

Start relationships with personal emails (and see who's reading them)

Some new tools have made it easier and more productive to use outbound emails to introduce yourself. These tools let you see who is reading your individually crafted emails. They make outbound email to strangers a strategy worth thinking about again.

What are new tools?

[Streak](#) and [Yesware](#) are small programs that work with Gmail to enable you to see if someone has read your email. You can also get a notification when someone opens your email. [Signals](#) (which runs in Google Chrome and integrates with Hubspot and Salesforce.com) is another competitor, and there are several more -- each with their own pluses and minuses.

What's the advantage?

You know whether your emails to strangers have been opened, and whether the recipients have clicked on links in them. You can see who is interested, and in what. You are not just sending emails to strangers with no idea of whether those emails are being seen. You are not sending emails to strangers with no ability to see which subject line entices the highest percentage to open the email. In recent years, it has been possible to use email newsletter tools like ConstantContact or Mailchimp to track email opens sent from an opt-in newsletter lists, but opt-in newsletter vendors don't allow lists where users haven't opted in. If you've got a list of prospective clients who haven't asked for you to contact them, you've been stuck. Now you aren't.

How does it work?

Using Streak or Yesware, you can easily send multiple, customized letters. With the software's mail merge feature, you can use a standard template but, for example, add the person's name, refer to their industry or company, or otherwise make it a more personalized note.

The number of emails you can send is limited by either Streak or Yesware (who have different limits depending on what, if anything, you are paying for the service), or by Gmail's restrictions (current 200 outbound emails per day for free Gmail accounts).

What are the challenges of this approach and these tools?

The software has some problems. It's not particularly easy to use. It takes a little while to get the hang of how all the pieces fit together. Also, with at least some of the products, you cannot download reports that show who has opened an email. You mostly have to browse through lists in your Gmail inbox. Workarounds are possible, but they are somewhat difficult to execute.

In addition, you are still trying to get people's attention via email, which is hard in a world of spam email. You need to make your emails valuable to people, just as if they were emails to an opt-in list. If your emails are just sales letters for you, you might get some response, but you won't be taking advantage of an opportunity to build a relationship that can be fruitful into the future. For professionals, it's best to think of these emails as the first step of a relationship -- where you will follow up with other emails and other kinds of contacts if they are interested.

What you must do to avoid legal problems

Know and follow the law. In the United States that means the CAN-SPAM act. (Requirements include - not exhaustively -- you have to give people a way to opt out, you have to put your physical address in the letter, you cannot use a deceptive subject line). In Canada, it means complying with some new Canadian laws about having express consent before you email someone (which means you might not want to do email outreach to or from Canada!).

What to do this week

Think about whether an outbound email campaign is appropriate for you. If it is, you'll need to be able to :

1. Craft a series of emails
2. Generate a list of people to mail to
3. Send
4. Track results

The new tools only help with #4, but make thinking hard about numbers 1-3 worthwhile. You should think about it, and then if still interested, download and experiment with Streak, Yesware or a competitor.