

The Email Prospecting Playbook: How to Quickly and Predictably Reawaken Dead Leads, Generate New Client Opportunities and Convert Not-Yet-Ready Prospects Into Clients

Reframing the Issue

The more generic, polished and non-personalized emails your prospects get, the more your prospecting emails will stand out.

As a freelance professional, you have the ability to handcraft personalized and relevant emails that get noticed, get opened and get a positive response.

Follow this simple strategy I'm about to teach you. Be diligent and be patient. I think you'll be surprised by your results.

The System at a Glance

This email prospecting playbook has three key steps:

1. Activate dead leads and dormant clients
2. Generate new leads
3. Nurture not-yet-ready leads

You want to follow these steps in order.

Reaching out to dead leads and dormant clients will potentially uncover some immediate project opportunities.

These projects could bring in some much-needed income quickly, which will then buy you some time to prospect for new leads.

And as some of these new leads turn out to be not-yet-ready leads (interested but not yet ready to hire you), you'll have a system in place for staying in touch with them until they *are* ready.

For our purposes, here's how I define each of these prospect categories:

- **Dead leads:** Prospects who indicated interest in your services at some point but never turned into clients. Also, you stopped following up long ago. So they'd probably *not* remember your name if you were to contact them today.
- **Dormant clients:** These are clients you worked with in the past that are currently inactive. (It's been a while since you worked with them.)
- **New leads:** Prospects that have recently expressed an interest in your services. Could be an inbound lead or a lead you generated through outreach efforts.
- **Not-yet-ready leads:** Prospects that have expressed interest in your services but that weren't ready to hire you at the time.

NOTE: I use the terms "lead" and "prospect" interchangeably.

STEP ONE: Activate Dead Leads and Dormant Clients

This group is most likely to yield quick wins. So you want to start here. It will help you clear the decks of any potential immediate opportunities.

They may not be dream projects. They may not pay you record fees. But they could generate cash quickly, boost your self-confidence and buy you some time to find even better opportunities.

Plus, these are the easiest emails to write. They're incredibly short and simple.

The Nine-Word Email

The nine-word email is designed to mimic the kind of conversation you would have with a friend or acquaintance if you ran into them at, say, the grocery store.

What would you ask?

- *Are you still thinking about going to wine country this summer?*
- *Hey, Mr. Smith! Great to run into you here. Do you still want those sweaters?*

The “bones” of a nine-word email:

1. You had a conversation with someone.
2. You discussed X.
3. You ran into them later.
4. You asked them about X.

SUBJECT: White papers

Hi Joan,

Are you still thinking about hiring an outside white paper writer this year?

Ed

Why does this email work so well? SPEAR!

- **Short,**
- **Personal,**
- **Expecting**
- **A reply**

Imagine you ran into Joan at the store. Here’s how the conversation might go:

You: “Hey! Joan, right?”

Joan: “Yes, hi! What a surprise to run into you here, Ed. How are you?”

You: “Great! Business is good. Just wrapped up a great year. How about you?”

Joan: “Oh, crazy as always. Never enough hours in the day! You know how it is.”

You: “I hear ya! Hey, that reminds me: Are you still thinking about hiring an outside white paper writer this year?”

Doesn't that sound like a very normal and natural conversation? Wouldn't this "flow" feel natural?

Other key points to note:

- There's no fluff and no wasted words.
- I'm also not "warming up" the prospect with small talk, which is what everyone does! ("Hope you're having a great summer so far...")
- I'm not dancing around the issue or using meaningless follow-up ("...I'd be happy to discuss your needs...") or "let me know" language ("...Let me know if there's anything I can do to help you with any writing projects...").
- I don't need this email to do all the work. I'm not trying to land work. I'm simply trying to restart the conversation. The selling happens later, but I need to rekindle the dialogue first!
- Finally, note that the subject line is very direct. That's the opposite of what we'd normally use in a marketing broadcast, where we're trying to arouse curiosity with the subject line.

Now that you've seen a sample nine-word email, let's go over the different flavors you can employ and when each works best.

Flavor #1: "Are You Still?"

This flavor of nine-word email touches on something you've discussed before:

- Are you still thinking about working with an outside writer?
- Are you still considering getting some writing help?
- Are you still interested in launching a newsletter this year?
- Are you still interested in working together on any of the following?
- Are you still interested in scheduling a call to discuss Q1 projects?

It works well when you have some information from a previous exchange and you're using that as the purpose of your follow-up.

You can add context to the email by including your previous email thread below your new message. Or you can add a short P.S.:

SUBJECT: Your newsletter

Hi Maria,

Are you still interested in launching a newsletter this year?

Ed Gandia

P.S. I'm the writer Brenda Stevens referred to you last October.

Flavor #2: "Are You?"

This flavor of nine-word email is useful when you're not entirely sure what (if any) needs your client or prospect has.

Unlike "Are you still?" emails (flavor #1), which point to something specific the prospect or client had identified or mentioned at some point, "Are you?" emails make an educated guess about a current or upcoming need as a way to start the conversation:

- Are you planning on publishing some white papers this year?
- Are you thinking about launching a newsletter this year?
- Are you thinking about getting outside writing help in the next few months?
- Do you still have a potential need for a content marketing writer?

For example:

SUBJECT: Marketing collateral

Hi Christine,

Are you planning on publishing new marketing collateral this year?

Ed Gandia

This flavor can work well with all four groups. But it's especially effective with **dormant clients and dead leads** you haven't contacted in a while (and therefore don't have much to go on).

Here again, you can append your nine-word email to a past email thread. Or you can add a short P.S. at the end.

Another option: Use a simple email signature that includes a title, a description of what you do, or even your target market or specialty.

For example:

Ed Gandia
Copywriter for Enterprise Software Companies

June Evans
Healthcare Writer

Scott Marshall
White Paper Writer

Flavor #3: "Would You?"

This flavor is ideal when you're not sure what the prospect or client might need. However, based on what you know about the prospect, you offer a service they might be interested in exploring.

This flavor can work with all four groups, but it's typically most effective with people you've been in touch with or who would recognize your name: **current clients, dormant clients, NYR leads.**

Here are a few examples:

- Would you be interested in working with me on your new marketing collateral?
- Would you like to get your newsletter launched by the end of the quarter?
- Would you like some help planning your next white paper?
- Would you like me to help you write another product backgrounder?

This flavor works well when you're proposing an idea, something you suspect would help the client. Or when you believe that a current or dormant client could benefit from the idea ... but they've been too busy with other things to think about it.

Sample script:

SUBJECT: Your marketing collateral

Hi, Mike,

Would you be interested in working with me on your new marketing collateral?

Ed

And again, the nine-word email is a concept, not a strict word-count rule. So you could add some context or credibility like this:

SUBJECT: White papers

Hi Joe,

I've been working with a number of SaaS clients to help them write persuasive white papers.

Would you be interested in discussing some white paper ideas?

Ed

Flavor #4: "Have You?"

This is yet another consultative nine-word email type. It proposes an idea that would be relevant and beneficial to the client or prospect:

- Have you considered writing some customer success stories to highlight how [your client's product or service] generates results?
- Have you thought about repurposing some of your webinars into white papers or e-books?
- Have you considered publishing a short newsletter to stay top of mind with longer-term prospects?

Here again, it typically works in situations **where the recipient would recognize your name**. But if you can discern a possible need based on some basic research, it could be just as effective with a **dead lead**.

Here's what a typical script would look like:

SUBJECT: Content repurposing idea

Hi Jamie,

Have you thought about repurposing some of your webinars into white papers or e-books?

Ed

Here's another variation of that idea:

SUBJECT: Content repurposing idea

Hi Jamie,

I've been working with a number of SaaS clients to repurpose some of their marketing content.

Have you thought about repurposing some of your webinars into white papers or e-books?

Ed

Flavor #5: "Do You?"

This final flavor represents a very strategic way to throw spaghetti at the wall. It's most effective with **dead leads, dormant clients and maybe even NYR leads**—groups on which you may not have enough information to use a different flavor.

It flat-out asks if they do a certain thing, have a particular challenge, have a specific need or have something coming up you might be able to help them with:

- Do you publish white papers?
- Do you ever work with outside writers?

- Do you produce marketing materials for your reseller partners?
- Do you need some help writing marketing materials?

In some cases, however, it can even work well with dormant clients—especially when you’re addressing something you’re not sure about.

Or when you’re checking in to see if something they mentioned a few months ago is still a possibility.

Or even when you’ve started offering a new service and you want to see if some of your old clients would be interested in learning more about it.

Script example:

SUBJECT: Writing help

Hi Brandon,

Do you need some help writing marketing materials?

Ed

Here again, in cases where the recipient may not recognize you—and when you don’t have an old email thread you can use—you could add a quick P.S. to jog their memory:

SUBJECT: Writing help

Hi Brandon,

Do you need some help writing marketing materials?

Ed Gandia

P.S. We met at the ABIC meeting last September.

On the next page is another example that landed Karen Hittelman (from this group) a project within one hour of sending the email:

SUBJECT: Projects

Hi Robert,

I'm mapping out my schedule for the coming months.

Any projects I should have on my radar?

Kate

The possibilities with these nine-word emails are endless.

Don't let their simplicity fool you. These emails are very powerful. But they require some thought before sending.

- Take the time to think through each prospect and client carefully before drafting your script.
- Think through all the different flavors and your history with the individual.
- And come up with a message that sounds natural and begs for a reply.

As you do this, remember the SPEAR criteria:

- **S**hort,
- **P**ersonal,
- **E**xpecting
- **A** reply

A Word on Subject Lines

In a nine-word email, your subject line needs to be bland and direct, which is the opposite of what we often use in marketing broadcasts, where we're trying to arouse curiosity.

Use the "friend test." What kind of subject line would you use if you were emailing a friend? Maybe something like:

Dinner on Sunday

Lunch

Dog shelter

Getting together

Cindy's birthday

Beach trip

Guacamole recipe

You'd probably not use a "curiosity" subject line such as "What in the world??" when your email was asking him if he could support your daughter by buying some Girl Scout cookies.

In that situation you'd probably use "Cookies" as your subject line.

It's the same with a nine-word email. Note some of the subject lines from the earlier examples:

White papers

Your newsletter

Your marketing collateral

Writing help

STEP TWO: Generate New Leads

When the prospect is completely cold (they have no idea who you are), it's best to take a different approach. That's where warm emails come in.

Warm email prospecting is the opposite of cold calling. And it's very different from your standard, generic email prospecting.

Unlike most marketing emails, warm emails employ three key psychological triggers:

1. Personalization. The email was written specifically for the prospect.
2. Relevance. The email is directly relevant to the prospect's work.

3. Brevity. The email is short and to the point. Specifically, 125 words or less.

When these three triggers are in place, your warm email will stand out from 99 percent of all marketing emails in your prospect's inbox.

Why? ***Because it shows that you've done your homework!*** And that alone gives you a much higher chance of getting a response.

Just like with a nine-word email, the goal of warm email is simply to start a conversation, not to land a project.

But unlike a nine-word email, a warm email is a little longer. That's because the prospect doesn't know you. So you need to offer a little more to show why he or she should respond.

The Warm Email Template

Over the years, I've identified four key structural components to a warm email and put them into a template, as follows:

SUBJECT LINE: [Meaningful Connection]

EMAIL BODY:

[Meaningful Connection]

[Value Statement]

[Credibility URL]

[Soft Invitation to Connect]

Definitions:

- + **Meaningful Connection:** A statement that ties what you do to something you noticed about that particular prospect. It does *not* need to be a person or event. It can be something you noticed on the prospect's website. Or a company attribute that would make the prospect need someone with your skill set. (More about this in a minute.)

- + **Value Statement:** A sentence or two that explains what you do, for whom you do it and why you're different from many competitors. It can also explain why that difference matters.
- + **Credibility URL:** A link to your "About Me" page, some relevant samples, testimonials, a success story about how you helped a client solve a challenge, or anything that would help you sound credible. It doesn't have to be a link, however. It can be a list of recent clients. Or a description of an award you've received. Or a big accomplishment, number of years of experience or information about your unique background.
- + **Soft Invitation to Connect:** No need to be wordy or elaborate. Keep it low-key. And consider using a question. You could ask, "Should we connect?" or maybe, "Would it make sense to schedule a brief call soon?"

Again, it's important to keep your email short and to the point: **125 words or less!** Remember: *Brevity* is one of the key psychological triggers!

Meaningful Connections

There are four basic types you can use in your email. But I strongly recommend you focus on the two most common types. They're also the easiest to use:

- A. Point to a "trigger attribute"
- B. Or name a relevant client, accomplishment, knowledge or experience

Trigger attributes: These are attributes about a prospect that could *trigger* a need for your services. They're based on something the prospect has been doing for a while (a trend) *or* something that is just part of who the prospect is or what he or she (or the organization) stands for.

Here are some examples:

- "Hey, Mr. Prospect: I noticed that you have quite a few _____ posted on your website."
- "Hey, Ms. Prospect: I noticed that you're starting to really go after the _____ market."
- "Hey, Mr. Prospect: I noticed that you do a lot of work in this area..."

- “Hey, Ms. Prospect: I know that marketing and selling _____ (type of product) often requires a lot of _____.”
- “Hey, Mr. Prospect: I was reading through your product lines and noticed _____. Have you considered doing _____ with that content?”

For example:

SUBJECT LINE: Been watching your Big Data webinar series

Hi Max,

I've been watching your recent Big Data webinar series. I couldn't agree more about the importance of moving this discussion to the boardroom.

I'm writing because I'm a technology veteran who works with enterprise software companies to repurpose business white papers into webinar content, video scripts, road shows and other compelling content formats. I've worked with ABC Data, XYZ Tech and others on similar projects.

Here are some samples of my work: [URL].

I'd love to chat briefly and run some ideas by you. If this sounds interesting, let me know when would be a good day and time to discuss.

Here's another example:

Hi Tina,

I keep seeing your name everywhere (I do a lot of writing work in the waterworks and wastewater treatment industry). I'm very impressed with what I've read about your new line of Xtronix wastewater treatment monitors. Definitely a game changer!

I was curious: Do you ever work with outside writers for any of your marketing materials? And if you do, I'd love to know what it would take to be considered for a future project.

I specialize in helping companies in the water treatment industry write marketing content and sales copy. You can learn more about my experience here:

[URL]

Would it make sense to connect?

Naming a relevant client, accomplishment, or relevant knowledge or experience: This is all about pointing out something *relevant* about your background, experience or skill set that would be attractive to the prospect—and then briefly explaining how it could be relevant and valuable to her.

Examples:

- I was a high school teacher for 22 years.
- I was an analyst for Forrester Research for seven years.
- I was in hotel management for 12 years.
- I've worked in and around the renewable energy industry for eight years.
- As a journalist, I've been writing about renewable energy for the past four years.
- I'm a Salesforce.com certified developer, so I understand _____.
- I've written for XYZ Co. and ABC, Inc.
- My family has been in the auto parts industry for over 60 years.
- I'm a passionate gardener and homesteader.
- We homeschooled our three children through middle school.

Here's an example:

SUBJECT: Love what you're doing with Sparx

Hi Belinda,

I've been following the growth of your Sparx online learning initiative. I'm very impressed with what you're doing here and the impact it's having on high school students.

I'm not sure how you're handling the writing of your marketing content, but I'd love to know what it would take to be considered for some of these needs.

I was a high school teacher for 22 years and now focus on writing marketing content for training and online learning companies. I use my experience as an educator and avid proponent of online learning to deliver persuasive writing that hits the mark.

You can learn more about me and my work here: [URL].

Should we connect?

Don't Overcomplicate Things!

One of the best things about this prospecting approach is its simplicity.

You don't need to do a lot of research on your prospect to make that relevant connection in your email. That's one of the most common misconceptions!

Consider this example:

SUBJECT LINE: Your recent white papers

Hi Jennifer,

I've come across your website a few times over the years because I've done work in the corporate health and wellness area. As I looked through your site this morning, I noticed that you're starting to publish a lot of white papers.

Do you have an internal resource for this? Or are you working with an outside professional?

I ask because I'm a business writer who specializes in white papers, e-books and long-format reports. Because of my experience in the wellness field, I may be able to help you get these pieces produced faster and more cost-effectively.

Here's a link to some samples of my work: [URL].

Should we connect?

Notice that just pointing to something you saw on their site that's relevant to the work you do can be enough, as long as you can tie it together in a natural and authentic way.

Also, your email doesn't need to be very long. And better yet, **you can reuse most of your email copy from one prospect to the next!**

This is yet another reason why it pays to keep your business focused. When you focus on just one or two target markets, project types, or some other type of targeting, your prospecting becomes a lot easier—and much more effective!

Step Three: Nurture Not-Yet-Ready Leads

Only 3 percent of qualified prospects are *actively* searching for someone who provides your services.

What about the other 97? According to that same research, 40 of them will *probably* have a need for your services sometime in the next few months. These are your not-yet-ready (NYR) prospects.

And the rest—a whopping 57 of them—won't be looking anytime soon!

How can you possibly market your business efficiently when only 3 percent of prospects are ready to hire you today?

The secret is to search for (and stay in touch with) that “40 percent” group—the one most freelancers ignore.

When you do this, you'll automatically find the 3 percent who are ready today. And you'll be the first person these prospects turn to when the timing is right.

This is called lead nurturing.

Whom Should You Nurture?

You should nurture *every* qualified prospect you come in contact with, *except the following*:

1. Prospects who, after some degree of follow-up, say flat out, “We have no interest or need for a writer.”
2. Prospects who are not (or don't seem) qualified—either because you looked them up and can tell they wouldn't be a good prospect, or because after a conversation or email exchange you realized that they would not be a good fit.

Does it really pay to stay in touch with NYR prospects?

- Forty-four percent of salespeople (as freelancers, we're selling our services, so we *are* salespeople!) give up after **one** follow-up. Yet 80% of sales require five follow-ups (sources: Scripted and Marketing Donut).

- Eighty percent of the prospects deemed “bad leads” by sales teams do go on to buy within 24 months (source: SiriusDecisions).
- On average, 15 to 20 percent of the “not yet ready to purchase” opportunities convert to sales [after lead nurturing] (source: Gleanster).
- Even inbound leads (inquiries) aren’t as ready to act as most of us think! Sixty-three percent of people requesting information today about you and your services will not purchase for at least three months. And 20 percent will take more than 12 months to buy (source: Marketing Donut).
- Nurtured leads make 47 percent larger purchases than non-nurtured leads (source: The Annuitas Group).
- Lead-nurturing emails get four to 10 times the response rate compared with stand-alone email blasts (source: SilverPop/DemandGen Report).

Landing a new client requires both the right **timing** and a certain level of **trust**.

The timing of hiring you needs to be right. You can’t create urgency inside the prospect’s organization. But you *can* stay in touch until they’re ready.

And to build trust you need a smart, methodical and sincere lead-nurturing effort with your NYR prospects.

How to Touch Base

What to send in your nurturing emails:

- Articles you’ve written
- Reports or white papers
- Useful and relevant tools and resources (checklists, cheat sheets, templates, process maps, step-by-step plans, shortcuts, worksheets, scorecards or other tools you’ve created, even if they’re lead magnets you’ve written to help generate new leads).
- Success stories
- Third-party content

- Books
- Videos and podcasts
- News stories or general announcements
- Handwritten cards and other creative items
- Nine-word emails

Where to find relevant information to add to your content library:

- Industry publications, newsletters and blogs.
- Pocket (www.getpocket.com).
- Crowdsourced content curation platforms such as www.inbound.org.

What should you say? Keep it very short and simple. If using email or postal mail, you could say something like this:

Hi John,

*Came across this article recently.
Thought you'd find it interesting.*

Ed

Throw in your business card, hand-address the envelope and you're good to go! Few people ever get mail like this anymore, so your piece will stand out.

When using the phone, you could leave a voicemail like this:

Hi Jill. Ed Gandia here. I'm the business-to-business copywriter you contacted back in December. I'm calling because I've recently worked with two clients to turn some of their white papers into one-sheet summaries for their sales teams.

This concept has really caught on with these two clients, and I thought it might be something you'd be interested in exploring.

If you'd like to connect, you can reach me at 770-555-1876 or ed@abcxyz.com. Take care!

Nurturing Frequency

The frequency and nature of your follow-up depend on:

- Stage of the sales cycle
- Who contacted whom
- Prospect's responsiveness and cues
- How long they've been on your nurturing list (the longer they've been on without any kind of response or acknowledgment, the lower the frequency)

Use these three factors to guide your decisions. But in general, sending something every one to three months is about right (I use eight weeks as my baseline).

Tracking Your Nurturing

A simple spreadsheet will do when starting out with your nurturing program. Add a prospect per row and use a column to track what you sent that prospect (and when).

Once this activity becomes a habit, consider implementing a contact management system. Here are some popular options:

- www.highrisehq.com
- www.contactually.com
- www.zoho.com/crm
- www.hubspot.com/products/crm

Resist the temptation to automate this process with emails or services such as "SendOutCards." Remember: The personal touch is key!

Also, don't treat lead nurturing as a desperate attempt to convert a prospect to a client. Let go of any expectations and instead focus on sending relevant and personalized messages.

Finally, think "ready, fire, aim." Eighty percent compliance (good enough) is better than not starting your nurturing initiative.

Your Action Plan

Take care of the “big rocks” first!

You have to schedule your prospecting into your week, much like you would, say, a doctor’s appointment.

Next, create a high-level game plan for yourself. As mentioned earlier, I strongly suggest that you follow this sequence:

1. Activate dead leads and dormant clients
2. Generate new leads
3. Nurture not-yet-ready leads

What to Send Whom

- Dead leads and dormant clients get **nine-word emails**.
- Cold prospects get **warm emails**.
- NYR leads get **nurturing emails and nine-word emails**.

Establish Designated Days

If you prefer to sprinkle your marketing efforts throughout the week, you might consider this schedule:

- Mondays: prospect research (1 hr.)
- Tuesdays: send warm emails (1 hr.)
- Wednesdays: send warm emails (1 hr.)
- Thursdays: nurture NYR leads (1 hr.)
- Fridays: work on newsletter, blog or other content marketing (3 hrs.)

But if you prefer to focus your marketing efforts on certain days only, leaving you with more focused stretches for client work, consider this approach:

- Mondays: prospect research + send warm emails (4 hrs.)
- Tuesdays: client work only
- Wednesdays: client work only
- Thursdays: client work only
- Fridays: nurture NYR leads + work on my content marketing (3 hrs.)

Besides giving you structure, this approach reduces the number of decisions you have to make on a daily basis.

Focus on “effort” goals (e.g., how much time you’ll dedicate to an activity each day) rather than on “outcome” goals (e.g., how many warm emails you’ll send out that day)—especially when you’re trying to build the habit.

Start TODAY!

By far the most important thing you can do to start getting results with these ideas is start TODAY!

You don’t have to start emailing today, but I implore you to do something right now, even if it’s a small and simple action.

Write down your first action now, and when you’ll commit to doing it.

The first action I will take in this playbook is: _____

I will do this on (date): _____