



ASLAN®

## How to Write Irresistible Sales Emails & Get More Meetings

By TOM STANFILL





The amount of information we receive daily is staggering. We now consume the equivalent of 174 newspapers a day, over four times more than in the late '80s. Marketing experts will tell you we receive anywhere from 3,000 to 10,000 messages or ads each day.

And not only are we barraged with massive amounts of information, there are more choices as well. Research suggests we are now making 35,000 decisions per day.

People are overwhelmed and paralyzed, driving response rates to a dismal 2%. What's the secret to breaking through the noise?

What if I could promise you that of the almost 500 emails received every week by your customers and prospects, yours would always get noticed? It's possible.

I can't promise a response, but I can promise your message, if received, will get opened and read. How can I make such a bold claim? The answer lies in a quick lesson in neuroscience.



## How Your RAS Keeps You From Reading Boring Emails

Located at the base of your spinal cord is a complex collection of neurons that serve as a point of convergence for signals from the outside world. This is the Reticular Activating System (RAS). The RAS is the automatic mechanism that brings relevant information to your attention. It acts as a filter between your conscious and subconscious mind, dampening down the effect of repeated stimuli such as loud noises, and preventing the senses from being overloaded.

Today, more than ever, our RAS is working overtime.

Without consulting your conscious mind, your brain has to quickly shift through the 10,000 messages/ads. How does this triage occur? The RAS recognizes, stores and catalogs all the information our brain is receiving. This allows you to go about your day until the RAS is triggered and signals you,

“Hey, you need to pay attention here.”



Think about the last time you were in the market for a car. On the way to work what did you notice? You noticed every car that fit the type you were considering. You didn't have a pep talk with your brain saying,

“Hey listen, as we're driving to work, look for German SUVs. I know you normally think about sports or our next meal, but today, stay focused on German SUVs.”

No, you just hopped in your car, started driving and zoned out. But once you made the decision that you were in the market for a new car, every car that met your criteria caught your attention. Previously, those cars went unnoticed but suddenly it's like every fifth person is driving the car you want.

This same effect holds true with emails, voicemails, or uninvited phone calls. Very few messages convince the RAS to smack you on the shoulder and say,

“Hey, you need to pay attention to this.”

This begs the question:

## What messages get through?

The RAS has two simple requirements. Early in our lives, the frontal cortex, where decisions are made, had a meeting with the RAS and gave it clear instructions:

“Listen, it’s getting pretty crowded up here, and I need some help. There are only two things I want you to bring to my attention:

1. Anything I need or
2. Anything I don’t understand or out of the ordinary. If you’re not sure what it is, let me know and I’ll check it out. After all, what we don’t know could kill us.”

That may not be the way they teach it at Harvard Medical School, but you get the idea.

The first, and most important criteria, highlights an important fact for sellers. Getting someone’s attention, is not about changing beliefs or creating a need, that comes later. *Getting a response is about alignment to an existing need.* More on that later.

The second filtering criteria is about being unpredictable, disrupting the rhythm, or creating a gap in understanding.



## Keep Your Seatbacks and Tray Tables in the Upright and Locked Position

Think about the last time you flew. Did you pay attention to the scripted pre-flight announcement about seat belts, etc.? For those of us that fly, we tune it out. We've heard it before. We subconsciously think, "Nothing new here." Back to our email, text message, the paper, or whatever is currently capturing our attention. Unless you have a creative flight attendant.

On a recent flight, I was awakened from a trance to hear a flight attendant say: "Most people tune out during the safety bit. I don't want to be that guy, but I just hope you'll be okay. That's all I am saying."

Why did I suddenly tune into an announcement I had ignored for years? Because it was unexpected. He broke the pattern of the common announcement. This example underscores the importance of the second filtering criteria.

### What's different gets noticed.

Predictability determines impact. Everyone is sending emails about their stuff. Blah, blah, blah. To get noticed, you must break away from the norm.

Think for a moment about what your customer or prospect is expecting:

A canned, generic message about your company and your solution.

You don't know anything about them.

You have no expertise to offer.  
You lack unexpected insight on how to address their unique problem or need.

You will bend the truth to get a meeting.

You want to get noticed? You want to engage the 90+ percent who aren't receptive to a sales call? Pay attention to the RAS. Don't communicate like a typical sales rep. Change your message.

Understanding how the RAS functions sheds light on how to create: the subject line, the introductory sentence, your purpose for reaching out, and the call to action. Let's tackle them in that order.



## Improve Your Email Subject Lines

Many make the fatal flaw of minimizing the importance of the subject line. On a mobile device, it's about half of the initial message read by the recipient. It will be the first thing filtered by the RAS and determines if the email is opened.

Here are a few typical subject lines from emails I received in the last few months. I use personal examples because I can only speak for what activated my RAS. Do you see any commonalities?

*Introduction to XYZ Company*

*A better business communication solution*

*Our High-Speed Internet is Faster & More Reliable*

*Cutting Cost Not Customers*

*Professional Persistence*

What's your assessment? Would you read the email? Do any pique your interest?

I deleted them all. (I dug them out of my deleted folder for this article).

These could not compete with the other 500+ email messages I received that week. Why? My RAS immediately filtered them out as generic marketing messages, pitches from unknown people who want to sell me something. Bottom line, zero were about me and none met the RAS criteria.



**Here are a few actual subject lines that worked.** Notice how the successful subject lines are less formal and create a mystery that gets the RAS' attention.

#### **FW: White Flag?**

I ignored the first few attempts, but my RAS didn't know what to do with "White Flag." The subject line didn't fit the norm. Also, the FW alerted the RAS that this may be from someone you know. I'm not suggesting you manipulate the customer, just that it was noticed by the RAS and the message got through. In this case, the message had been legitimately forwarded.

#### **Here's What Andy Stanley Does**

Andy is one of the top five leaders in his industry and someone I hold in high esteem. I quickly recognized the name and decided that anything Andy does, I should probably do.

#### **500 Rockets and a Tree**

I just had to read that email.

#### **Quick Question about Training Adoption**

My number one challenge in effectively delivering our solution and ultimately client satisfaction is training adoption. It's one of our top two initiatives at ASLAN. Bingo.

The subject line that not only addressed my whiteboard but appeared to be coming from someone I know (less formal), without being manipulative or salesy.

#### **Not Everyone Is Getting This Email**

This one was from Delta Airlines. Delta has millions of customers, but apparently not everyone got this email. It wasn't the typical canned marketing hype usually received from a large company. This email promised something special for me.

#### **This One Number Proves the Value of a Blog**

This got my attention because I've struggled to answer the question: Is the effort I put into blogging worth my time? It's a perceived problem. Plus, I'm curious. What's the one thing? My RAS has to know.

## How to Craft a Compelling Email Subject Line

When crafting your subject line, it's helpful to remember the goal. It's not about getting a meeting or generating a lead. It's about getting noticed. Until the email is read, nothing happens. The goal is to be one of the very few raindrops recognized out of the thousands hitting the windshield—to grab their attention without resorting to manipulative tactics that could sabotage your ultimate goal.

Here are a few more effective examples and templates to work from:

*[First Name], quick question for you.*

*[Mutual connection] recommended I get in touch.*

*Ideas for [thing that's important to them].*

*Question about [a goal they have, recent event, key initiative].*

*Have you considered [thought/recommendation]?*

As you develop your subject line, filter it through the following criteria to ensure it gets noticed:

Does it read like it wasn't sent from someone they know? (Or does it appear as if the email was generated by a marketing machine?)

Is the focus of the subject line about your solution or their whiteboard?

Is it unpredictable? Is the RAS unsure how to file the email?

It's not always possible to pull off all three, but the closer you can get to positively answering the questions above, the higher the response rates. Now let's move to the main body of the email.



# Check out the Body on That Email

To unpack the body of the email, let's work from an example of an email sent by a rep selling voice and data services to an engineering firm with remote employees.

**To** *info@company.com*

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**Subject** *Referred by Susan \_\_\_\_\_*

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*Jane,*

*I am currently working with Abbott Engineering Services and Susan recommended I reach out to see if you have same challenges other engineering firms are experiencing in supporting remote consultants (e.g. your 25 engineers spread throughout southeast):*

- Wasting time accessing large files on a remote network*
- While at the client site, missing calls from your most strategic customers*
- Hassle dealing with multiple numbers, poor voice quality, and loss of productivity in being disconnected from the main office staff in Atlanta*

*We just expanded our network and may be able to offer our voice and data services comparable (or possibly less) to what you are paying now. This could ensure your remote employees have the same support (and voice and data quality) as if they were located at your headquarters in Atlanta.*

*If this a priority, let's schedule a brief, 15-minute conversation to determine if it makes sense to have one of our engineers offer a free assessment of your current voice and data service.*

*In the meantime, if you would like to learn more, I've included a case study that highlights the top five problems we solve for virtual, engineering companies (most surprising is the total hours of down time) and how they impact productivity and the bottom line.*

Let's deconstruct this email and explore the four unique sections: The Connection, The Other-Centered Position, The Offer, and The Proof.

### Section One: **The Connection**

The first section of the email body answers the question: "Who are you?"

It's an obvious but important point: emails from people we know are read far more than emails from strangers.

In fact, an article published by Fast Company details the findings of 1,000 emails sent to the most difficult audience – executives. What drove the highest response rate? Familiarity. The sender knew something about the recipient, or they leveraged an existing relationship. Another important revelation, the less generic the message the higher the response rate.

Therefore, begin with a shared connection—a reference from an associate, an article you read about the prospect, or any point of connection that establishes a business relationship with the recipient.

Referencing Susan and Abbott Engineering (offices in the same office complex) moves the seller from stranger to a "friend of a friend" status.

### Section Two: **The Other-Centered® Position**

Stop for a minute and honestly assess what you do when someone shows you their pictures from a recent trip. If you're not Mother Teresa, you either feign interest or, if you were on the trip, scan the pictures to find the ones that include you. When sending an email, the same truth applies: people only care about the picture if they are in it. Therefore, start with them.

Your Other-Centered Position should be... Other-Centered. Begin the heart of your message by first describing their world and their problem.

*I thought you might have some of the same challenges other engineering firms are experiencing in supporting your 25 remote consultants in the southeast:*

- *Wasting time accessing large files on a remote network*
- *While at the client site, missing calls from your most strategic customers*
- *Hassle dealing with multiple numbers, poor voice quality, and loss of productivity in being disconnected from the main office staff in Atlanta*

The purpose for reaching out is all about Jane, *not* the seller's solution. It describes a perceived need and, because it doesn't lead with a typical sales or marketing pitch, it's unpredictable.

The second part of your Other-Centered Position should connect the dots. Describing their problem or pain doesn't require a meeting with you. You got their attention but now we need to answer the customer's question: "Why is it in my best interest to meet with you?"

Without being manipulative, the best approach is to resist the temptation to provide a detailed, thorough answer, and instead activate their RAS by creating a little mystery and the need to learn more.

*We just expanded our network and may be able to offer our voice and data services comparable (or possibly less) to what you are paying now. This could ensure your remote employees have the same support (and voice and data quality) as if they were located at your headquarters in Atlanta.*

The RAS doesn't understand how the remote employees could have the same level of support and quality while operating in the field.

Another intriguing fact is how could you offer better service without paying more? This could be construed as a sales tactic, except for the inclusion of two words: "may be". By communicating you are unsure, you maintain trust.

Distill it down to a simple, plausible benefit that the reader wasn't expecting and requires a live conversation to learn more. The goal is to demonstrate the benefit of meeting and not all the features and benefits of your solution.

As James Carville said to Bill Clinton when running for office, "If you say three things, you say nothing."

### Section Three: **The Offer**

Once you've successfully answered the question: "Why meet?" It's time to answer the next question: "What's next?"

Here it's critically important to not only focus on *what* you offer, but *how* you offer it.

By using the word "If," you separate yourself from pushy, "commission breath" sellers. All assumptions are arrogant and by assuming, at this stage, you know what they should do... well, you come off as arrogant. By communicating you are unaware of their list of priorities and focused on determining what's best for them, it's unpredictable and removes the tension that always exists in the seller/buyer relationship.

Additionally, the offer to only meet for 15 minutes and introducing the possibility of a free assessment by an engineer, reduces the risk to engage and delivers an immediate, cost free benefit for the buyer. Think baby steps.

Effective offers remove as many barriers as possible while simultaneously providing the most value to the customer.

## Section Four: **The Proof**

Some interested prospects will require more information before accepting your offer. Therefore, end by offering some additional proof to validate your solution.

*In the meantime, if you would like to learn more, here are a few highlights you might find interesting about our solution:*

All that's needed is a concise, bulleted list of information (100 to 200 words) that contrast you from the competition or the status quo. Information about the potential results and not details about the how, have the most impact.

The goal is to enhance credibility and help the reader to see that it's in their best interest, not to invest, but just to learn more.

If you have some compelling information to share that can't be included in a short list of bullets, attach it. Just be sure the information is helpful to building *their* bridge and reaching *their* desired destination, as opposed to an infomercial on your company or solution.

Articles, white papers, and case studies are a few examples of how you can provide valuable information that subtly, but powerfully, demonstrates the impact of your solution while addressing the challenges the decision-maker faces in reaching their desired destination.



## The RAS Checklist

Let me summarize by offering a simple checklist. The gravitational pull to develop a self-centered message is strong. Before pushing send, dialing the phone or walking in the door, critique your message by sifting it through the questions below.

- ☐ Did you lead with what is on their whiteboard? Are the first few sentences about their plan/bridge to reach their destination?
- ☐ Is the email unique to the decision-maker? Will they instantly know that it's not part of a mass email campaign or a call from a contact center in India?
- ☐ Is it unpredictable? Is there something unexpected or counter-intuitive in the message that catches the reader's/listener's attention?
- ☐ Is there anything about the email that can be construed as manipulative?
- ☐ If targeted at an executive, is it clear why they should meet with you versus delegating you to someone lower in the organization who is responsible for working with vendors?
- ☐ Is your email less than 175 words and is your introduction less than 100 words?



If you answer these questions correctly, will you always engage every cold prospect? You know the answer to that, but based on our twenty years of research, we have seen the engagement rates increase by as much as 800% in the toughest selling environments. It's definitely a different way to prospect.

Leading with the decision maker's whiteboard and dropping the rope may go against every selling instinct you have, but consider this: if you do what no other sellers are doing, you might see prospecting results no other sellers are seeing.

If this topic is interesting to you and you want more, [please visit our website](https://www.aslantraining.com). We have recently launched an online version of our Other-Centered® Selling course which has helped more than 100,000 reps over the last two decades. Get started today!

