

22 EMAIL LEDES THAT ALWAYS WORK!!

by: WILL VALVERDE, Senior Creative Director, M+R

1. Right now...

The simplest way to establish timeliness — literally write the words “Right now” and explain to the reader what is happening in this moment.

Right now, the temperature in the Arctic Circle is 5 degrees higher than it should be at this time of year — and that spells serious trouble for polar bears, narwhals, and other wildlife.

2. I am [emotion]

Whether it’s “gleeful,” “devastated,” or “mad as hell,” if you want your reader to feel something, it helps to get in touch with your own emotional state.

I am furious, <FirstName>. We are on the verge of passing the most significant climate legislation in history, and one single senator is blocking the way. We need your help to raise the alarm and push this historic bill over the finish line.

3. Here in [place]

Add immediacy and authenticity by grounding your message in a specific place and time.

Here in the Everglades, the signs of climate change are unmistakable — and tragic. Water levels are rising. The heat is overwhelming. Migratory bird populations are plummeting. And we are bracing for yet another intense, potentially deadly hurricane season.

I’ve been a field biologist studying wildlife here for nearly 20 years, and I can tell you: it’s not supposed to be like this.

4. TIME IS ALMOST UP!

Urgency is one of the essential elements of effective creative — and basically the entire ballgame here.

<FirstName>, there are just hours left until our mid-night deadline — don’t wait to make your gift and help fuel the fight against climate change.

5. Focus on one sense at a time

Conjure a specific time and place by focusing on ONE sense — sight, sound, smell, taste — and draw the reader in with an evocative physical description.

The sound of an orangutan mother calling out to her child is unmistakable. At dusk, it booms and trills through the darkening treetops, seeming to come from every direction at once. It’s lonely and beautiful and a little bit eerie, and sometimes it sends a little shiver up my spine.

It’s a sound that is being silenced all across the forests of Borneo, replaced by screaming chainsaws and roaring bulldozers.

6. I’m going to level with you

Straight talk and transparency bring the audience inside your circle of trust.

<FirstName>, let me put it plainly: if we don’t reach our fundraising goal by midnight tonight, we may have to cut back on key programs in the coming months. We need your help to make sure we have the resources to stand up to Big Oil.

7. One word that sums it up

Give your one-word reaction to or description of this moment — then, explain why.

Devastation. That’s the reality on the ground, as communities on the Gulf Coast try to recover from another hurricane. And with climate change creating more frequent, intense storms, it’s only going to get worse.

8. ICYMI: Here’s basically the same thing we said last time

Most of your audience won’t have read or remembered your last message. Give them another chance.

Did you see my message from yesterday? This is an incredibly important moment for our movement, <FirstName>, and I hope you’re ready to step up.

9. UPDATE: Here’s what has happened since the last email we sent you

Just like #8, except now something has changed that gives us a new focus.

Quick update on my last message: in just the last four hours, hundreds of supporters like you have stepped up to help reach our \$1 million goal. Now, we have until midnight to make it to the finish line — will you chip in now to help get us there?

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10. Report back from colleagues

Your organization is full of people with inside info — field staff, development officers, policy experts. Pass along an update from one of them.

I just received a report from [our staff on the ground in Borneo/our head of fundraising/Capitol Hill], and what I am hearing is downright alarming.

11. “Quote out of context” — now here’s the context

An out-of-context quote gives your reader a reason to keep reading in order to understand, and a quick way to dive into storytelling.

“This is my home. I grew up here, my mother grew up here, my grandmother. But there’s no future here for my children.”

That’s what Maria, a farmworker in Zunil, Guatemala, told me when I asked her about how climate change is affecting her region. And she’s not the only one who is worried.

12. [Person] is a person whose story I am going to tell you now

A powerful way to communicate authenticity is to tell a true story about a real person and provide real details about the way your reader’s action will have an impact. Be sure to gain full consent, present the personal story with dignity and authenticity, be mindful of power dynamics, and ground storytelling in your values.

Maria thought that the worst dangers of climate change were still years away. She thought there would be time to find solutions, ways to protect her small farm and her family’s livelihood.

Then came a year of drought and record heat. Followed by another year of drought and record heat. As crops withered in the field, Maria knew that the future had arrived. The time to act is now.

13. Have you ever heard of rhetorical questions?

An open question invites the reader in, creating a tension that can’t be resolved until they read on to find the answer.

What will the coastline in southern Florida look like in 10 years? 20? 50?

Climate change will create devastating changes in vulnerable areas like this. We know that. The real question is what we’re willing to do now to mitigate the damage and avoid the most catastrophic outcomes.

14. Rip from the headlines

The news is urgent, tangible, and real. And by quoting an outside validator, you add an extra voice of authority to support your own message.

U.S. Climate Has Already Changed, Study Finds, Citing Heat and Floods

That’s the headline on today’s New York Times front page. But for anyone who’s been paying attention to the escalating consequences of climate change, it isn’t news at all.

15. In medias res

Start your story in the middle, without providing context or background, to draw your reader quickly into your narrative.

It was cold in the Senate hearing room, but I was sweating. After hours of waiting, days of preparing testimony, decades of leading researching — I was finally getting my chance to lay out exactly how serious the climate threat truly is. I don’t mind telling you I was nervous.

16. Click here to put your call to action in the very first sentence

Be direct. Ask for what you need up front.

Today is the deadline — [click here to make your last-minute gift and help reach our \\$500,000 fundraising goal to fuel the fight against climate change.](#)

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17. Today is National [Topic] Day, which is a good time to address [Topic]

Every day is National Something Day, which gives you lots of opportunities to reiterate your message from a variety of perspectives.

Today is National Endangered Species Day. So let's talk about the plants and animals that are on the brink. Let's confront the harsh reality that threatens the survival of polar bears, Hawksbill turtles, and Amur leopards. Let's talk about the dangers they face — and *then let's do something about it.*

18. I noticed you have not donated. What's up with that?

A little guilt social pressure can go a long way.

Dear <FirstName>,
With just hours to go before our midnight deadline, 4,236 committed supporters have already donated and DOUBLED their impact thanks to a special matching gift. **We need everyone who cares about stopping climate change to chip in — but your name is still not on that list.** Will you do your part by making a gift before it's too late?

19. This is my core belief:

Start with a fundamental value, and offer your reader a chance to agree.

<FirstName>, we have a responsibility to preserve the beauty and wonder of this planet for our children and the generations to come. We owe them clean air and water, vibrant wilderness, and the hope of a thriving future.

I'm not about to let that legacy be destroyed in the name of corporate profits.

20. Let an image do the talking

They say a picture is worth a thousand words, which is nice because writing is hard sometimes.



This photo was taken just yesterday. It shows just one small part of the wildfires devastating the Blue Mountains of Oregon. It's also a horrifying preview of the disasters that will become increasingly common if we don't confront the climate crisis.

21. I know we're on the same page

You get it, I get, we all get it — now, let's do something about it.

You don't need me to tell you that this year's mid-term election will be among the most important of our lives. The stakes for our climate, our planet, and people all over the world could not be higher. And that's why we need you to step up right now, <FirstName>.

22. Tease mysterious or inside information, and promise to explain more

Everybody wants access to hidden knowledge. Bait your hook with just a hint of what's to come, and hope your reader feels compelled to read the whole thing.

Unless you have read the latest U.N. climate report cover to cover, you might have missed something important: hope, hiding there in the details and data.

We have a chance right now to confront the climate crisis in a focused, powerful way — but only if we are bold enough to seize this moment. Are you ready to be a part of this groundbreaking effort?

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