



Your Cold email checklist for 2026

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Warm-up and recovery

- Domain warm-up takes 1-3 months (the longer the better).
- Email warm-up (on a warmed domain) takes 14-30 days.
- Use a cold email tool that has warm-up included (like [Woodpecker](#)).
- Burned domain? Replace with backup.
- Re-warm burned domain, 30 days.

2026 sending guidelines

- General rule of thumb: ~50 emails per day per mailbox.
- <5% reply rate, open rates dropping? Warm-up + send.
- Keep the ratio of 30 cold emails + 20 warm-up emails.
- Constantly <30% open rate? Re-warm your domain.
- Check bounce messages if the bounce rate ~5%.

Email copy guidelines

- Keep copy between 30-100 words.
- 1 value proposition with a soft CTA per email.
- Avoid links, images, and bolding in the first email.
- Prospect-centric language. Avoid many I/We sentences.
- Keep around a 5th-grade reading level. Use: [Hemingwayapp](#).
- If you are new to copywriting try frameworks like AIDA, PAS, etc.
- Keep your subject lines lowercase and 1-5 words (shorter = better).

A/B testing

- Determine the metric you want to test (e.g. open rate).
- On average, what % of said metric do your emails generate?
- Determine what % difference you want to detect at the minimum.
- Use [this calculator](#) to determine the sample size per version.
- "Baseline": your average. "Detectable Effect": difference to measure.
- Run a test for at least 7 days. Stop once sample size is reached.
- Check statistical significance [here](#). #successes: e.g. unique opens.

Follow for more cold email tips



Margaret Sikora, CEO at Woodpecker.co
9 years in Cold Email – Let's connect!



Cold email infrastructure

- Use a tool optimized for Gmail changes (like [Woodpecker](#)).
- Dedicated outbound domains. Don't use your business domain.
- Use good domain & emails providers: Microsoft, Google, Maildoso and Infraforge.
- [Buy these right in Woodpecker](#) ↑ with SPF, DKIM and DMARC pre-configured.
- 2 emails/1 domain. Good engagement? Up to 5 emails/domain.
- Have 30-50% back up domains and emails ready to go.
- Set up [SPF](#), [DKIM](#) & forwarding to your business domain.
- Track your reputation with [Google Postmaster Tools](#).

Benchmarks (Heavily influenced by target, country, and language)

- Good open rates are at 50-80%.
- Great reply rates: 3-5% per email, 10% campaign.
- Bounce rate: <2% (Use free list validation in [Woodpecker](#)).

Ideal customer profile (ICP)

- Define your ICP: "I help X solve Y by doing Z".
- Create sub-ICPs for tighter targeting and engagement.
- Take your best fit, top clients. What do they have in common?
- Gather keywords, phrases and search terms about top clients.
- Use these to search for lookalike clients.

AI/automation & personalization

- Overused, avoid: "I love the work you do at {{Company}}", etc.
- Instead, think: "What would I point out doing manual research?"
- Manually research X accounts. Write down what you learned.
- Brainstorm: "What types of data would show I did research?"
- Find that data. [Clay](#), [Apify](#), and [Zenrows](#) are your friends.
- Experiment embedding researched data into your copy.
- Once you know what works, use [Make](#), [n8n](#) (lower cost).