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Carla Hillerns and Pei-Pei Lei on You had me at Hello: Effective Email Subject Lines for Survey Invitations


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You had me at Hello: Effective Email Subject Lines for Survey Invitations

Did we get your attention? We hope so. We are Carla Hillerns and Pei-Pei Lei – survey enthusiasts at the [Office of Survey Research](#) at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

An email subject line can be a powerful first impression of an online survey. It has the potential to convince someone to open your email and take your survey. Or it can be dismissed as unimportant or irrelevant. Today’s post offers ideas for creating subject lines that maximize email open rates and survey completion rates.

Hot Tips:

- **Make it compelling** – Include persuasive phrasing suited for your target recipients, such as “make your opinion count” and “brief survey.” Research in the marketing world shows that words that convey importance, like “urgent,” can lead to higher open rates.
- **Be clear** – Use words that are specific and recognizable to recipients. Mention elements of the study name if they will resonate with respondents but beware of cryptic study names – just because you know what it means doesn’t mean that they will.
- **Keep it short** – Many email systems, particularly on mobile devices, display a limited number of characters in the subject line. So don’t exceed 50 characters.
- **Mix it up** – Vary your subject line if you are sending multiple emails to the same recipient.
- **Avoid words like “Free Gift”** (even if you offer one) – Certain words may cause your email to be labeled as spam.
- **Test it** – Get feedback from stakeholders before you finalize the subject line. To go one step further, consider randomly assigning different subject lines to pilot groups to see if there’s a difference in open rates or survey completion rates.

Cool Trick:

- **Personalization** – Some survey software systems allow you to merge customized/personalized information into the subject line, such as “Rate your experience with [Medical Practice Name].”

Lesson Learned:

- **Plan ahead for compliance** – Make sure that any recruitment materials and procedures follow applicable regulations and receive Institutional Review Board approval if necessary.

Rad Resource:

- This [link](#) provides a list of spam trigger words to avoid.

We’re interested in your suggestions. Please leave a comment if you have a subject line idea that you’d like to share.