11x

The Cold Email Playbook:

Why Your Cold Emails Fail (And 11 Plays That Don't)

Introduction

Cold email isn't dead, but your approach might be.

Most cold emails get deleted. "Just checking in." "Circling back." "Quick question." These openers have turned inboxes into delete buttons waiting to be clicked.

But when done right, cold email works.

This playbook breaks down 11 plays top SDRs and AEs use to cut through inbox noise and book real meetings. These aren't templates. They're strategic frameworks based on learnings from top sales experts, tested across millions of outbound touches. You adapt them based on what you learn about your prospect's context, challenges, and timing. Let's dive in.

Play #1: Identity Outreach

The Core Concept

Find shared identity markers (college rivalries, professional sports teams, hometown pride, military service, shared career paths) and use them as the foundation for a vivid, memorable opening story.

This isn't about surface-level "Hey, I see you went to Michigan too!" This is about crafting a narrative that's so engaging, so well-told, that your prospect forgets they're reading a sales email.

In Action

Armand Farrokh, co-founder of 30MPC (the leading revenue media platform for elite sellers), received a cold email from 11x using this strategy. The email referenced their shared alma mater, told a compelling story about a college rivalry game, and then smoothly transitioned into how 11x's AI agents for sales teams work.

The personalization was so thoughtful, the segue so natural, and the value proposition so clear that Armand wanted to know how the company did it. That email led to a major media opportunity and thousands of new prospects learning about 11x's approach to cold email.

A single well-crafted cold email opened doors that would have taken months of traditional outreach. That's the power of getting research, relevance, and craft right. Here's the email:

The USC vs. UCLA Example

The Setup:

- Prospect went to USC
- Sender went to UCLA
- There was a recent rivalry game worth referencing

The email opened by painting a vivid picture of the game. Not just "Hey, did you see the USC-UCLA game?" but actual storytelling. The tension, the plays, the outcome, the emotions. It was detailed enough to be engaging but concise enough to keep the prospect reading.

Then came the segue: "Just like USC dominated that game with precision, consistency, and disciplined execution, our AI SDR helps your team dominate outbound with the same level of focus and follow-through." The transition was smooth and didn't feel forced. It worked because the email had made the reader invest in the story first.

Then came the value prop, the social proof, and the call to action. All tight, relevant, and leading naturally from what came before.

Why This Play Works

Stories create emotional connection
People don't remember facts. They remember stories. A well-told narrative about a rivalry game, a shared hometown, or a memorable college experience sticks in your brain in a way that "We help companies increase pipeline by 40%" never will.

Shared identity builds instant rapport
When someone references your alma mater, your hometown, or your favorite team, your brain automatically categorizes them differently. They're not just another cold emailer. They're part of your tribe. That psychological shift matters.

It demonstrates real effort
Generic emails are obvious. But when someone clearly spent time researching your background and crafting a story around it, that effort is visible. And in an age of automation and AI, visible human effort stands out.

The segue gives you permission to sell
If you lead with your pitch, you're asking for attention you haven't earned. But if you lead with value (entertainment, insight, or genuine connection), you earn the right to transition into your offer. The story is the deposit; the pitch is the withdrawal.

The Art of the Segue (Where Most People Fail)

The segue is everything. You can have a killer opening story and a great value prop, but if the transition between them feels clunky or forced, the whole email falls apart.

Here's the framework:
Personal Hook → Business Problem → Solution → Call to Action

The segue happens between the personal hook and the business problem. This is where you draw the connection. The best segues use metaphor, comparison, or thematic linkage.

Examples of bad segues:
- "Anyway, speaking of sports, let me tell you about our product."
- "So, completely unrelated, but I wanted to reach out about..."

How to Execute This Play

Step 1: Research identity markers
Check LinkedIn for education, location history, interests, and shared connections. Check social media for sports fandom, personal interests, and career milestones.

Pro Tip: AI agents for GTM teams (like those built by 11x) can automate this research at scale, surfacing shared identity markers across hundreds of prospects simultaneously.

Step 2: Find the story worth telling
Don't just say "I see you went to Ohio State." Find the story: recent rivalry game with high stakes, historic moment, shared experience, unexpected connection.

Step 3: Craft the narrative
Write the opening story in 3-5 sentences. Use sensory details. Create tension. Make it engaging enough that even someone who doesn't care about sports would keep reading.

Step 4: Build your segue
Connect the story to a business insight or challenge. Use metaphor, comparison, or thematic linkage. Make sure it feels natural, not forced.

Step 5: Deliver your value prop
Connect the story to a business insight or challenge. Use metaphor, comparison, or thematic linkage. Make sure it feels natural, not forced.

Step 6: Clear CTA
One ask. Specific next step. Make it easy to say yes.

When This Play Works Best

You have strong shared identity markers, there's a recent or historic event worth referencing, the prospect's identity is visible and important to them, and you can draw a clear, non-cheesy metaphor to your value prop.

Play #2: Review-Based Outreach

The Core Concept

Find public complaints in reviews (Google Reviews, Yelp, Trustpilot, G2, Capterra) and use them as evidence of a pain point. Then frame your outreach not as criticism, but as an opportunity to capture the demand they're clearly generating.

This play works because you're not guessing at their problems. You're pointing to evidence they can't refute. Their own customers are telling the world what's broken. You're just offering to help fix it.

The "No One Picks Up the Phone" Example

Here's a specific example: a company with multiple Google or Yelp reviews saying things like "Great product, but impossible to get ahold of anyone" or "I tried calling three times and no one answered."

Instead of shaming them, the email reframed it as an opportunity: "You're clearly generating demand. People want to buy from you, they're actively trying to reach you. The problem isn't interest. It's capacity. Here's how companies like yours capture that demand instead of losing it to voicemail."

The tone is consultative, not accusatory. You're acknowledging their success (they're generating demand!) while pointing out an operational gap (they can't handle the volume).

Why This Play Works

It's research that's impossible to ignore.
When you say "I think you might have a lead response problem," that's speculation. When you say "Your customers are publicly saying they can't reach you, here are three reviews from last month," that's evidence.

Reviews are public, recent, and credible.
These aren't internal complaints or anonymous feedback. These are real customers with real names putting real frustrations on the internet for everyone to see.

You're framing it as opportunity, not criticism.
Most companies know they have operational issues. But if you can reframe the problem as "you're generating so much demand that your current systems can't keep up," you're giving them a narrative they can get behind.

It shows you did your homework.
Reading through 20 Yelp reviews or scrolling G2 feedback takes time. That effort is visible.

How to Execute This Play

Find the reviews:
Google Reviews, Yelp, G2/Capterra, Trustpilot, App Store reviews, Better Business Bureau. Look for patterns, not one-offs. One bad review is noise. Five reviews saying the same thing is a trend.

> Pro Tip: Modern AI agents for GTM teams (like those from 11x) can monitor and flag review patterns automatically, saving hours of manual research.

Identify the operational gap:
What are customers complaining about that your product solves? Examples: "Can never get ahold of anyone" suggests need for AI phone support, lead routing, callback automation.

Categorize the problem as a scaling issue, not a failure:
Frame it as growth pains, not incompetence. "You're generating more demand than your current systems can handle."

Write the email: Reference the reviews specifically but not condescendingly. Reframe as evidence of demand. Explain why this is common for companies at their stage. Show how you solve this exact problem. Provide social proof. Offer a specific next step.

Example Email Template

Subject: I called [Business Name] and nobody picked up

Hey [Name],

I was researching [Company] and noticed a pattern in your recent Google reviews. Several customers mentioned they tried reaching out but couldn't get through. I tried calling and couldn’t either.

That's actually a good problem to have. You're generating demand. People want to buy from you. The issue isn't interest, it's capacity.

We work with [similar companies] who hit this same bottleneck when they started scaling. [Customer Example] was losing 40% of inbound leads to slow response times. After implementing [solution], they're now capturing 90%+ and response time dropped from hours to seconds.

Worth a 15-minute conversation?
[Your Name]

Play #3: Career Progression Recognition

The Core Concept

Notice when someone gets promoted (especially from individual contributor to manager) and tie your outreach to the new challenges they're facing in that role. Career transitions are emotionally charged, high-stakes moments where people are hyper-aware of what they need to succeed.

The SDR to Sales Manager Example

Someone gets promoted from SDR to Sales Manager. They've spent the last two years in the trenches doing cold calls, sending emails, and hitting quota. Now they're responsible for a team doing the same thing.

The challenges are predictable: How do I maintain consistency across multiple reps? How do I coach without micromanaging? How do I scale results without just adding more headcount?

If you can name those challenges in your email before they articulate them, you position yourself as someone who understands their world.

Example:
"Congrats on the promotion to Sales Manager. You know better than anyone how hard it is to maintain consistency in outbound when you're managing a team instead of doing it yourself. Here's how we help new managers maintain consistency without micromanaging every activity."

Why This Play Works

Career changes are public and recent.
LinkedIn announces promotions. People update their titles. You're not guessing. You're responding to something they've made visible.

New roles come with new anxieties.
People in new positions are actively thinking about how to succeed. They're open to new tools, new processes, new ways of working.

You're showing you understand their world.
Role-specific outreach says "here's what you're dealing with, and here's how we help." That feels like advice from someone who's been there.

It's genuinely helpful.
If your product actually solves a problem that new managers face, you're offering real value.

How to Execute This Play

Set up LinkedIn alerts for promotions:
Track job changes at target companies using LinkedIn Sales Navigator or other tools. AI-powered platforms built for GTM teams can monitor these signals continuously and surface them the moment they happen, so you're reaching out while the news is still fresh.

Identify valuable role transitions:
IC to Manager, Manager to Director/VP, lateral moves into new functions, internal promotions at fast-growing companies.

Research what the new role actually entails:
Look at job descriptions, LinkedIn posts from people in the same role, industry forums where people discuss role-specific problems.

Map your product to their new challenges:
Be specific. "We help new sales managers maintain team consistency without micromanaging every activity" beats "We help sales teams."

Example Email Template

Subject: Congrats on the Sales Manager role

Hey [Name],

Saw you just got promoted to Sales Manager, congrats! Going from carrying your own quota to managing a team that carries quota is a completely different game.

You know better than anyone how hard it is to stay consistent in outbound when you're grinding through 100 calls a day. Now imagine trying to get 5 reps to do that with the same discipline, without micromanaging every activity.

That's exactly what [similar company] was dealing with. Their new sales manager was spending 80% of their time on activity tracking and only 20% on actual coaching. Now they focus on strategy, deal reviews, and developing their team.

Worth a quick conversation?
[Your Name]

When This Play Works Best

The promotion is recent (within 30 days), the new role has predictable challenges, your product solves a problem specific to that role transition, you have a relevant case study, and the company is growing.

When to Skip This Play

The promotion is old news (3+ months ago), the new role is too senior for your typical buyer, you can't articulate a role-specific problem, or the transition is lateral with no new challenges.

Play #4: Public Filing & Earning Report Triggers

The Core Concept

Public companies announce their strategic priorities in earnings calls, investor presentations, SEC filings, and shareholder letters. These documents are a goldmine of intent signals. If a company publicly commits to a priority (expanding into enterprise, investing in AI, opening new markets), they're allocating budget and attention to it.

Your job is to connect the dots between what they said publicly and what your product enables.

The Enterprise Expansion Example

Example:
"Saw in your Q3 earnings call that you're prioritizing expansion into enterprise accounts. That usually means longer sales cycles, more complex deal structures, and 3x the pipeline to hit the same revenue targets. [Your product] helps teams like yours handle that increased complexity without just throwing more headcount at the problem. [Customer Example] scaled from 50 deals to 200 deals in their pipeline without adding a single AE."

Why This Play Works

It's timely and specific.
When a CFO says "We're prioritizing enterprise expansion in Q3" on an earnings call, that's not aspirational. That's a board-level commitment with budget attached.

You're responding to public intent signals.
This isn't cold outreach. This is warm outreach disguised as cold. You're responding to something they've already told the world they care about.

It demonstrates strategic thinking.
You're not just selling features. You're connecting their business priorities to your solution.

How to Execute This Play

Find the filings:
For public companies, check SEC filings (10-K, 10-Q, 8-K), earnings call transcripts, investor presentations, shareholder letters. For private companies, check funding announcements, CEO interviews, company blog posts, executive LinkedIn posts.

> Pro Tip: High-growth GTM teams use AI agents (like 11x) to automate this entire process. They can research filings, write personalized messaging, and automate outreach in one orchestrated workflow. What used to take hours of manual research now happens instantly across your entire pipeline.

Identify strategic priorities:
Geographic expansion, market expansion, product expansion, operational efficiency, technology investments.

Map their priority to your product:
Be specific. "We help companies entering enterprise handle 3x the pipeline without adding headcount" beats "We help companies grow."

Write the email:
Reference the filing/call specifically. Quote or paraphrase their priority. Connect the priority to a predictable challenge. Position your product as the enabler. Social proof from similar situation. Specific CTA.

Example Email Template

Subject: Saw your Q3 earnings call, enterprise expansion

Hey [Name],

I was listening to your Q3 earnings call and heard [CFO Name] mention you're prioritizing enterprise expansion over the next two quarters.

That's exciting, but it also usually means longer sales cycles, more stakeholders per deal, and needing 3x the pipeline to hit the same revenue targets you did with mid-market.

[Customer Example] went from 50 mid-market deals in their pipeline to 200 enterprise deals without adding headcount. They used [your product] to handle the increased complexity without their team drowning in manual work.

Worth a quick call?
[Your Name]

When This Play Works Best

The company is public or late-stage private, the priority they announced is recent (within the current quarter), your product directly enables that priority, you have a customer who succeeded in a similar situation, and the priority implies operational changes.

When to Skip This Play

The priority is vague or generic, the filing is old (6+ months ago), you can't connect your product to their priority in a specific way, or the priority doesn't imply any buying intent for your category.

Play #5: Content Nugget Hooks

The Core Concept

If someone appeared on a podcast, wrote a blog post, gave a conference talk, or posted something substantive on LinkedIn, they've told you exactly what they care about.

Use that content as your hook. Reference something specific they said, show you actually engaged with it, and connect their insight to how your product solves a related problem.

Why This Play Works

It shows genuine interest.
Listening to a 45-minute podcast or reading a 2,000-word blog post takes time. That effort signals respect and genuine interest in their perspective.

It flatters without being obvious.
You're not saying "Great post!" You're saying "I loved your take on [specific thing]. Here's why it resonated with me and how it connects to what we do."

They've already told you what they care about.
You don't have to guess at their pain points or priorities. They literally told you on a public platform.

It gives you conversational momentum.
You're not starting from zero. You're starting from shared context.

How to Execute This Play

Find the content:
Search "[Person Name] podcast" or "[Company] podcast guest." Check company blogs, personal blogs, Medium, Substack. Look at LinkedIn long-form posts, carousels, video content. Find conference talks on YouTube.

Consume the content (actually):
Don't skim. Listen to the podcast. Read the whole post. Watch the talk. Look for specific challenges they mentioned, strong opinions they hold, stories or examples they used, gaps or problems they acknowledged but didn't solve.

Find your hook:
What did they say that connects to your product? Examples: They mentioned a challenge your product solves, they shared a workflow that your product automates, they expressed frustration with a tool your product replaces.

Write the email:
Reference the content specifically. Quote or paraphrase something they said (prove you actually engaged). Share your reaction or insight (add value, don't just summarize). Connect to your product. Specific CTA.

Example Email Template

Subject: Loved your take on [topic] in the [Podcast] episode

Hey [Name],

I was listening to your conversation on [Podcast Name] yesterday and your point about [specific challenge] really resonated with me.

You mentioned that [specific thing they said]. That's exactly what we've been hearing from [similar companies]. The challenge isn't the strategy, it's the execution at scale.

[Customer Example] had the same issue you described. They knew what they needed to do, but doing it manually across 200 accounts was impossible. After implementing [product], they automated [specific workflow] and cut [metric] by 60%.

Would love to show you how it works. Worth a quick call?
[Your Name]

When This Play Works Best

The content is recent (within 30 days), they mentioned a specific challenge not just high-level strategy, your product directly addresses something they talked about, you can add genuine insight, and the content is substantive.

When to Skip This Play

The content is old (6+ months ago), they didn't say anything specific or actionable, you can't connect your product to their content meaningfully, or the content is too promotional.

Play #6:
Hobby-Based Hooks

The Core Concept

Find shared hobbies or personal interests visible on LinkedIn, Twitter, or other social profiles, and use them as metaphors for your value proposition. This isn't "Hey, I see you like running too!" It's "Training for a marathon is all about consistency and discipline. Outbound is the same. Here's how we help teams maintain that consistency without burning out."

The hobby is the hook with the metaphor as a segue. The value proposition is the payoff.

The Marathon Training Example

Example:
Someone ran the NYC Marathon. You can see it on their LinkedIn activity, their race bib photo, their Strava linked in bio.

Email: "Saw you ran NYC Marathon last year. Training for 26.2 miles is all about showing up every day, even when you don't feel like it. Consistency, discipline, incremental progress. Outbound is exactly the same. Most teams start strong and then fade. We help teams maintain that marathon-level consistency without the burnout. [Customer Example] went from inconsistent outreach to 1,000+ touchpoints per week, every week, without their team working nights and weekends."

Why This Play Works

Hobbies reveal personality and values.
Someone who runs marathons values discipline, consistency, and delayed gratification. These are character traits that translate to how they approach work.

It's unexpected in B2B outreach.
Most cold emails don't reference personal interests. When you do it well, it stands out.

Metaphors make value props memorable.
“We help you scale outbound" is forgettable. "Scaling outbound is like training for a marathon. It's not about one great day, it's about showing up consistently" is memorable.

Shared hobbies create instant rapport.
If you both run, bike, climb, or cook, you have built-in conversational territory.

How to Execute This Play

Find the hobbies:
Check LinkedIn "Interests" section, LinkedIn posts and activity, Twitter/Instagram bios and posts, Strava or other linked profiles, conference speaker bios.

Look for hobbies that reveal values: endurance sports (discipline, consistency), team sports (collaboration, strategy), solo challenges (perseverance, self-motivation), creative pursuits (attention to detail, craft).

Build the metaphor:
Connect the hobby to a business challenge. Marathon training = consistency in outbound. Rock climbing = incremental progress toward big goals. Make sure the metaphor works.

Example Email Template

Subject: Marathon training and outbound consistency

Hey [Name],

Saw you ran the Chicago Marathon last fall, that's incredible. Training for 26.2 miles is all about discipline, showing up every day, and trusting the process even when progress feels slow.

Outbound is exactly the same. Most teams start strong (100 calls a day, personalized emails, great energy) and then fade after two weeks. The winners are the ones who maintain consistency, week after week, without burning out.

[Customer Example] used to struggle with outbound consistency. Their team would go hard for a month, then crash. Now they're hitting 1,000+ touchpoints every week, and their reps actually have work-life balance.

Worth a quick call?
[Your Name]

When This Play Works Best

The hobby is recent and visible, you can draw a clear non-cheesy metaphor, the hobby reveals values that align with your product's benefits, or you share the hobby.

When to Skip This Play

The hobby is generic or trivial, you can't build a natural metaphor, the prospect's profile suggests they don't want personal and professional mixed, or the hobby is sensitive or controversial.

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Play #7: Website Visitor Retargeting

The Core Concept

Use intent data to identify companies or individuals who visited your website, viewed specific pages, or engaged with your content but didn't convert. Then follow up with outreach that references their visit and offers to answer questions or provide a demo.

This isn't cold. It's warm. They already showed interest. You're just following up on a signal they sent.

Why This Play Works

They already showed intent.
Visiting your pricing page, features page, or case studies is a buying signal. They're researching, comparing, and considering.

It's timely.
If they visited yesterday, they're still thinking about the problem. If you reach out while it's fresh, you're top of mind.

It's specific.
"I noticed someone from your team checked out our [feature] page" is more relevant than "I wanted to reach out about [product]."

It creates urgency without being pushy.
"You were checking us out, happy to answer questions" feels helpful, not aggressive.

How to Execute This Play

Set up website visitor tracking:
Use tools like Clearbit Reveal, Koala, 6sense/Demandbase, or HubSpot/Marketo. Set up alerts for target accounts visiting your site, visitors who viewed high-intent pages, or repeat visitors.

> Pro Tip: Leading GTM teams automate this with AI agents like 11x, where website visitor signals trigger personalized outreach sequences. That way, you're reaching prospects within minutes of their visit instead of days.

Prioritize by intent level:
High intent (visited pricing, demo request page, or case studies). Medium intent (visited product pages, blog posts about use cases). Low intent (visited homepage or About page only).

Example Email Template

Subject: Saw you checking out [Company]

Hey [Name],

I noticed someone from [Company] was checking out our [specific feature/page] on the site yesterday.

Happy to jump on a quick call and walk you through it, or I can send over a case study from [similar company] that shows exactly how they're using it.

Let me know what would be most helpful.
[Your Name]

When This Play Works Best

The visit is recent (within 1-3 days), they viewed high-intent pages, and your messaging can reference their specific browsing behavior.

Play #8: Re-Engaging Closed-Lost Deals

The Core Concept

Revisit deals you lost 6-12 months ago. Timing, budget, priorities, or leadership may have changed. If you stay helpful, non-pushy, and bring new information (product updates, new case studies, market changes), you can resurrect dead deals.

Closed-lost doesn't mean closed forever. Circumstances change.

Why This Play Works

They already know you.
You're not starting from scratch. They've seen demos, talked to your team, maybe even championed you internally. The relationship exists.

Circumstances change.
The reasons they said no 6 months ago may no longer apply: Budget freed up. New leadership with different priorities. The competitor they chose didn't work out. Their problem got worse and now it's urgent.

Your company shipped new features or products.
If your company launched new features, pricing, integrations, or proof points since they last evaluated you, that's new information worth sharing.

Low-pressure resurrection.
"Hey, circumstances change, worth revisiting?" is low-stakes. They can say no easily. But if timing is better now, they'll say yes.

How to Execute This Play

Pull your closed-lost list:
From your CRM, pull deals that closed-lost 6-12 months ago (not too recent, not too old), deals where you got deep in the process, and deals lost to "timing" or "budget" (not to "your product sucks").

Identify what's changed:
Since they last evaluated you, what's new? Your product (new features, integrations, pricing). Your proof (new customers, case studies, results). Their company (new funding, leadership, priorities, challenges). The market (new regulations, competitor threats, trends).

Example Email Template

Subject: Worth revisiting?

Hey [Name],
We talked last spring about [your product], but timing wasn't right. Totally get it.

A few things have changed since then that might make it worth revisiting:

1. You all just [raised funding/hired new VP/launched new product line], congrats! That usually means [relevant challenge].
2. We shipped [new feature] specifically to solve [pain point they mentioned].
3. [New customer in their space] just went live and they're seeing [specific result].

If timing's better now, happy to do a quick 15-minute refresh. If not, no worries. I'll check back in another quarter.
[Your Name]

When This Play Works Best

The loss was 6-12 months ago, you lost to timing/budget (not to fit concerns), something changed, and you got deep in the sales process.

Play #9: “Wake the Dead” Inactive Leads

The Core Concept

Re-engage old leads who went dark. People who expressed interest, maybe even booked a demo, but then disappeared. Use a pattern-interrupt email (often called a "breakup email") to create urgency and force a decision.

The idea: treat their silence as a "no" and give them one last chance to re-engage before you close their file. This flips the dynamic. Instead of you chasing them, you're pulling back, and that often gets a response.

The Breakup Email

Subject: Should I close your file?

Hey [Name],

Haven't heard from you in a while, so I'm assuming [problem you solve] isn't a priority right now.

Should I go ahead and close your file? Or did I catch you at a bad time?

If it's the latter, let me know and we can reconnect. If not, no worries. I'll stop bugging you.
[Your Name]

Why This Play Works

Pattern interrupt.
They're used to "just checking in" emails. This isn't that. It forces them to engage.

Urgency without pushiness.
You're not saying "BUY NOW." You're saying "I'm moving on unless you tell me not to." That's different.

Easy yes/no decision.
"Do you want to keep talking or not?" is easier to answer than "Can we schedule a demo?"

Re-qualifies the lead.
If they respond, great. They're still interested. If they don't, you save time.

How to Execute This Play

Pull your inactive leads:
Leads who engaged but went dark (demo'd, trial'd, expressed interest), leads who haven't responded in 30+ days despite multiple follow-ups, and leads who were warm but never converted.

> Pro Tip: High-growth GTM teams use Alice, 11x's outbound AI agent, to automate this. She can monitor inactive leads in your CRM and trigger breakup sequences at the optimal moment.

Determine the right timing:
Send the breakup email after 3-4 follow-ups with no response, 30-60 days of silence, and after you've exhausted other angles (value emails, case studies, new features). Don't send it too early.

When This Play Works Best

You've already followed up 3-4 times with no response, they previously engaged meaningfully, and you've used all of your other strategies.

Play #10: Competitive Takeout Campaigns

The Core Concept

Target customers of your competitors with outreach that acknowledges their current solution, respects their choice, and then highlights a gap or pain point your competitor doesn't solve. Position yourself as the solution to a problem they already have, not a replacement, but a better fit for specific needs.

This isn't "your vendor sucks." It's "your vendor is great at X, but most teams tell us they struggle with Y. Here's how we solve that."

Why This Play Works

They're already bought into the category.
You don't need to convince them they need the tool. They already have one. You just need to convince them they need a better one.

Incumbent fatigue is real.
Most customers have frustrations with their current vendor. If you can name those frustrations before they do, you position yourself as someone who understands their world.

Switching costs are real, but not insurmountable.
People won't switch for 10% better. But they'll switch for 2x better, or if you solve a critical gap their current vendor doesn't.

You can be specific about the gap.
Instead of generic "we're better," you can say "we're better at [specific thing], which is critical for [specific use case]."

How to Execute This Play

Identify competitor customers:
Use BuiltWith/Datanyze to identify companies using specific tools. Check G2/Capterra reviews to find reviewers who mention pain points. Search LinkedIn for people who mention competitor tools in their profiles or posts.

Research known pain points:
Check G2/Capterra reviews (search for 1-3 star reviews), Reddit/Quora threads, LinkedIn posts where people complain, support forums, user communities, Twitter complaints. Look for patterns: feature gaps, usability issues, support problems, pricing frustrations.

Map your product to the gap:
What do you do better or differently? Be specific: "We support [integration] that [Competitor] doesn't." "We're built for [use case] while [Competitor] is built for [different use case]."

Example Email Template

Subject: [Competitor] + [specific use case]

Hey [Name],
Saw you're using [Competitor]. Great tool, especially for [thing they're good at].

That said, a lot of teams using [Competitor] tell us they struggle with [specific pain point]. It's a great product, just not built for [use case].

That's where we come in. [Customer Example] was using [Competitor] for two years and loved it, until they tried to [specific thing]. They switched to us and [specific result].

Worth a quick 15-minute comparison?
[Your Name]

Play #11: Event Registration & No-Show Follow-Ups

The Core Concept

Target people who registered for your webinar, event, or demo but didn't attend. They raised their hand. They expressed interest. They just didn't show up. Maybe they got busy, forgot, or something came up.

Your job is to make it easy for them to re-engage by sending them the recording, offering a 1:1 walkthrough, or giving them another way to get the value they signed up for.

This is warm outreach. They already opted in. You're just following up on their intent.

Why This Play Works

They already expressed interest.
Registration is a buying signal since it indicates they want to learn more.

No-shows are often timing issues, not interest issues.
Something came up and they forgot, or they were in back-to-back meetings. That doesn't mean they don't care. It may mean they need a second chance.

You have their permission to follow up.
They gave you their email when they registered. You're not cold emailing.

Low-pressure resurrection.
"Here's the recording" is easy. No commitment and no pressure.

How to Execute This Play

Segment your no-shows:
From your webinar/event platform, pull people who registered but didn't attend, and people who attended for <5 minutes. Segment by job title (prioritize decision-makers), company size (ICP fit), and industry.

> Pro Tip: Smart GTM teams automate event follow-up entirely. With platforms like 11x, no-show sequences trigger automatically, the recording goes out within minutes, and follow-ups adapt based on engagement.

Determine the follow-up timing:
Send the first follow-up email 1-2 hours after the event ends (while it's fresh). Include the recording link immediately. Send a second follow-up 2-3 days later if they didn't engage.

Example Email Template

Subject: Missed the webinar? Here's the recording →

Hey [Name],

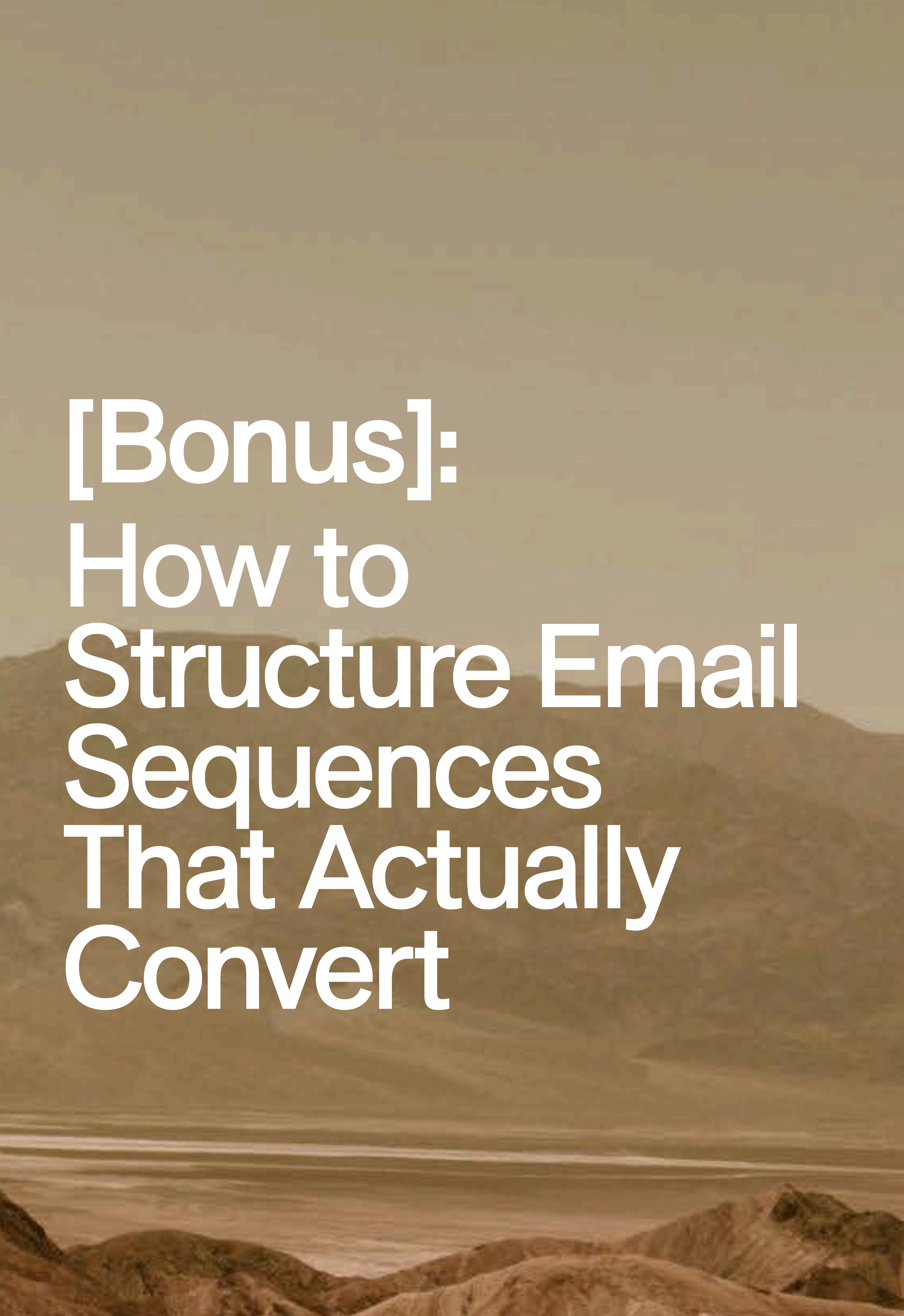
Saw you registered for our webinar on [topic] but couldn't make it. Totally get it, things come up.

Here's the recording: [link]

If you'd rather have a quick 1:1 walkthrough instead of watching a 45-minute recording, happy to jump on a call and show you the highlights. Let me know what works better for you.
[Your Name]

When This Play Works Best

The event was recent (within 1-3 days), they're in your ICP, the content was valuable (not just a sales pitch), and you can offer multiple ways to engage.



[Bonus]: How to Structure Email Sequences That Actually Convert

Sequence Structure Framework

Email 1: Story or Metaphor

- Open with a narrative
- Build connection and rapport
- Introduce your value proposition through story

Email 2: Short and Direct Value

- Cut fluff
- Lead with problem you solve
- Case study or proof point
- 3-4 sentences max
- Clear CTA

Email 3: Pattern Interrupt

- Breakup email (“Should I close your file?”)
- Leave the door open for future interest

FAQ: What makes a good follow-up email?

Add value in every email. Don't just "bump" your previous email. Each follow-up should include new information (case study, product update, insight), different angle (different pain point, different use case), or new format (video, article, 1-pager).

Bad follow-up: "Just bumping this to the top of your inbox. Thoughts?"

Good follow-up: "Saw you all just [relevant trigger]. That usually means [challenge]. Here's how [Customer] solved that: [link to case study]."

Pro Tips for Sequences

Use different channels: Email 1, LinkedIn connection, Email 2, LinkedIn message, Email 3. Multi-channel persistence beats single-channel spam.

Track engagement: Adjust your strategy based on prospects’ engagement (ex. if they opened every email vs. they haven't opened anything).

Conclusion

Cold email is about research, relevance, and craft

Cold Email Isn't Dead, Mediocrity Is

Every day, inboxes get flooded with lack-of-effort outreach.

But cold email done right (with real research, genuine relevance, and thoughtful craft) still works.

The 11 plays in this guide aren't magic formulas. They're frameworks. They require effort. They require you to:

- Research your prospects deeply enough to find the right hook
- Connect that hook to a real business problem they're facing
- Craft your message in a way that feels human, not robotic

Your Next Steps

1. **Audit your current outreach**

   Are you using generic templates or personalized frameworks? Are you researching your prospects or guessing at their problems?

2. **Test, measure, iterate**

   Track your metrics: open rate, reply rate, meeting booked rate. If something isn't working, change it.

3. **Consider automation where it matters**

   Executing these 11 plays manually at scale is impossible. Leading GTM teams solve this by using AI agents for sales teams (like 11x). AI agents pick the right play for each prospect, craft the message, and follow-up based on engagement. Your team focuses on closing deals.

4. **Build a research process**

   Build a repeatable research process: Where do you find the signals? How do you organize the data? How do you turn research into messaging?

11x

Ready to Automate Personalized Outreach at Scale?

11x helps GTM teams create, qualify, and convert pipeline across every channel in one unified platform.

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