



Creating Subject Lines for E-mails: Best Practices for Researchers

Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are developing increasingly sophisticated spam filters to block the sending of junk mail. The spam filters, however, often block more than just junk mail, but also block legitimate e-mails that are not considered commercial advertisements or unsolicited bulk e-mails. Spam filters may utilize the following techniques to mark e-mails as junk mail:

- If the subject header of an e-mail is in CAPITAL LETTERS
- Using punctuation in subject lines
- Using various “trigger” words and phrases such as: “\$\$\$”; “earn \$”; “earn extra cash”; “free”; “free gift”; “make \$”; “apply online”; “call now”; “get paid”; “opportunity”; “help”; “survey”; “sign-up”; “urgent”; “important”; “please read”; “dear”
- Using font colors of bright green, red or white
- Using HTML code from Microsoft Word
- Using just one image in the body of a message
- Font Size
- Placing telephone numbers in subject lines
- The use of pronouns in the subject line; i.e. “you” and “I”
- Blank subject lines
- Adding e-mail attachments
- Personalization of subject lines
- Urgent calls to attention and action

Developing Subject Lines

When sending e-mail, survey and opinion researchers should use subject lines. The subject line, however, gives an expectation for the e-mail. Therefore, subject lines must be definitive in their scope and purpose and be brief and descriptive. Subject lines should be less than 50 characters and should indicate who you are as the sender. Survey and opinion researchers should also consider drafting a subject line that does not appear commercial in nature in order to avoid the appearance of a commercial or unsolicited advertisement.

Examples of Subject Lines

Survey researchers should consider some of the following subject lines as a starting point:

- Research Study Participation on X
- Research Study with Company X
- Request for Participation in Research Study
- Company X Request for Research Study Participation

More Information

For more information on research e-mails, review [“Email and Spam: Best Practices for Survey and Opinion Researchers.”](#) For additional information on other laws and issues impacting research, please review [MRA’s Recommended Best Practices for Survey and Opinion Research](#), contact MRA, and consider becoming a [member](#) to get free access to the [MRA Compliance Guide](#).