THE DECISION SEQUENCE

MARKETING BUILT AROUND HOW PEOPLE DECIDE

Your follow-up is becoming noise

How to follow up

Why a scarcity claim that repeats without escalating reads as technique

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Why repetitive scarcity claims without escalation read as technique

Gates. Relevance: no. Credibility: secondary. Proof: no. **Safety: primary.** Access: secondary.

Scarcity escalates. It never oscillates. The same limited-capacity line in March, June and September teaches the reader that the constraint is a writing device.

The symptom

March. Limited capacity for new engagements this year, so let's talk soon.

June. The same note. Not a similar note, the same one, near enough word for word that a recipient with a search bar could prove it.

September. Again.

Nothing about the constraint ever resolved in between. No slot filled, no start date moved out, no message anywhere in the run where the firm said the room had finally closed. The number of available engagements was apparently the same in the fall as it had been in the spring, which is either a remarkable coincidence or the tell.

Nobody inside the firm caught it, and nobody was being careless. Each of those emails was written on its own, approved on its own, and read perfectly well on the day it went out. The only person who ever saw all three together was the prospect.

Why it keeps happening

Campaigns get planned one at a time. A message is drafted for a moment, reviewed against that moment, and judged by what it did that week. Held up alone, it's a defensible email. That's how it clears.

What nobody does is read the sequence the way the recipient eventually will, which is all at once, in order, at the moment they're deciding whether this firm is worth trusting with something that matters.

The failure in that capacity run was more specific than a constraint that never resolved. An exclusivity claim showed up early, in the first or second touch, and then nothing that followed demonstrated any selectivity at all. No engagement declined. No fit criteria. No sense that anyone had ever been told no. The eight messages that followed convicted the early claim retroactively, because none of them behaved like they came from a firm with a waiting list.

Most outbound is drafted by a model now, which is a decent explanation for why so much of it arrives with the same finish. The recipient has the same tools open on the other side of the screen and recognizes the texture somewhere around the second line.

We've written the second one. Not the first, which was true when it went out, and not the third, which somebody else queued. The second one, where the constraint got restated because restating it had worked, and nobody in the approval chain had the earlier email open beside it.

What the buyer is doing at the Safety gate

Keeping score. Nobody asked them to, and the firm has no idea it's happening.

Catching someone in a lie takes work. Noticing that a claim never moved takes none. A constraint that never resolves stops reading as a fact about the firm's calendar and starts reading as technique, and technique is contagious backward. Once one message lands that way, the reader re-reads the earlier ones with the new information, and the warm paragraph from four months ago gets reclassified along with everything else.

What they're weighing at this gate is whether this is a firm they could defend having chosen. That question gets answered by small things, and consistency across a sequence is one of the smallest and most reliable. A firm whose claims don't survive being lined up in order is a firm that costs something to sponsor internally, because the person sponsoring you has to hope nobody else ever lines them up.

You may never hear about it. There's no reply that says the September email retired you. The sequence just stops producing anything and the firm concludes the list is tired.

The correction

Pick one named prospect who's been in the sequence a while. Pull every message sent to that person over the last eighteen months, in order, into one document.

Now mark every scarcity claim, every deadline, every reference to capacity, every line implying selectivity or a closing window. Read the marked lines in one sitting, in sequence, with the dates visible.

Three things come out. Anything that repeats without escalating, because the repetition is what converts a fact into a device. Anything you can't verify today with a name, a date, or a calendar. Anything the firm has never once acted on, which includes every exclusivity claim never followed by evidence of a no.

What survives has to move in one direction. Four openings becomes two becomes one becomes closed. The story either advances or it isn't a story.

Then set the standing rule for what replaces the cut lines. Every touch earns its place by adding context, insight, evidence, or something the recipient can use whether or not they ever hire you. A five-touch sequence has room to do real work: recognition of the issue, then what the issue implies if it goes unaddressed, then proof chosen to fit their situation, then a practical resource, then a close that leaves the door open without pretending it's about to shut.

Urgency language is authorized in exactly one place. At the point of commitment, where a real decision is in front of a real person, and only when it's true.

That's the whole allowance. One place in the sequence, and it has to survive being checked.

Before and after

Before. *(March) We have limited capacity for new client engagements this year.*

(June) We have limited capacity for new client engagements this year.

(September) Our capacity for new engagements remains limited.

After. *(March) We're taking on four new engagements this year. Two are committed.*

(June) The third started in May. One left before we're scheduling into next year.

(September) The last one went two weeks ago. Next opening is January, and I'd rather tell you that now than in December when you're planning around it.

What it costs

A lever. The firm gives up urgency as a tool it can reach for whenever a quarter looks thin, and that's a real loss to whoever has to fill the quarter. What it buys back is the ability to use urgency once, at the moment the thing is true, and be believed when it does.

Run this on your own material

Pull the last six emails you sent to one named prospect. Not a template library, not the campaign calendar. The six actual messages that landed in one human being's inbox, in the order they arrived.

Read them start to finish in one sitting, the way that person never intended to and eventually will.

Watch for the claim that appears twice at the same volume. Watch for the paragraph that exists so the email had a reason to be sent. Watch for anything you'd have to walk back if they asked you a direct question about it on a call next Tuesday.

Do this before the next sequence launches. It takes twenty minutes and it's cheaper than finding out in the silence.

Signals you've cleared it

Advance when the buyer refers to something you sent months earlier without being prompted, or asks about a constraint by name. Someone asking whether the January start is still open has told you they believed the September email. That's the whole test.

Hold when the only thing moving across the sequence is the calendar. Hold when a message's real purpose is to create a reason to appear in the inbox again. Hold when you find a claim already sent that you couldn't verify today if the recipient forwarded it back and asked. That one's already out there, and the next email is where it either resolves or hardens.

Where this connects

Story from the Field · *The Man Who Understood the Customer*, on giving before asking.

Research Library · Entry 07, on small commitments and why manufactured ones backfire.

Next move · Go to *How to keep one frame across a sequence*.