

5 Honest Reasons Why Founders (And Investors) Ghost You — From a Founder Who's Ghosted 1000's

It's not what you think.

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No one likes to get ghosted, but let's be real: If you put yourself out there in life and business, it's kind of inevitable. In fact, I'd argue entrepreneurial success often relies upon the resilience of being able to brush off those ghosting foibles and move right on to your next target.

However, as much as ghosting may be wrong or rude or a patronizing way to let someone know just how unimportant they are to you, I have a confession to make: I, as a founder and investor, have ghosted people, too — and more than just a handful of them.

As someone [who's run a company that sent over 60 million emails over a 5-year period](#) (and optimized ridiculously high open- and conversion-rates), I do have a bit more experience than the average founder with getting emails opened, read, and successfully acted upon. That said, [this article isn't meant to be an email marketing masterclass](#), and it isn't just for founders. Instead, this is the article that every hopeful vendor, business partner, investor, and aspiring fundraiser should read if they're wondering why they keep getting radio silence in response to their artfully crafted outreach.

I'm exposing the five honest reasons [why founders \(and investors\) ghost people](#), as well as debunking (or affirming) five myths around toxic outreach faux pas. If you've ever been ghosted in business and you want answers, this one's for you.

1. We plead the 5th

I'll be honest: This is both the most common and the most troubling reason for ghosting, as the admitted ghoster myself. I'm referring to those instances where we receive an email from a decently viable, perhaps even promising party:

- It could be a good vendor whose services we may one day need.
- It could be a potential partner who's synergistic with our future plans
- It could be an investing or fundraising opportunity that aligns with our niches or capital deployment strategy

The problem, though, is that it simply isn't imminent on our current priority list, and therefore, it isn't compelling enough to warrant a response.

By the way, make no mistake: This is a good reason to get ghosted, since it has nothing to do with you.

No, you did nothing wrong in your email, you may have a great and promising opportunity or proposition, and you're credible and interesting enough that the recipient actually toyed around with a response in their mind. Unfortunately, [what you can't control is their own timing and priorities](#), and right now, you simply don't make that shortlist. Ironically, though, you aren't quite unappealing enough of a "no" to elicit a rejection from the recipient, since they genuinely may want to leave the door open to a future response or connection.

Sometimes founders, investors, and prospective business partners don't want to deliver a hard "no" or sever a possible future relationship, but they also don't want to extend the brain power to start building that connection now or get your hopes up for an uncertain far-off collaboration. [No harm, no foul, but I'd say this was an overall positive interaction](#), even though you (the person who elicited the outreach) may never know that.

2. Didn't see you there

Reason number two for ghosting is quite the opposite of the aforementioned reason, as this scenario occupied zero time or brain space in your recipient's mind. In this all too common and tragic mystery ghosting saga, your email wound up in your intended recipient's junk (or spam or promotions) folder, and they simply never saw it.

While you won't necessarily know each time your email is gate-kept out of the inbox, there are a number of steps you can take to try to increase the likelihood you do make it into the inbox. Since [that alone could be an entire multi-hour course](#), I'm not going to include them all, but I will mention a few easy fixes (without getting too technical about email deliverability):

- Reputation matters, so try to use an email with a good reputation that hasn't been flagged for cold outreach or spammy email marketing
- Colors, links, fonts, gifs, and attachments can be red flags, as these are common in marketing emails and often get intercepted pre-inbox
- Brand-new emails can give certain inboxes the spooks, so try to use an aged email (even an old personal one) rather than one you created today

3. This clever gimmick backfires

This is the ironic scenario that many of you may have unknowingly faced while trying to be clever or eye-catching in your subject lines or email aliases. Sometimes implementing too many clever, cute, or eye-catching strategies can make a completely legitimate email outreach spike up our spammy censors, and thus, backfire, rather than secure the type of attention you desire.

I'm referring to the artistic hook intros, the clickbait-y subject lines, and using aliases like "Important Investor" or "Founder Team". While I can understand and appreciate the strategy and

intention behind those tactics, [an often more effective strategy is to be straightforward and down-to-earth](#) in your communications.

You aren't writing a fiction novel or a script for a 30-second social media short; you're simply trying to invoke the [trust, legitimacy, and interest for a human-to-human connection](#), and gimmicks may not be required. Ironically, employing the very email marketing copy hacks you've probably seen in your own inbox are more likely to lump you in with the countless automated marketing emails from which we keep unsubscribing.

4. The backwards approach

The number one rule to getting something from someone else is to avoid coming off like a burden. Nonetheless, so many vendors, founders, fundraisers, and hopeful business partners start their email outreach with an ask before establishing the relationship or confirming interest. If you start by giving your recipient a link to click or a deck to view, [you're going to be perceived as creating work for the already-busy party](#) on the other end.

No one likes an unsolicited burden, and too few people realize that the most expensive "ask" you can request is your recipient's time. If you've been going out with links, presentations, or requests within your first few lines of outreach, that may be the clear culprit for your 0% response rate.

5. The worst way to start any email

If you thought the presumptuous and arguably disrespectful ask was the worst way to start off an email, I just may have an even greater flaw to top the list. I'm talking about assumptions, and specifically, [beginning your email by making and openly stating a bold assumption](#) about the recipient.

I especially hate this tactic because I know it's taught and championed by naive, lazy marketers out there who don't seem to understand the psychology of the copy they're pushing. Listen, I understand the strategy behind it: The bold assumption either gets the recipient to agree and identify with you or disagree and write back to tell you why you're wrong.

It doesn't matter! It's presumptive, a little rude, off-putting, and playing a mind game that founders don't often want to engage in or waste time on.

Debunking (& exposing) 5 outreach faux pas myths

Now that you know the five common culprits that will get you ghosted in business, what won't get you ghosted? That's a pretty murky question, as there are countless myths and misconceptions about the outreach faux pas that can get a person or company blacklisted, deleted, or ignored by a founder. Thus, I'm going to expose and debunk five right here:

1. These words

Do you know how much time I've seen founders, bankers, and B2B professionals agonizing over small wording choices as if they could make or break the partnership with a "Hi" versus "Hey"? Likewise, you could make a hidden camera reality TV show revealing the explosive cubicle fights, tears, and unsuccessful email recall attempts for those pesky typing errors that get spotted just milliseconds after hitting "Send".

To be fair, "Hey" is a little on the casual side, and typos should try to be avoided, but my point still stands: The nuanced wording choices over which people obsess may be a flat-out waste of time.

Here's the truth: The difference of using "Hi" and "Dear" or "Best" and "Thanks!" are truly not going to matter with any party of legitimacy on the other side. On the off chance that those tiny nuanced choices do make the difference of whether or not a person responds to your email, I'd argue they weren't someone whose response or engagement you'd really benefit from in the long run. Valuable people focus on valuable tasks, and nitpicking over your chosen email closing is simply not one of them.

2. This address

Okay, this is a controversial one, and my mind has changed on this topic as technology and email service provider gatekeepers have evolved. I'm referring to the use of a free or non-owned-domain email address, such as a Gmail or Yahoo mail address, rather than your company's domain.

Historically, I would have 100% advocated for sending any important or business-related emails from our own domain, and I'll admit that I've most definitely discriminated against (or flat-out deleted) emails from free domains. To me, it always looked unprofessional, amateurish, and a little fishy (borderline scammy) to send an important business proposition from a Gmail address. That is, up until three or four years ago when two things happened:

- Email spoofing became incredibly common (spammers and scammers sending emails made to look like they came from an owned domain)
- Gmail (and other email service providers) cracking down on which emails can and can't make it to the inbox (demoting ones from little-known owned domains to the junk, spam, or promotions folders)

With those two evolving trends, among many other changes in the email deliverability and digital trust landscape, I've shifted my opinion such that I can see the case for using a free Gmail account, so long as it sounds professional and relevant to your company. Though to be honest, this will still send up red flags with some of us, and I personally do still treat those emails with a higher degree of skepticism. When in doubt, I'd suggest you do both:

- Send an email from your owned domain (try to keep that sender reputation high and perhaps use a “warming” service for new domains)
- Send a follow-up from a Gmail account (personal and professional)

3. Too many of these

This isn't really a myth or misconception; it's unfortunately the truth: Too many links — even perfectly relevant and legitimate ones — are a big no-go for the first outreach unless you're prepared to get flagged as spam. Furthermore, even if you do make it to the inbox, these links can ignite suspicions in tech-savvy recipients who are wary of insidious links that can pass certain virus detection software and still wreak havoc. Establish the relationship first, send links after.

4. This word count

As a detail-lover, I hate to admit that the length of the email does have a correlation with getting ghosted, and starting off with too long of an email for a first-contact unsolicited outreach is a ghost-magnet faux pas. There are always exceptions, but if we're talking about a manual, individual, high-priority email introduction or proposition, I'd rather operate as if you're the rule, not the exception.

5. This punctuation

Okay, this one is true and unfortunate for expressive communicators, as well. Trust me guys: It pains me to temper my “!” and omit any smiley faces after those stern periods. Perhaps it's because I witnessed the transition of phone to email to texting communication that I feel the written word sans significant punctuation can come across as blunt and curt. Regardless, the data speaks for itself, and I have enough of it from personal experience, business colleagues' anecdotal admissions, and thousands of A/B tests to prove that yes, too many exclamations and expressive punctuations do increase the likelihood of a ghosting scenario.

Is it because those punctuations get flagged by wary ESPs and sent to spam? Sometimes. Is it because recipients are unemotional, black-and-white business people who detest comedy and expressiveness? Could be. However, I do believe a portion of the punctuation-ghosting correlation has to do with the perception of youth, eagerness, and desperation: Formal business communications typically aim to remain professional, keep emotions close to the vest, and maintain a mature demeanor.

Overly expressive, punctuation-laden outreach can poke holes in your perceived maturity and professionalism and perhaps even come off a bit desperate, impulsive, or inexperienced. Right or wrong, it's worth being aware and saving those smiley faces for your personal communications. I've never seen someone lose a business deal from being too stiff or professional, but I've most definitely seen the opposite more than a few times.

The secret to overcome business ghosting

As founders, entrepreneurs, and ambitious business hustlers, many of us are [endlessly driven to achieve whatever goal we set forth](#). The inherent problem in that praised entrepreneurial drive is that there are some doors that simply won't open, no matter how many times we knock or how many keys we try. I'm not suggesting that we should lower our ambition or give up when an opportunity presents a bit of friction or resistance to our pursuits.

I am, however, advising that successful entrepreneurship entails having the wisdom to decipher when we need to knock again, harder, on the same door, versus when we simply need to find the different door, that's in fact the right one. Business isn't necessarily easy, but if every single task feels like a torturous, nearly impossibly uphill battle of perpetual rejection and stagnation, [it may be a sign that we're walking up the wrong hill](#).

If you get ghosted, sure, you can implement every email deliverability trick in the book, change the address, and also contact the intended recipient on every social media platform known to man. Once you start showing up on their doorstep with a handwritten letter and a bouquet of bribery flowers, you may have gone too far. The key to overcome ghosting is to cast a wide enough net and build a magnetic enough reputation and network that you won't solely rely on the uncontrollable response of cold outreach. Your future success isn't reliant on one person's response to an email; if you think it is, I'd assert that you've already made a fatal error in your strategy.