The State *of* Email Marketing

2024

CONTENTS

Email marketing can help you make strangers into friends and turn acquaintances of your brand into loyal customers. It's a powerful channel for delivering your brand message to people who actually want to hear it.

Gartner's research reveals that 44% of CMOs say email marketing is essential to their overall digital strategy, allocating nearly 8% of their entire digital marketing budget to the channel. Last year, in the U.S., email marketing revenue was estimated at over 10 billion dollars, with an ROI other channels can't compete with.
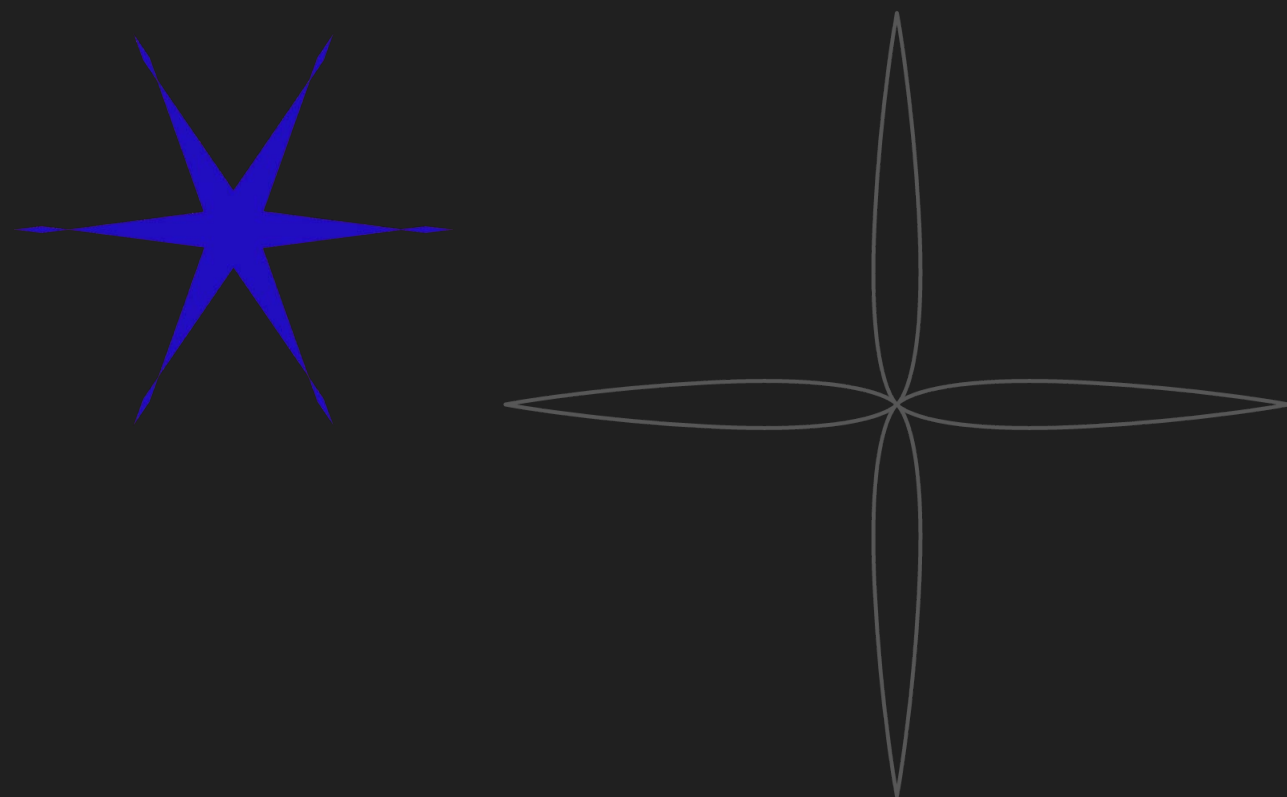
The email marketing landscape is getting increasingly competitive. Messages are flooding consumers' inboxes and it's increasingly difficult to stand out. Yet too many companies are losing on potential wins in the email marketing front.

Our report shows you how to truly succeed with email marketing.

In the first part, we share the results of our research, where we subscribed to 25 commercial newsletters in Sweden to understand the state of email marketing in 2024.

Next, we share the common pitfalls email marketers tend to fall into, as well as share the best practices in email marketing — based on our experience from sending and optimising millions of emails annually and running hundreds of marketing automation projects.

Finally, we'll showcase what the email marketing tool landscape looks like in 2024.

CONTRIBUTORS
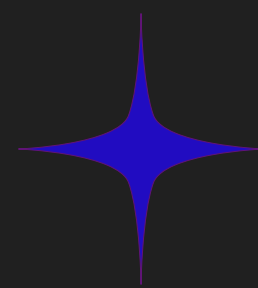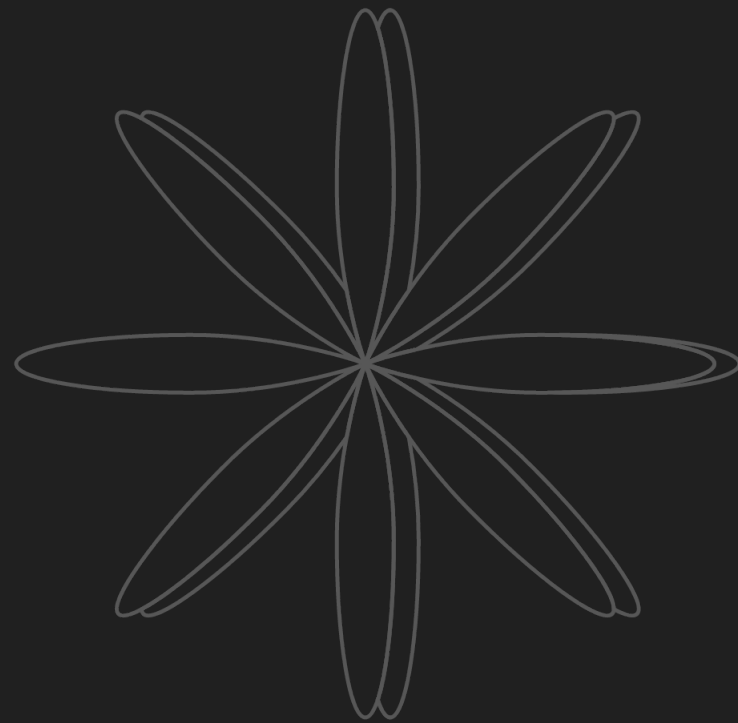
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Research:
The state of email marketing

Helmi Korhonen & Simon Fransson

INTRO & SAMPLE

We subscribed to 25 newsletters from 25 different retail brands in Sweden to understand what kinds of messages are filling consumers' inboxes and how to stand out from the crowd. By analysing four months worth of marketing emails we made some insightful findings about the state of email marketing.

25
RETAIL COMPANIES

We subscribed to a wide range of newsletters from Swedish retail companies. These included companies operating in fashion, consumer electronics, home goods and banking services.

4
MONTHS

We conducted this study from October 2023 to January 2024, as the holidays are one of the most active and interesting times for email marketing.

906
EMAILS

During the research period we received over 900 marketing emails that allowed us to identify the key trends in email marketing today.

SENDOUTS

Over 80% of brands consider email marketing a crucial element for business success (Litmus, 2023). It's no wonder consumers' inboxes are overflowing with marketing emails.

In our research, November was the most active month based on the amount of emails we received. Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and Singles' Day are some of the most important days for retailers, not to forget holiday shopping that starts already in November.

RECEIVED EMAILS PER MONTH:

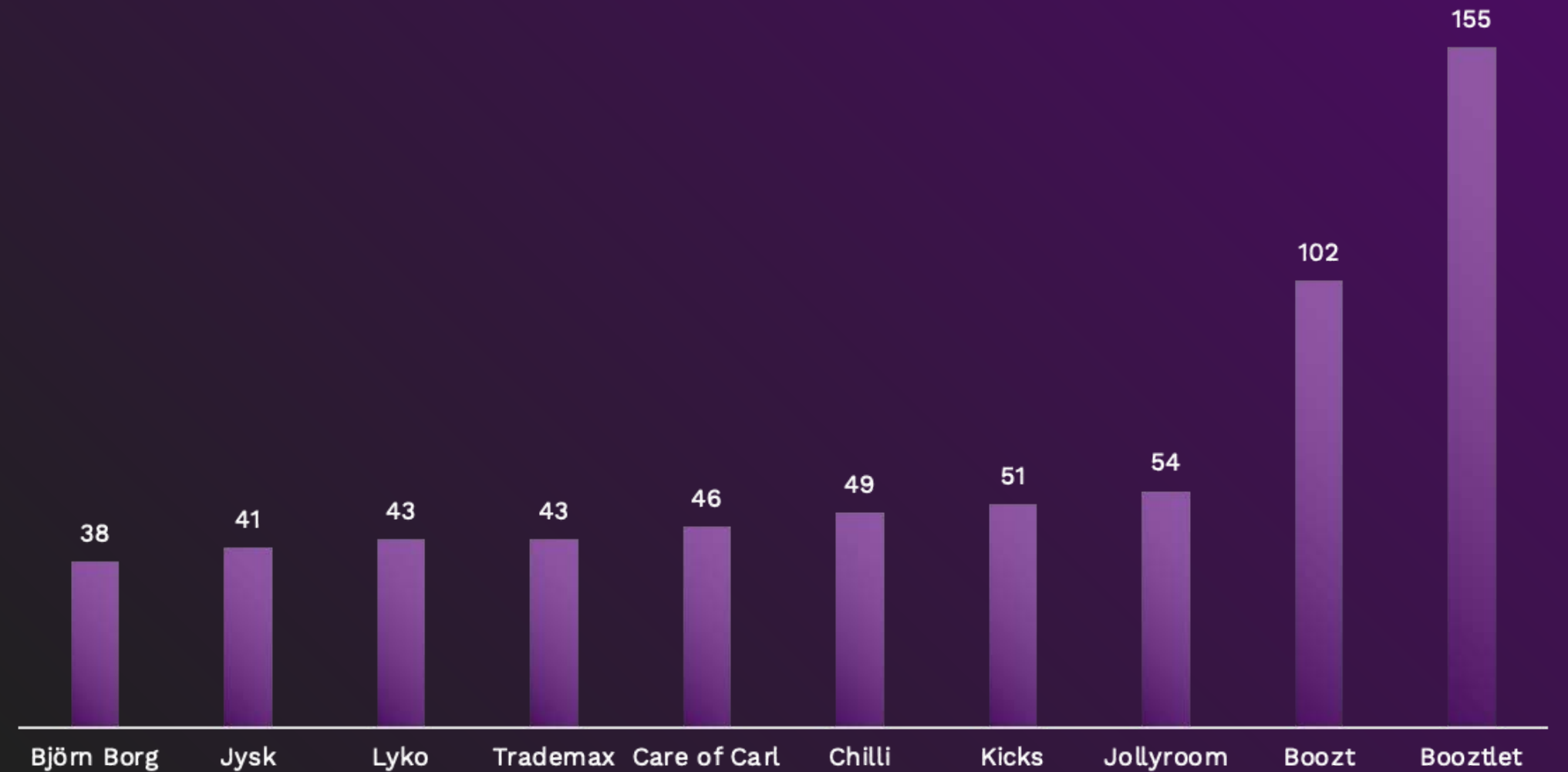| Month	Received Emails
October	217
November	273
December	206
January	170
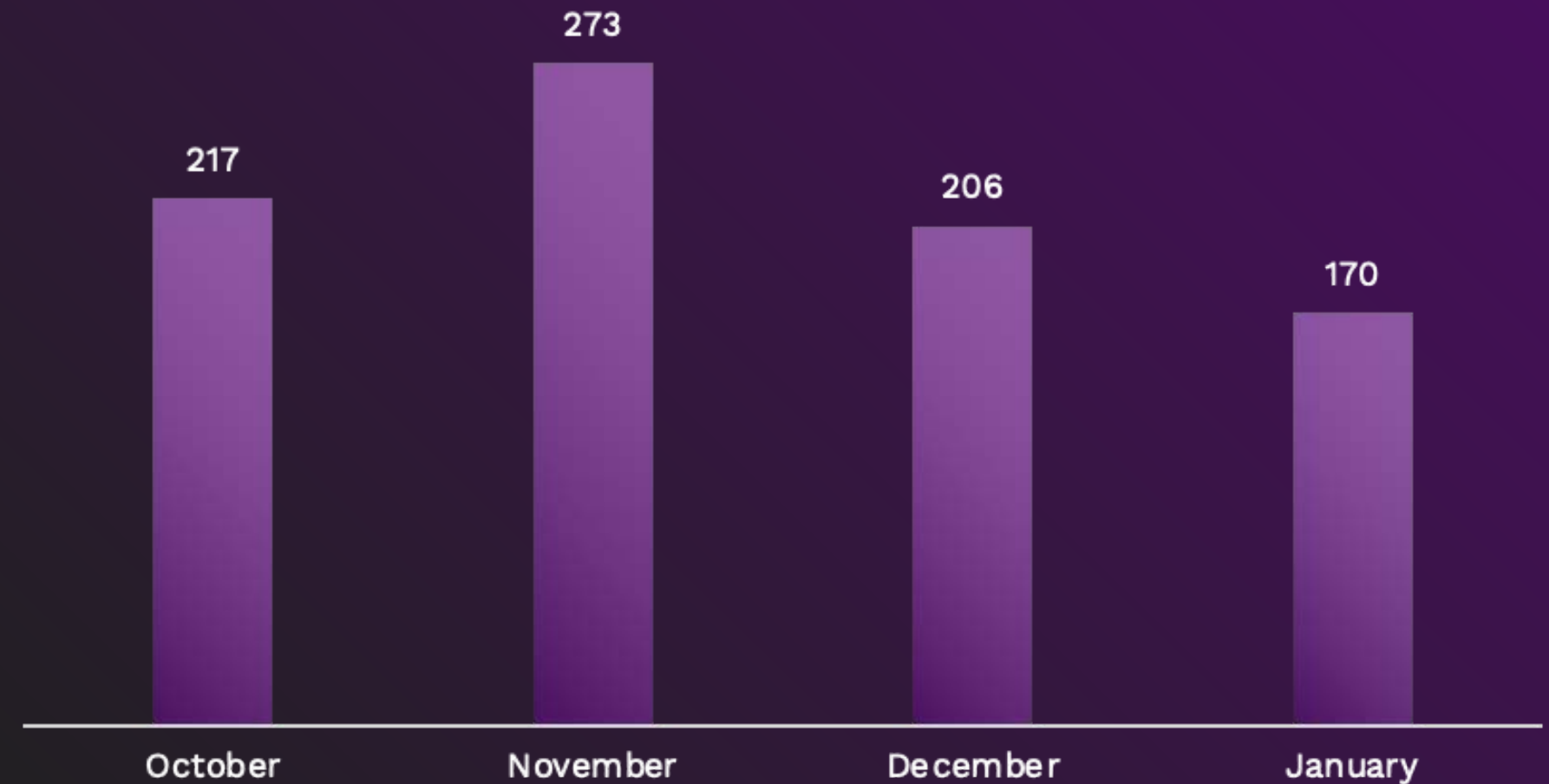
SENDOUTS

Companies also have different approaches to email marketing. On average, companies send about 7 emails per month, and most companies stick to sending only less than 10 emails each month, based on our research.

Out of the newsletters we subscribed to, Booztlet and Boozt were the most active in tapping into the potential of newsletters. Notably, Bootzlet sent emails more than once a day throughout the research period!

TOTAL SENDOUTS PER COMPANY, OCTOBER–JANUARY:

Björn Borg	Jysk	Lyko	Trademax	Care of Carl	Chilli	Kicks	Jollyroom	Boozt	Booztlet
38	41	43	43	46	49	51	54	102	155

SUBJECT LINES

The subject line is the single most important part of your marketing email. If the subject line doesn't encourage the customer to open the email, you won't be able to generate much traffic or conversions. We analysed the 906 subject lines of the emails we received and made some interesting observations. Here's what you are competing against.

68%
of subject lines mention a sale.

12%
of subject lines mention Black Friday, Cyber Monday or Singles' Day. The first mention of Black Friday is on October 24th.

31%
of subject lines contain emojis. Most common emoji is 🖤 for Black Friday, followed by 🎁 during Christmas and 😍 that can never go wrong.

8%
of subject lines mention Christmas. The first mention of Christmas is on October 6th.

7%
of subject lines contain a sense of urgency, such mention of last chance or final sale.

EMAIL MARKETING TRENDS

5

Product-specific promotions

Certain product categories and brands get the centre stage in marketing emails. This suggests a trend in popular product niches that resonate with current consumer interests. Discounts on brand names (e.g., "SALE on top brands for kids", "Björn Borgs winter collection") indicate brand partnerships or inventory clearance of seasonal collections. Many marketing emails are just catalogues of products brought to your inbox.

Season's greetings!

Email marketing, much like advertising, is highly seasonal. Significant emphasis is placed on Black Friday, with various brands offering up to 80% extra discounts. There is also a strong focus on Christmas shopping, indicating that seasonal events continue to be pivotal sales drivers in the ecommerce sector.

Discounts, sales and promotions

Nearly 70% of the emails we received included some discount in the headline. The emphasis on discounts signifies a highly competitive market where businesses are competing for the consumer's attention with price incentives. Discounts get the clicks.
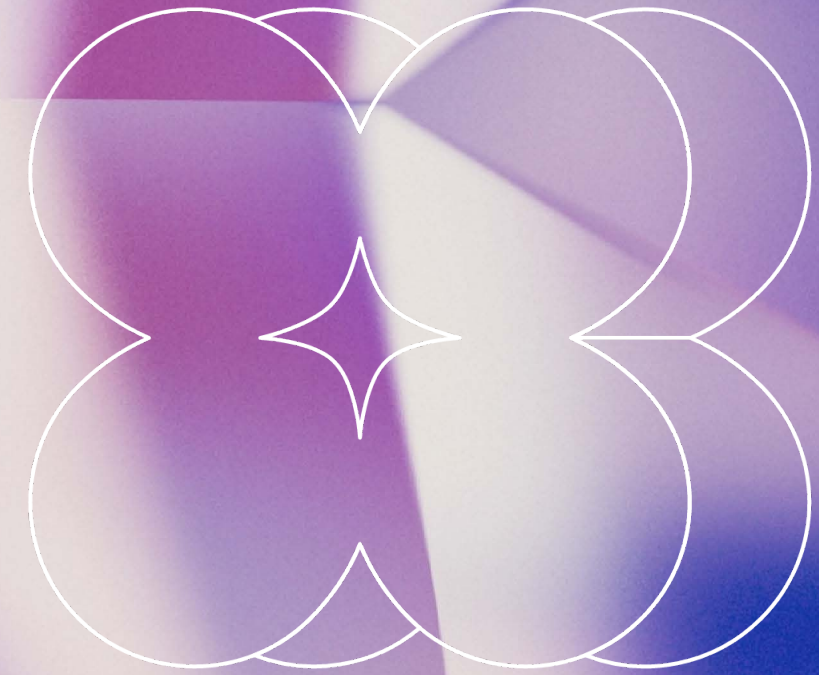
EMAIL MARKETING TRENDS

For members only

There are multiple incentives to join membership clubs (e.g., Kappahl Club, Club BOOZT), indicating a push for customer loyalty programs. Exclusive discounts reward loyalty, and invitations to members-only shopping events (e.g., "First change: Girls' night at HORNBACH") create a sense of exclusivity and community. Extra discounts are offered to early shoppers or on the next purchase to incentivise retention (e.g., The first 3000 orders get an extra 15% discount"). Emails are the posting board for your brand community.

Add a personal touch

While personalising the subject line is not common, some add a personal touch by speaking directly to the customer (e.g., "Which Louis Vuitton size fits you best?"). It is notable, however, that only two emails out of the 906 included the receiver's name in the subject line. Perhaps there remains untapped potential with personalising the subject line – and not just the copy of the email itself.

Common pitfalls in email marketing

Mikaela Stjernström

10 + 1 COMMON PITFALLS IN EMAIL MARKETING

1. Overestimating your customer's attention span

2. Overestimating your email's importance

3. Thinking that you = target audience

4. Compromising clarity for creativity

5. Promoting a sale but not wanting to be "salesy"

6. Putting most of your time into news & product launches

7. Listening more to internal stakeholders than your customers

8. Not A/B-testing

9. Personalising where it doesn't matter

10. Focus only on opening and click rates

11. Ego — yours and your company's

OVERESTIMATING YOUR CUSTOMER'S ATTENTION SPAN

Everyone knows that people skim through their inboxes quickly, and the time available to catch someone's attention is a fraction of a second. Still, we spend a lot of time coming up with new, creative, and long subject lines for every newsletter. This most likely causes your email to get overlooked.

OVERESTIMATING YOUR EMAIL'S IMPORTANCE

We tend to think the world revolves around us. However, most email recipients today won't remember what you sent them yesterday. This is true even if you have incredibly high open rates and sales. We have a hard enough time remembering our family's birthdays and where we left our phones.

Pro tip: Don't be afraid of some good old copying and pasting. Copying your best emails and sending them a few times over will most likely outperform anything new.

COMPROMISING CLARITY FOR CREATIVITY

This is something we see a lot with our clients. Marketing, in general, tends to attract creative people, which is great! However, when it comes to email marketing and penetrating the noise in someone's inbox, too much creativity can hurt more than it helps. The key is not to compromise clarity for creativity. If you can manage to do both, you're probably one of the top 10% of email marketers!

THINKING THAT YOU = TARGET AUDIENCE

Haven't we all been there? Selecting our personal favourite products to be featured in an email. The hard truth for many of us is that our preferences are most likely not in line with our core customer audience's preferences. By promoting what you like most likely won't reach the full sales potential.
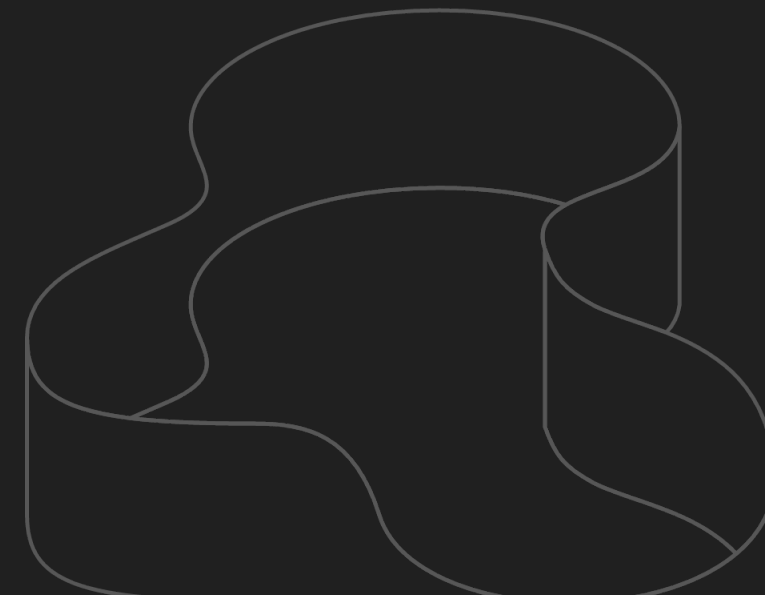
PROMOTING A SALE BUT NOT WANTING TO BE "SALESY"

A lot of brands view discounts as something ugly that they don't want to be associated with. But they still promote sales because it brings in a lot of revenue. Trying to go into Back Friday or a seasonal sale without mentioning a sale is not a great strategy. It will cause confusion and the additional revenue boost you were hoping for will be significantly less. Clarity is everything!

OVEREMPHASISING NEWS AND PRODUCT LAUNCHES

There are two main reasons people do this: pleasing internal stakeholders and balancing the communication between sale periods. There are very few brands whose customers are genuinely interested in new product launches 20+ times a year. Instead, try to pique interest with best-sellers, products that are almost out of stock and products that are back in stock. Or even better, show that you've listened to customers' feedback and fixed a common issue with your product. No one wants to miss out on something everyone else loves!

NOT A/B-TESTING

If you don't test, you have no idea if you're performing as well as you can. Often, A/B Testing is the first reality check we need to poke a hole in our bubble of "we already know what works". You need to test what actually works, test what your customers are most interested in, and put the decision-making into the hands of data.

A hot tip: A/B testing can also be used to silence annoying stakeholders by testing their theories (and proving them wrong).

LISTENING TO INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS MORE THAN YOUR CUSTOMERS

Internal stakeholders tend to be loud and create a lot of noise for anyone working close to the customer. Everyone wants "their" product featured "to all customers", and it has to happen ASAP. Eventually, we cave in, mostly to quiet the noise and restore peace. But do you know who the stakeholders are not? Customers! The best way to make stakeholders shut up, is to be good at listening to customers and show them what customers actually want in their inbox.

PERSONALISING WHERE IT DOESN'T MATTER.
HI *FIRSTNAME*!

Personalisation has been a hot topic (for at least a decade), including here at Columbia Road. It's something that gets great results if done right. Still, can we all agree that putting someone's first name in an email isn't really personalisation?

Especially to someone who hasn't had any real interaction with your company. That is a bit like saying hi to someone you recognise from your old high school friend's Instagram, without them knowing you. Personalisation is great, but you need to be confident you're relevant first.

FOCUS ONLY ON OPENINGS AND CLICKS

Opening rates and click-through rates are great for measuring the performance of your emails, especially if you measure trends over time. Yet, too many marketers in different industries get tunnel vision and only focus on those metrics.

To be a good email marketer you need to know what the end goal is. Most likely, it doesn't end with people opening your email; the main goal is probably that they convert, either by purchasing your products or becoming a qualified lead.
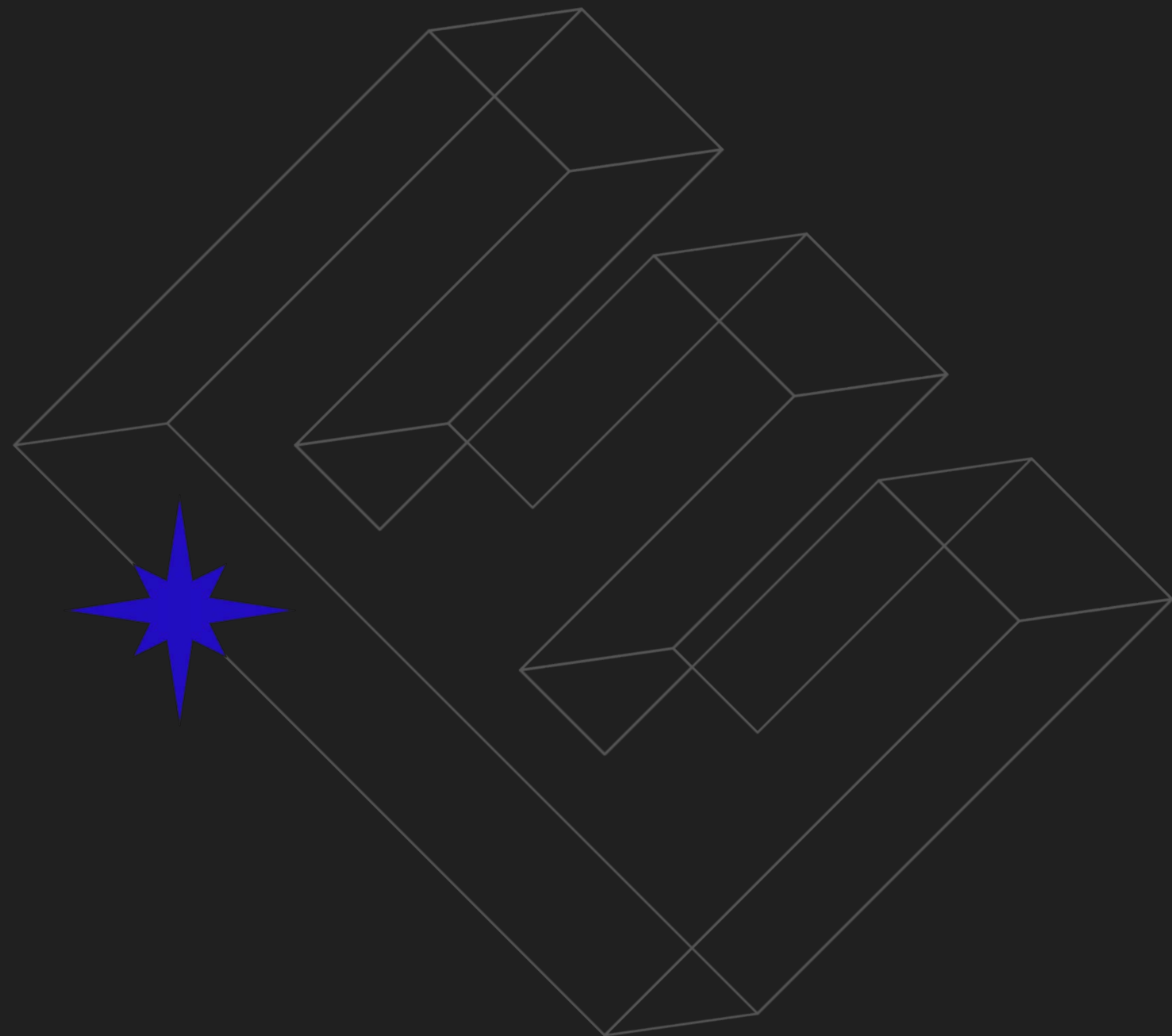
EGO,
YOURS AND
YOUR COMPANY'S

Egos... Most points in this list could be summarised in this one point. If you put your ego aside – your own and that of your company – you'll most likely be a better email marketer.

If you don't test, you have no idea if you're performing as well as you can. Often, A/B Testing is the first reality check we need to poke a hole in our bubble of "we already know what works". You need to test what actually works, test what your customers are most interested in, and put the decision-making into the hands of data.

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Best practices in email marketing

Paula Malka
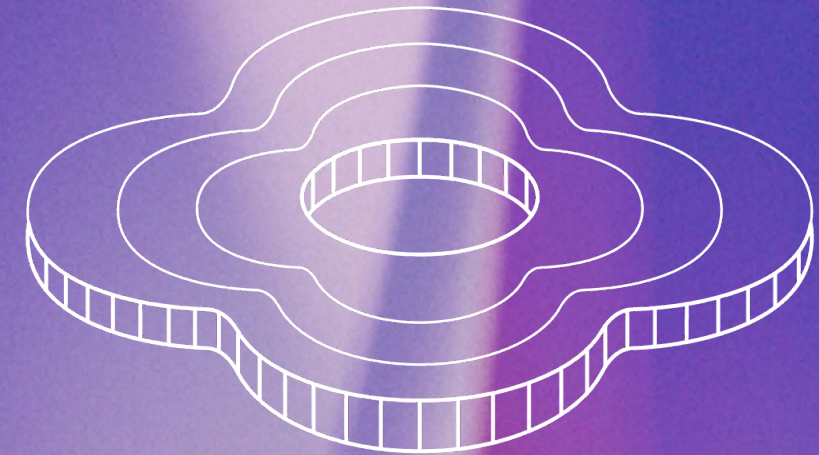
TAKE A HOLISTIC VIEW
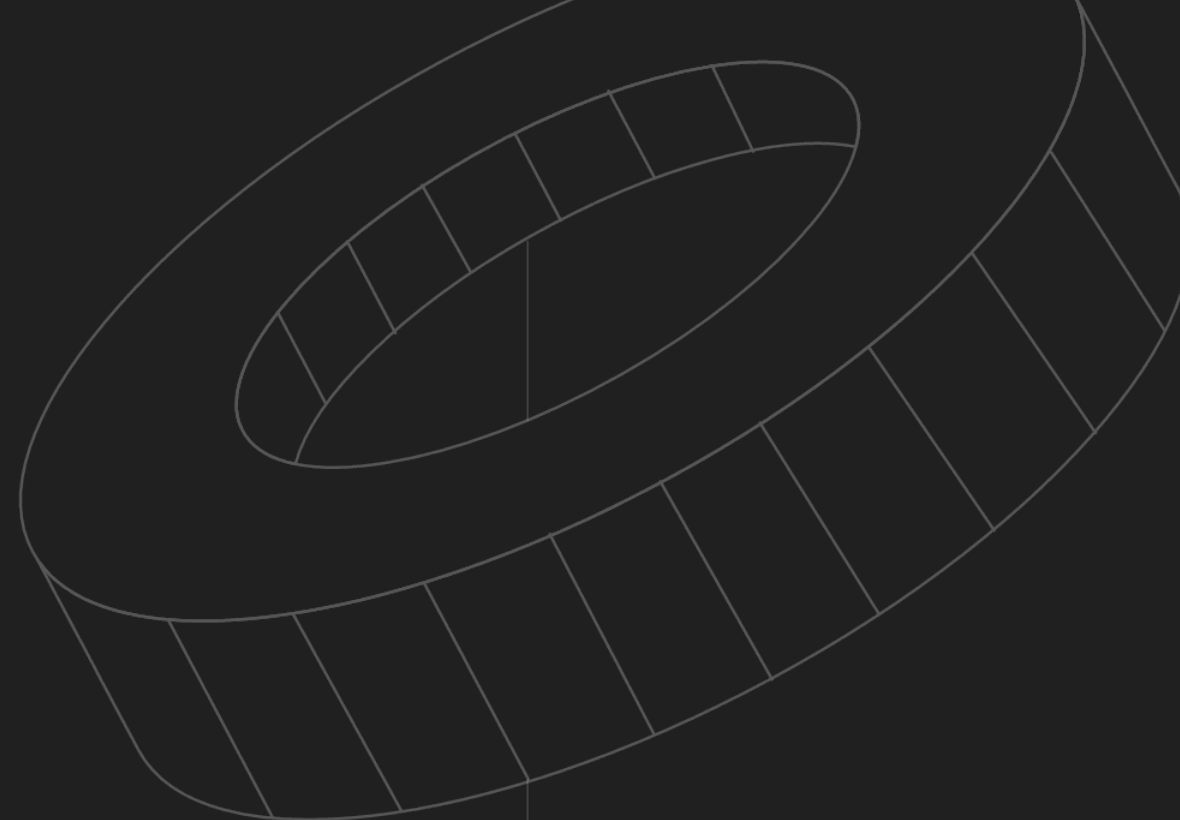
Sending emails is what everyone does, but to really differentiate in your email marketing efforts, you should take a good look at your customer journey. To create a strong email marketing strategy, it is important to map out the entire journey to identify what role emails and newsletters play in that part.

Here's how you can get started:

1. Map the entire Customer Journey (use our <u>free tool</u>)

2. Are there any gaps? How can you improve them with email marketing?

3. Define your KPIs at each customer journey stage

4. Set up a plan for email marketing

Consider, for example, whether you are aiming to grow your customer base through email marketing or are looking to nurture loyalty. Define the KPIs you're aiming to support with email marketing.

TAKE A HOLISTIC VIEW

Email marketing take many forms at each stage of the customer journey:

Reach	Awareness	Conversion	Nurture
Social media campaigns	Newsletters segmented by specific topics	Onboarding emails	Cross- & upselling
Landing pages	Inspirational and educational emails	Behaviour- or interest-based emails	Personalised recommendations
Content management	Interactive emails, quizzes	Customer service emails	Loyalty program emails
Referral programs		Abandoned cart emails	Feedback requests
		Testimonials	Re-engagement campaigns

Make sure your organisation doesn't work in silos, but align with all departments that are sending emails to your customers. It doesn't give a great impression of your brand if your clients receive a message from marketing and soon after one from customer service.

GROW THE SUBSCRIBER BASE

In order to get permission, you make a promise. You say, 'I will do x, y and z, I hope you will give me permission by listening.

SETH GODIN

Creating an impact with email marketing begins with having people subscribe to your email. Whenever you meet your customers, you have a chance to grow your subscriber base, both online and offline. Make sure that in exchange for their email address, your customers always receive genuine value.
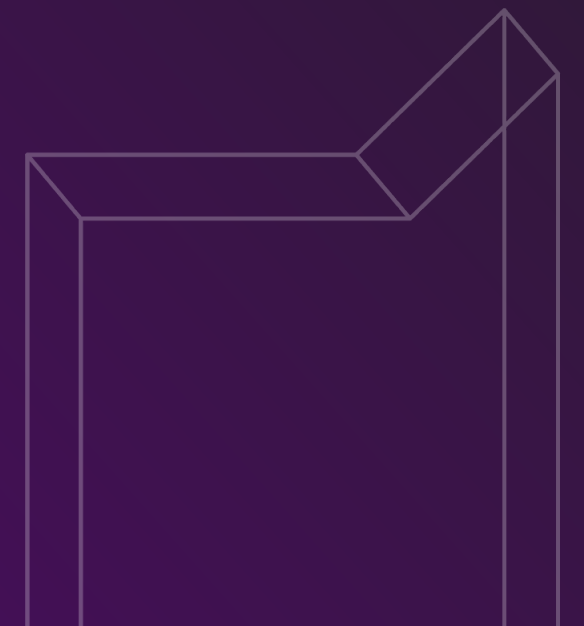
GROW THE SUBSCRIBER BASE
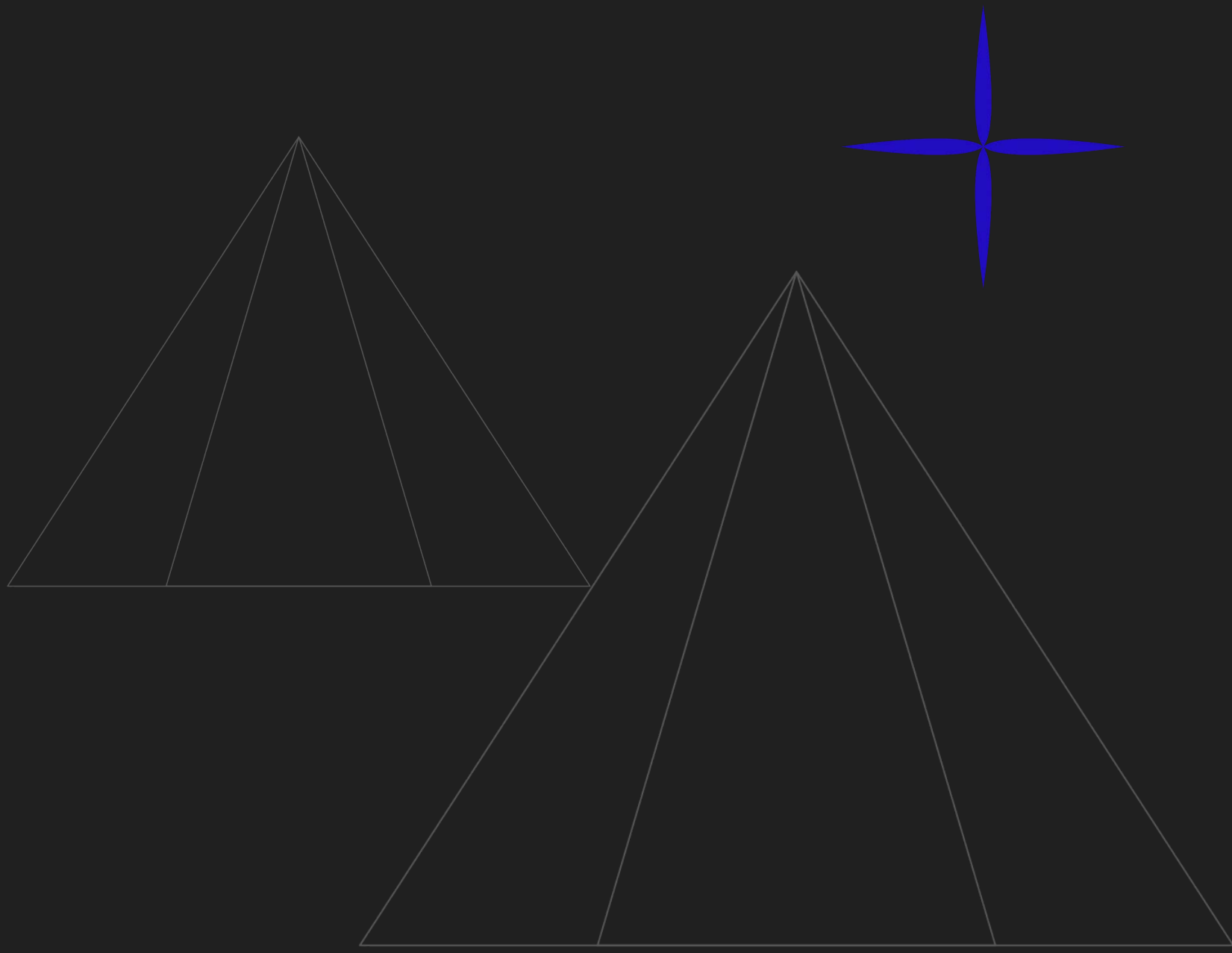
Grow the subscribe base with:

- Sign-up forms in all owned channels

- Events, webinars, and gated content

- Quizzes and contests

- Loyalty and rewards programs

- SMS Polls

- A newsletter subscription checkbox in all forms, including feedback forms

Remember to use your sign-up form to get to know your audience. Ask them questions that help you segment and personalise your communications while keeping the form concise.

Set expectations of what the user can expect by signing up and delivering your promise! If you promoted a monthly newsletter, give them a monthly newsletter. Moreover, never compromise data privacy for email subscribers. Make sure you stick to GDPR: obtain clear consent, be transparent about the data use, and offer easy unsubscribes.

SEGMENT AND PERSONALISE

The key to ensuring relevance, especially if you have a larger audience, is making sure your email marketing is personalised. Customer-centric content is engaging.

The first step of personalisation is segmenting your audience and choosing content targeted to them. Depending on the data you have on your audience, you can segment them into groups based on behaviour, customer lifecycle or demographics. A great tool to support your segmentation is the Buyer Persona Canvas, an easy-to-use template that helps you understand your customers better.

Don't have data to personalise against? Revisit your email sign-up forms and add fields that will help you segment subscribers. Or send the existing customer base quizzes or some other fun ways of how they can share more information with you.

When creating email marketing content, personalise it to the segment. Think about what kinds of problems, questions, or needs this specific group could have, and address those in your messaging.

CREATE CONTENT PEOPLE LOVE

> When someone comes to my home and knocks on my door, I expect them to share relevant content that is valuable and meaningful.

A ROADIE

Consider your email as a private communication channel between your brand and your customer. Is your email more than just a product catalogue? Aim to inspire, entertain or educate your reader in addition to promoting your products. When creating content, think of what's in it for the recipient.

CREATE CONTENT PEOPLE LOVE
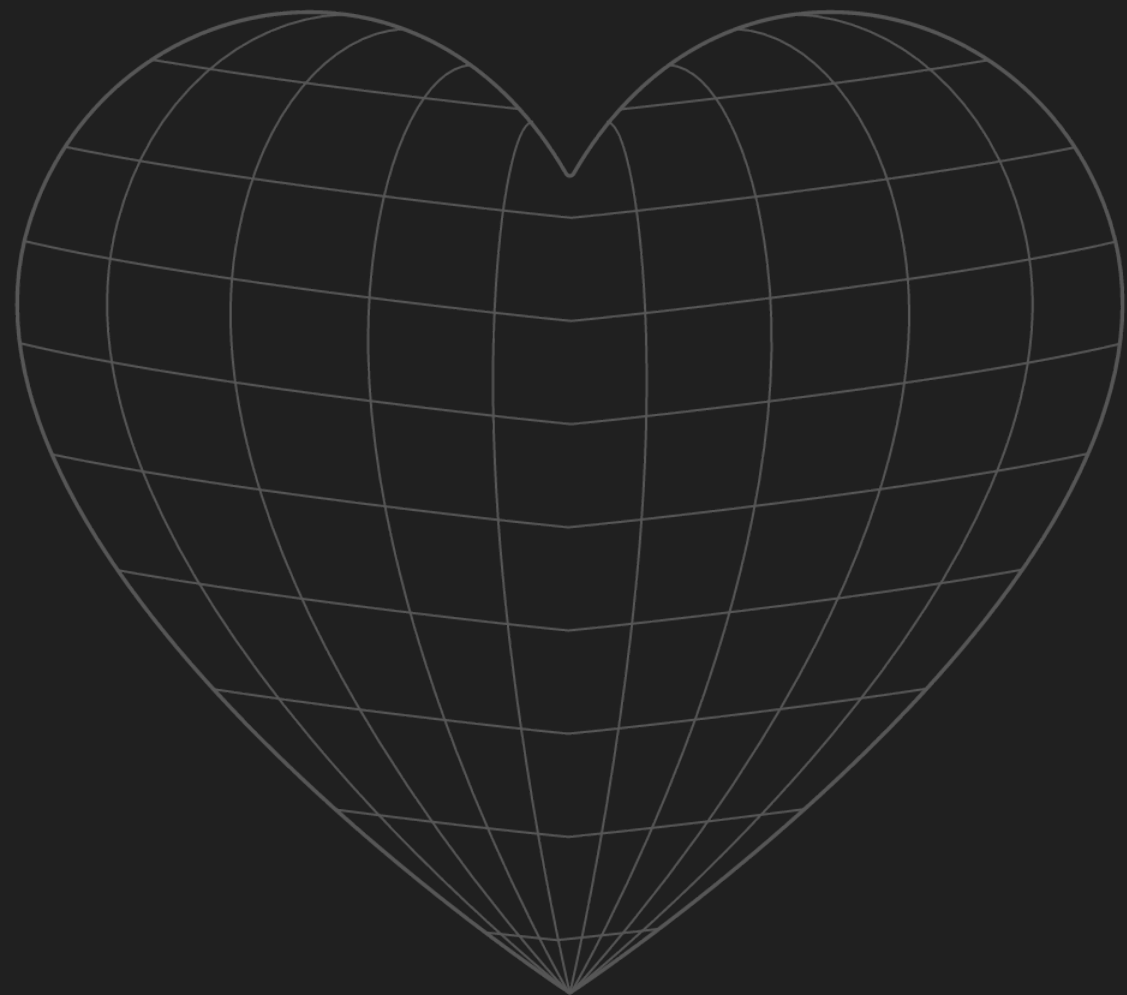
Key success factors for private channels are:

• Personalisation

• Relevance

• Value

Remember these best practices:
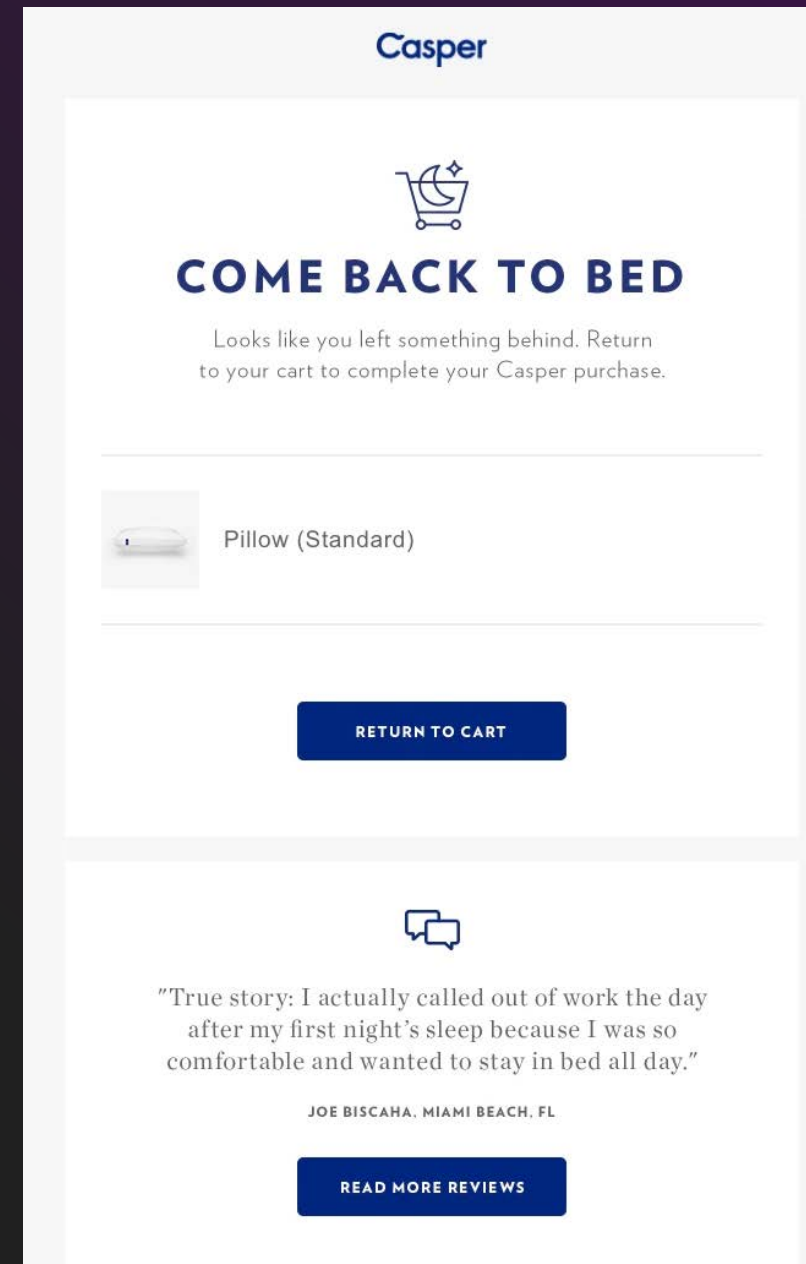
• Less is more: stick to 1-3 topics per newsletter

• Balance 90% educational/inspirational with 10% promotional content

• Align the content with your other marketing efforts

• Keep the email skimmable and avoid dense amounts of text

• Pick one primary goal and CTA per each email

• Always experiment

• Use segmentation and personalisation to ensure relevance

STAY CREATIVE

To stand out from the masses, be creative with your emails. Tap into the uniqueness of your brand and play around with clever copy and compelling design. Just make sure that you don't compromise clarity for creativity.

Here are three examples of creative "abandoned cart" emails.

ENCOURAGE OPENS

When you open an email, you typically see three things: the sender's name, the subject line, and a preview text. The key to increasing open rates lies in these three.

Prioritise the subject line

- Be direct and descriptive: Don't use creativity at the expense of clarity.
- Keep it short: Make sure you don't get cut by the email application.
- Create a sense of urgency: Use carefully when it truly benefits the recipient.
- Personalise: Make sure your recipient can see the email is tailored for them

Sender

- Make sure your sender name and email are simple and seem trustworthy
- Use your brand name or personalise (e.g. Anna from Wolt)

Send times

- Data shows that the best time to send emails is in the morning
- Test your send times to see what works for your audience
- Use time-zone-based send-outs for international audiences

Remember to experiment, automate and repeat!

OPTIMISE CLICKS

Getting your customers to click your link on the email is one of the main goals for someone optimising email marketing. Start with creating trust with the reader and make sure the call-to-actions (CTAs) are relevant and compelling.

Use strong call-to-actions:

- Make sure your call to action is clear and compelling

- Use verbs that promote action

- Create a sense of urgency

- Make CTAs stand out visually and lift them high(er)

Design mindfully:

- Design for impatience: People have a short attention span
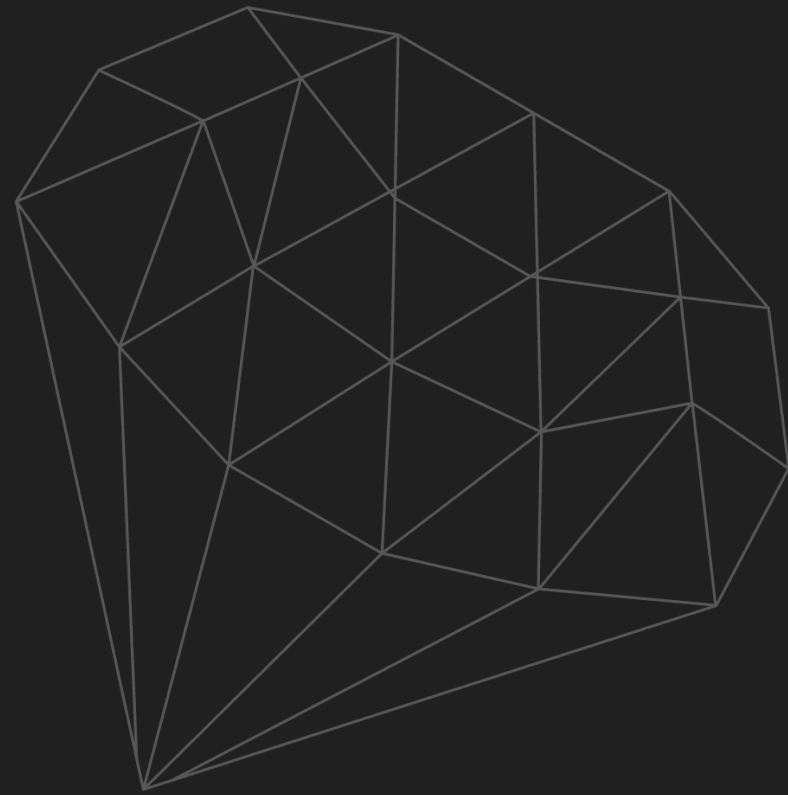
- Optimise for mobile

Be relevant, always:

- Offer several relevant links, but don't let it become messy

- Communicate value: what's in it for me?

- Segment and personalise

Remember to experiment, automate and repeat!

STAY RELEVANT, NEVER SPAM

Unsubscribe rates are often related to the content of emails. If your recipient list finds your emails valuable and relevant, you're less likely to see high unsubscribe rates. On the other hand, it's a fine art to balance the number of send-outs. Make sure you don't spam but also remember to be consistent.

Balance send-outs and content

- Don't spam your recipients with too many emails
- Don't spam your recipients with irrelevant or poor-quality content

Personalisation and segment-based email marketing can increase the relevance and help mitigate unsubscribes. Take changes in interests into account. You can even ask your recipients about your emails and their interests from time to time.

It is also very important to make it easy for recipients to manage their email preferences and unsubscribe if they choose to do so. This ensures that your subscribe base remains relevant.

NEVER STOP LEARNING
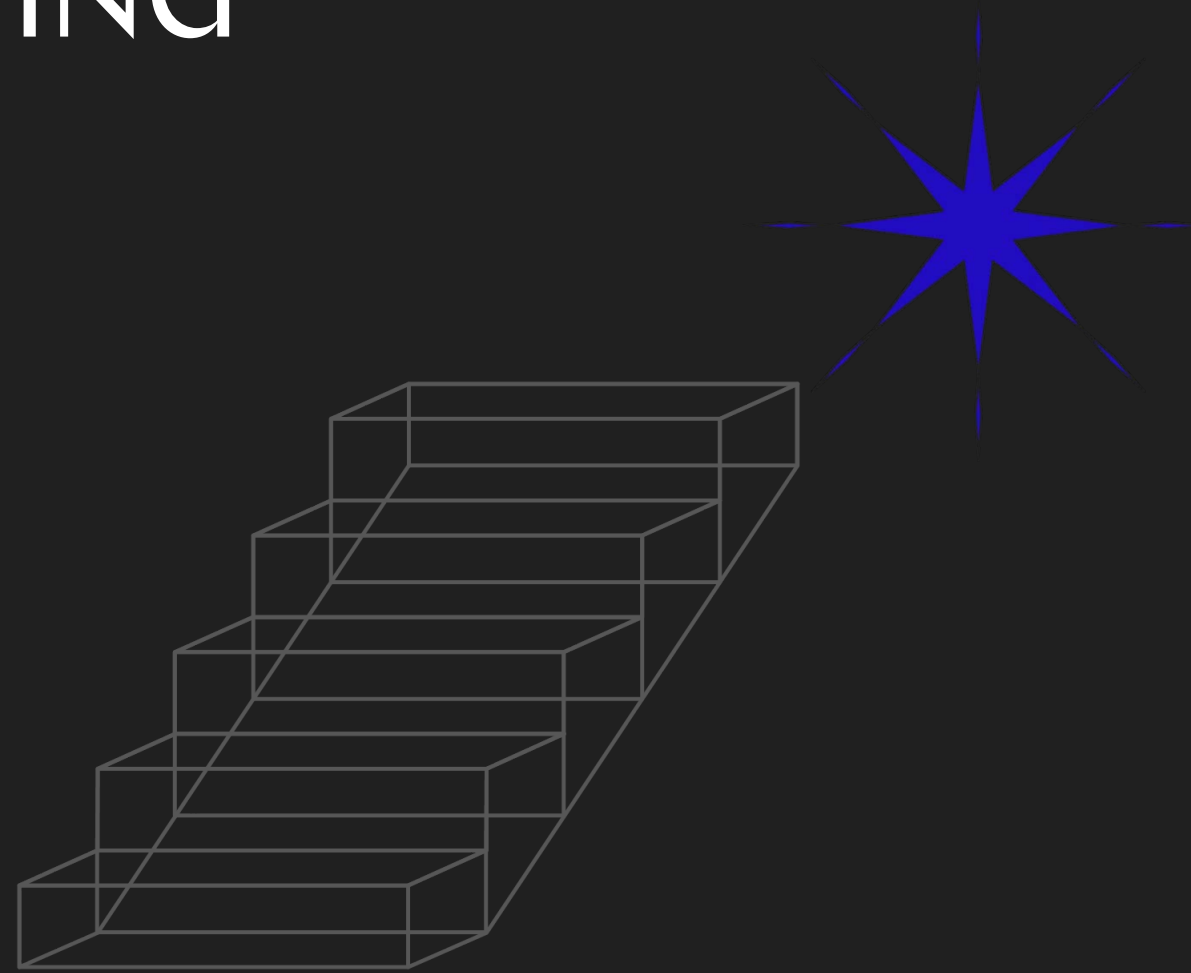
Never just send emails and hope for the best. Instead, make sure you have a process for testing and optimising.

With a willingness to test, each email becomes an interesting part of the experiment. When something sticks, repeat or automate it.

Key metrics to follow and optimise:

List size

- Contacts with marketing permission

Deliverability

- Bounced emails: hard bounced, soft bounced
- Deliverability rate: delivered/sent

Balance send-outs and content

- Active/Inactive contacts
- Open rate: opened/delivered
- Click-through rate: clicked/opened
- Unsubscribe rate: unsubscribes/delivered
- Conversion rate: conversions/delivered
- Sales generated: €

Remember not to only sub-optimise one metric, but to think of email marketing with a holistic lens.

A view
into email
marketing
platform
landscape in
2024

CHOOSE THE RIGHT TOOL FOR YOUR COMPANY'S NEEDS

Email tools
Easy-to-use tools for common email communications.

Marketing automation tools
Easy-to-use customisation for automatisation and email marketing.

Enterprise tools
Huge lead base, complex lead scoring and automations. All departments (sales, marketing, support) and channels are involved.

WANT TO TAKE THIS FURTHER?

BOOK A MEETING WITH OUR EMAIL MARKETING CONSULTANT TO SEE HOW YOU CAN RAMP UP YOUR MARKETING AUTOMATION.

Let's meet →

COLUMBIA ROAD

The Nordic digital sales consultancy