Cold Email Tips To Land Your Dream Job

Learn How To Send Effective Cold-Emails to Recruiters
Which Will Get You Interviews For Your Dream Jobs

Written By Nick Singh

Chapter 1
Introduction

Airbnb, Snapchat, & Cloudflare interviewed me for Software Engineering jobs when I had no connections at those companies.

Those opportunities came from writing cold emails to company recruiters.

Even my current job at SafeGraph is the result of a cold email which I sent my now CEO. But most people haven't had as much success with cold emailing for two reasons:

#1: They Suck At Writing Cold Emails
#2: They Don't Have Respond-Worthy Content

I'm here to help you with #1.

 #2 - Having Respond-Worthy content, like a strong resume with relevant experience for the position you are applying for is needed if you want a cold email to lead to an interview eventually.

The best written cold email won't help you if the jobs you are applying to aren't a good fit. Make sure you have a kick-ass portfolio project, maybe a hackathon win, & a strong resume before you expect cold-emailing to pay dividends.

With that disclaimer out-of-the-way, let's dive into some tips for writing effective cold emails.

Chapter 1
Who are we emailing?

Before we talk about the content of the cold email, let's talk about who we are actually emailing.

At smaller companies (<30 people), CEO's or CTO's work well.

At mid-range companies, see if there is a technical recruiter. If so, go email them.

I don't advocate for emailing engineers directly. In my experience, even if an engineer responds positively to your cold-email, they may not follow through in submitting a referral or forwarding you to a recruiter.

At larger companies (750+ employees), there might even be a person with the title 'University Recruiter' or 'Campus Recruiter.' These are the right people to reach out to if you are still in school, and it's where I had the most luck when I was cold emailing.

Chapter 2
Cold Email Content Tips

Keep It Short

Recruiters are busy people. They may briefly read your email, and immediately decide whether to respond to it or ignore it.

So keep your email short. The data backs up this principle up. Hubspot analyzed 40 million emails and found the ideal length of a cold-sales email to be between 50 and 125 words to maximize response rates.

I've personally had the best luck at around 100 words. It's all about maintaining a high signal-to-noise ratio. You don't need to include phrases like 'I hope you are doing well today!" or "I hope this email finds you well." At best, it's extraneous, and at worst, insincere.

Mention An Accomplishment Or Two

This is a sales email - you are trying to sell yourself in one paragraph to the recruiter that you are someone worth reaching out to for an interview.

So don't be shy.

Highlight a relevant accomplishment or internship experience that makes you respond-worthy. Name drop that that hackathon you won. Hyperlink to your favorite project or an app on the app store that has a few thousand downloads, and mention that usage number. If you went to an impressive engineering school, lean into that.

You don't need to link to too many things or copy-paste the entire resume. That would end up breaking Principle #1: Keep It Short.

Instead, just attach your resume to the initial email so the recruiter can get more background if needed.

Add Urgency

My favorite tip: if you already have a return internship offer with a different company, or a job offer extended to you, mention that. It puts pressure on a recruiter to respond promptly and might even fast track you to an onsite interview. This is especially true if it's a well known company.

Even if the deadline is very far from now, so there is no true urgency, name-dropping the other company is helpful due to the concept of social proof. If other companies desire you, then a recruiter is more likely to feel you are valuable and have #fomo. This leads to them responding to you. Here's a great story of how a self-taught programmer went from not getting interviews to getting offers from Google & AirbnB by using social proof cleverly to induce #fomo.

You don't even need the offer in hand to make this tactic work! Just having an on-site interview scheduled with a top company helps other companies realize you've got something worthwhile and that there is a specific timeline to adhere to.

One warning: be careful not to make it seem like the company you are talking to is the backup option. To do this, make sure you convey enthusiasm for the company / mission.

Example:
"Hey X,

I'm passionate about ML and how it can improve the world. Last semester, I made a project which used Computer Vision to find and categorize skin diseases.

I have an upcoming onsite-interview with Microsoft's Azure ML team next month, but wanted to also interview with Uber because self-driving cars is where I think Computer Vision will help improve the world the most in the next decade. I've also enjoyed the Uber ATG teams' technical blogs on 3d-point clouds and rigor with which ya'll approach the self-driving car space.

Would love to start the interview process for a Computer Vision internship - I've attached my resume. Thanks"

Relate Personally To The Recruiter Or Company

If you have a connection with the recruiter or company, mention that! Search LinkedIn to see if you have any commonalities like education or cities you've both lived in.

Even better, when cold reaching out, used LinkedIn People Search filters to find alumni from your university who already work at that company.

If you don't have many college alumni at the company you are targeting, and you interned at a large company like Microsoft, it's easy to find alumni of a company as well on LinkedIn.

Have A Specific Ask

Be upfront with what you want.

A vague email hoping to 'setup a time to chat' or 'learn more about the interview process' is too meek and indirect.

The recruiter knows between your friends, Google search, Quora, and Glassdoor, you can find any information you need about a company and it's interview process.

The recruiter knows you are angling for a job or internship but are too shy to ask directly.

So be bold, and always include a specific ask:

"I'd like to interview for a Software Engineering Internship for Summer 2019".

"I'd like to start the interview process for the New Grad Back End Software Engineering Position at Company X".

Have A Strong Subject Line

The email content will only be read if the email is clicked into. Without a strong subject line, the email content is wasted. If you have top tier experience or education, it's key to include it.

What I used: Former Google & Microsoft Intern Interested In FT @ X

If I found a recruiter from my alma mater (UVA), I'd be sure to include that in the subject line to make it even more click-worthy.

This subject line works because:

I lead immediately with my background which is click-worthy since Google and Microsoft are well known companies
I have my specific ask (for full time software jobs) included in the subject line

Other subject lines that are short and to the point if you can't rely on internship experience at big tech companies.

"CMU Engineer Interested in Data Science @ Asana"
"Self-Driving Car PhD Student Interested In Uber ATG"
"IoT Hackathon Winner Interested In Nest Labs"

Including the name of the recruiter should also increase click-through rate.

Example:
"Dan | IoT Hackathon Winner Interested In Nest Labs"

Chapter 3
Cold Email Mechanics

Follow Up 3 Times

You should follow up at least three times. A really good email sent only once may not work. Some of the cold emails that turned into interviews only got responses after the third email! And don't worry about feeling too pushy - It's standard in sales to reach out at 3+ times.

Send the first follow up after 3-4 days, and send the second follow up again 4-5 days later. Don't think putting in a 2 week delay will make you come across as more polite.

A free gmail plugin like Boomerang, which will flag when an email hasn't been responded to in some time, can help keep yourself accountable.

If you want to opt for something more powerfu to manage the followupsl, we use Interseller.io at work. It's a $100 a month, but super effective and creating drip email sequences and automatically sending emails with delays until you get a response.

If after 3-4 emails, you don't get a response, reach out to another recruiter at the same company. It's okay to reach out to multiple people at a company that you want to work for. Trust me, it's not a weird thing to do. This is called being 'multi-threaded' in sales lingo.

Send The Email At The Right Time

We've all been guilty of getting an email, reading it, and waiting till later to respond to it. And then 'later' never comes. That's why Principle #6 - following up 3 times - works. But sending an email out at the right time can save yourself from having to bump up emails.

If you send it at a time you think the reader is most likely to be free and in the mood to respond, that maximizes your reply rate. That means no weekend emails. No emails on holidays or days people typically might take a long weekend.

Figure out the time zone for the recruiter, and be sure to not send it after business hours.

I had the best luck emailing Silicon Valley recruiters at ~ 11:00 A.M. or 2 P.M. P.S.T. The psychology behind this is we've all felt ourselves counting down the minutes to lunch, aimlessly refreshing your email and slack to pass the time. That's a great time to catch someone. Same with the after-lunch lull.

The best days I found to send emails was Tuesday through Thursday. I avoided Mondays since that's the day many people have 1:1's or team meetings, or have work they are catching up with from the weekend. On Friday's, many people might be on PTO or even if they are in office, have some other kind of event like happy hour in the afternoon or have simply mentally checked out.

You can program in a schedule when you use a tool like Interseller.io.

Chapter 4

Putting It All Together

Putting it all together, here is an email sequence that worked well for me which I sent to many recruiters when I was recruiting for Software Engineering Jobs.

An Example Sequence:

Intro Email:

Subject Line: Ex-Google & Microsoft Intern Interested in Working FT at Periscope Data
Body:
Hi X,

Found your email on Hacker news. I'm a former Software Engineering intern @ Google's Nest Labs and Microsoft who will be graduating from college May'17.

I'm interested in working full time at Periscope Data because of my interest in data engineering (spent the summer on the Data Infrastructure team @ Nest) and my interest in turning data into insights (built dashboards to do just that the past two summers). How can I start the interview process?

Best,

Nipun Singh

My First Follow Up:

Hey X,

Just wanted to follow up with you about full time roles at Periscope data. I believe my interest in data engineering, along with past experience building dashboards and visualization tools, makes me a good fit.

My Second Follow Up:

Hi X,

Wanted to circle back on this. What do next steps look like?

The Hail Mary:

I send this when I have onsite interviews near the target company planned, or when I have offer deadlines approaching.

This email is often sent weeks after the initial outreach. It works because it adds an element of urgency to the recruiter, and it gives social proof that other companies have vetted me enough to bring me onsite.

Hi X,

Just wanted to follow up with you regarding opportunities with Periscope Data. I will be in the bay area doing interviews with Facebook and Uber next week. Would love a chance to do a phone interview with Periscope Data this week to assess technical fit. If we are a good match, I'd be happy to swing by the office the following week for technical interviews while I am already in town.

Thanks,

Nipun Singh

BONUS CONTENT

Bonus: Other Cold Emails I've Sent

Subject: Former Google Intern from UVA Interested in Airbnb

Hello Z,

We met briefly at the UVA in SF mixer this past summer. I just wanted to reach out to you about new grad Software Engineering positions @ CompanyX.

My college classmate, Y, interned at CompanyX on the Data Infrastructure team and really loved her experience. This past summer, I was on the Data Infrastructure team at Google's Nest Labs. From talking to Y, I think I can be a good fit for similar teams at CompanyX. Let me know what next steps are.

Thanks,
Nipun Singh

Subject: Ex-Microsoft Intern & Startup Founder Interested In Reddit

Hello X,

I saw your post on Hacker News and wanted to reach out regarding why I'm a good fit to be a Software Engineering Intern at Reddit for Summer 2016. I interned at Microsoft this past summer on the Payments Team where I helped the team turn data into insight to diagnose payment issues faster.

In my free time (when I'm not on Reddit) I built RapStock.io which grew to 2000 users. 1400 out of the 2000 users came from Reddit when we went viral so I have a soft spot for the community and product.

Let me know what next steps I should take.

Thanks,
Nipun Singh

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