear this is the last reminder. Include social proof (star rating, review count, or a short testimonial). CTA to complete purchase. Under 150 words. British English."

Re-engagement Sequence (3 Emails)

For subscribers who haven't opened or clicked in 60-90 days.

Email 1 — The Check-In (Day 1):

Prompt: "Write a re-engagement email for [business name]. The subscriber hasn't engaged in [X] days. Be honest and human — acknowledge you've noticed they've been quiet. Ask if they still want to hear from you. Give them a

reason to stay: mention [upcoming content/offer/value]. Include a clear 'Yes, keep me subscribed' button. Under 150 words. British English."

Email 2 — The Value Reminder (Day 4):

Prompt: "Write a second re-engagement email for [business name]. Share your single best piece of content or most useful resource — the thing that makes people say 'oh, this is good'. Present it as 'in case you missed this'. Under 200 words. British English."

Email 3 — The Breakup (Day 7):

Prompt: "Write a final re-engagement email for [business name]. Be warm but clear: if they don't click, you'll remove them from the list. No hard feelings. Make the 'keep me subscribed' button prominent. Mention they can always re-subscribe later. Keep it short and genuine. Under 120 words. British English."

5. Newsletter Writing

A good newsletter is the backbone of your email marketing. It keeps you top of mind, builds trust between purchases, and gives people a reason to stay subscribed.

The Weekly Newsletter Formula

Every strong newsletter follows a simple structure:

1. **Hook** (1-2 sentences) — Start with something interesting. A question, a surprising stat, a quick story.
2. **Main content** (1-2 sections) — Your insight, tutorial, or opinion on a topic your audience cares about.

3. **Curated links** (3-5 items) — Useful resources you've found. Saves your reader time.
4. **CTA** (1 sentence) — What you want them to do: reply, check out a product, read a post.

Prompt — Weekly Newsletter Draft: "Write a newsletter for [business name], aimed at [audience]. This week's theme is [topic]. Structure: (1) Opening hook — something surprising or thought-provoking about [topic], (2) Main section — share [an insight/tutorial/opinion] with actionable takeaways, (3) Three curated links — I'll provide URLs, write brief descriptions for each: [URL 1 about X], [URL 2 about Y], [URL 3 about Z], (4) Closing CTA — encourage readers to [action]. Tone: [conversational/authoritative/witty]. Under 500 words. British English."

Content Curation Prompts

Finding great content to share is half the work. Use AI to speed up the curation process.

Prompt — Content Discovery: "I write a [frequency] newsletter about [topic] for [audience]. Suggest 10 content themes or angles I could cover in upcoming editions. For each, give me: (1) a working title, (2) why my audience would care, (3) a unique take I could offer. Avoid generic topics — think specific, surprising, or contrarian."

Prompt — Link Descriptions: "I'm including these links in my newsletter. Write a 1-2 sentence description for each that explains why it's worth reading. Be specific about the value — don't just summarise the title. Links: [paste URLs and brief notes about each]. British English."

Writing in Your Voice

AI-generated text sounds generic unless you train it. Here's how to make AI write like you:

Prompt — Voice Training: *"Analyse these 3 samples of my writing and describe my voice, tone, and style in detail. Note my sentence structure, vocabulary preferences, level of formality, use of humour, and any quirks. Then rewrite this [email/paragraph] in my style: [paste draft]. Writing samples: [paste 3 genuine samples of your writing, at least 200 words each]."*

Save the voice description AI generates. Paste it at the start of every email prompt as a style instruction. This one step transforms generic output into something that sounds like you.

6. Analytics & Optimisation

You don't need to be a data analyst. You need to watch five numbers and understand what they're telling you.

Key Metrics

Metric	Healthy Range	What It Tells You
Open rate	20-40%	Subject line + sender reputation + send time
Click-through rate	2-5%	Content relevance + CTA strength
Unsubscribe rate	<0.5% per send	Content-audience fit
	<0.1%	List quality + permission

Metric	Healthy Range	What It Tells You
Spam complaint rate		
Revenue per email	Varies	Bottom-line effectiveness

If open rates drop, fix your subject lines or clean your list. If click rates drop, your content isn't matching expectations. If unsubscribes spike, you're emailing too often or to the wrong segment.

AI Prompts for Analysis

Prompt — Campaign Review: "Here are the results from my last 5 email campaigns: [paste data — subject line, open rate, click rate, unsubscribes, revenue if applicable]. Identify patterns: what's working, what's not, and what I should test next. Be specific with recommendations, not generic advice."

Prompt — A/B Test Analysis: "I ran an A/B test on [subject line / send time / CTA / layout]. Version A: [details + results]. Version B: [details + results]. List size: [X]. Is this result statistically meaningful? What should I learn from it? What should I test next?"

The Continuous Improvement Loop

Every month, run this cycle:

1. **Review** — Pull your top 3 and bottom 3 performing emails
2. **Analyse** — What do the winners have in common? What do the losers share?
3. **Hypothesise** — Form one clear test for the next month
4. **Test** — Run the test across at least 3 sends
5. **Document** — Write down what you learned (even if the result was "no difference")

Small, consistent improvements compound. A 1% open rate improvement every month means 12% better by year end.

7. Tool Recommendations

Free and Budget-Friendly

Buttondown — Clean, minimal, great for writers. Generous free tier (100 subscribers). Markdown-native, no bloat. Best for: personal newsletters, solo creators.

MailerLite — Full-featured with a free tier up to 1,000 subscribers. Solid automation builder, landing pages included. Best for: small businesses wanting all-in-one.

Brevo (formerly Sendinblue) — Free tier based on sends (300/day), not subscribers. Good transactional email support. Best for: e-commerce with transactional needs.

Mid-Range

Kit (formerly ConvertKit) — Built for creators. Excellent automation, tagging, and sequence builder. Free to 10,000 subscribers (limited features), paid plans from \$25/month. Best for: course creators, coaches, digital product sellers.

Beehiiv — Newsletter-focused with built-in monetisation (ads, paid subscriptions, referral programme). Free tier up to 2,500 subscribers. Best for: newsletter businesses, media operators.

What to Look For

Choose based on your primary use case, not feature checklists. Prioritise: reliable deliverability, an automation builder you'll actually use, and solid analytics. Every platform on this list handles the basics well. The best tool is the one you'll consistently use.

8. Quick Reference

Best Send Times by Industry

Industry	Best Days	Best Times (GMT)
B2B / SaaS	Tue, Wed, Thu	09:00 - 11:00
E-commerce	Tue, Thu, Sun	10:00 - 12:00, 19:00 - 21:00
Newsletters / Media	Tue, Wed	07:00 - 09:00
Health / Fitness	Mon, Wed	06:00 - 08:00, 17:00 - 19:00
Food / Restaurant	Thu, Fri	11:00 - 13:00, 16:00 - 18:00
Finance / Professional	Tue, Wed	08:00 - 10:00
Creative / Design	Tue, Thu	10:00 - 12:00

These are starting points. Your audience is unique — test and adjust.

Subject Line Swipe File (20 Templates)

Replace the bracketed sections with your specifics.

1. The [unexpected thing] I learned about [topic]
2. {first_name}, quick question about [their goal]
3. [Number] [audience type] can't be wrong
4. Stop [common mistake] (do this instead)
5. I almost [dramatic thing] — here's what saved me
6. [Specific result] in [short timeframe]. Here's how.
7. This [thing] changed how I think about [topic]
8. What [respected person/brand] gets wrong about [topic]
9. The [adjective] guide to [desired outcome]

10. [Short statement]. (No, really.)
11. Your [thing] is costing you [something valuable]
12. Why I stopped [common practice]
13. [Number] minutes to better [outcome]
14. We need to talk about [pain point]
15. {first_name}, you left something behind
16. If you only read one email this week...
17. The [topic] mistake everyone makes (except you, now)
18. [Shocking stat] — and what to do about it
19. I was wrong about [thing]. Here's the truth.
20. [Simple question]?

CAN-SPAM and GDPR Compliance Checklist

For every email you send:

- ☐ Clear, non-deceptive subject line
- ☐ Valid "From" name and email address
- ☐ Physical postal address included (footer is fine)
- ☐ Working unsubscribe link, honoured within 10 days
- ☐ Not sending to purchased, rented, or scraped lists

GDPR additions (if you have EU/UK subscribers — and you probably do):

- ☐ Consent obtained before sending marketing emails
- ☐ Record of when and how consent was given
- ☐ Easy unsubscribe/data deletion process
- ☐ Privacy policy accessible and up to date
- ☐ Data processing purposes clearly stated at sign-up
- ☐ No pre-ticked consent boxes
- ☐ Under-16s excluded unless parental consent obtained

Review quarterly:

- ☐ List cleaned of bounces and unengaged subscribers
 - ☐ Suppression list maintained and respected
 - ☐ Third-party integrations reviewed for data sharing compliance
 - ☐ Consent records backed up
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One Final Note

Email marketing isn't about blasting your list with offers. It's about building a relationship through consistent value, then making relevant offers to people who trust you.

AI makes the writing faster. These prompts make the writing better. But the strategy — the understanding of your audience, the genuine desire to help them — that's still on you.

Start with your welcome sequence. Get it live this week. Everything else builds from there.

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