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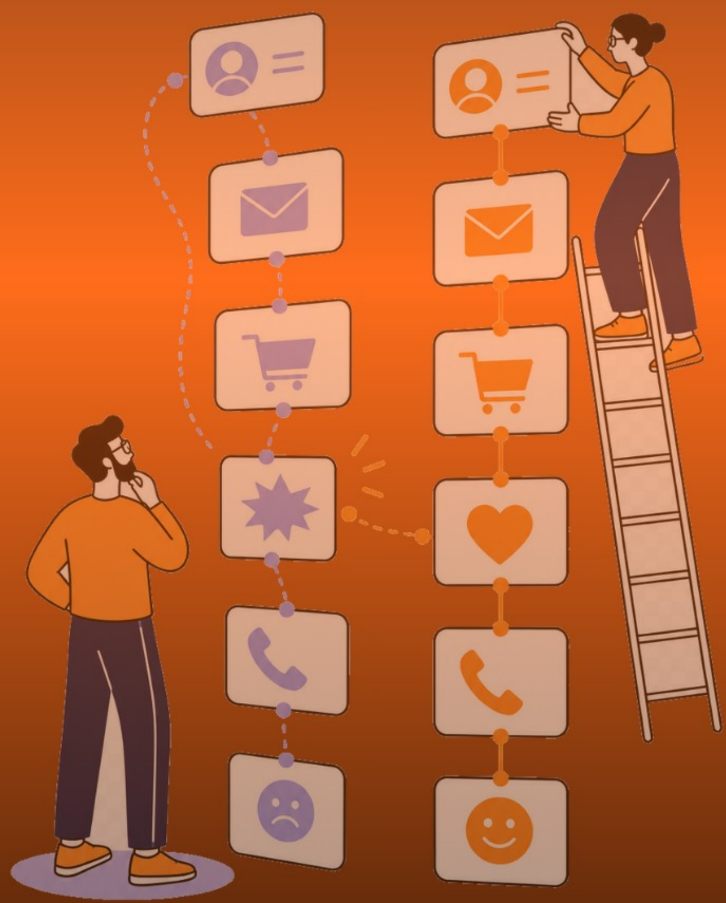
Your sequence changed its story

How to keep one frame across a sequence



What it costs when the loss argument becomes a gain argument halfway through

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How to keep one frame across a sequence

What it costs when the loss argument becomes a gain argument halfway through

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

A sequence carries one frame. Pick loss or gain at the brief and hold it to the last touch, because a firm that argues both ways has told the buyer it hasn't settled what the problem is.

The symptom

The first email warns about what it costs to leave this alone another year. The fourth one opens with what becomes possible once it's working.

Both are true. Both were approved by the same people in the same review, and nobody flagged either one, because there's nothing in either one to flag.

The recipient reads them nine days apart. What they come away with is that the firm has an opinion about something and no clear way to say what. Is the situation dangerous, or is it promising? Those point to different diagnoses, different urgency, and different kinds of firm.

Reviews happen asset by asset. Each email gets read against the brand guide, the offer, and the call to action. Nothing in that review asks the one question that would have caught it, which is what the last three emails said.

Why it keeps happening

The switch feels like range.

A firm that only talks about risk starts to sound gloomy... so somebody adds the upside piece to balance it out. That instinct is sound. Nobody wants to be the practice that only shows up carrying bad news. The trouble is where the balancing happens: at the asset, because the asset is what gets reviewed, rather than at the sequence, because nobody owns the sequence.

I've written that balancing piece. For good reasons, at the request of people who were right that the tone had gotten heavy, into the middle of a sequence that was working. We fixed the temperature of one email and broke the argument of six.

Here's the part that makes it expensive. Once a frame is set early, switching it later forces the reader to rebuild the mental model they'd already started building. Ask a reader to do that and they'll form a conclusion about why they had to. Usually it's that the firm hasn't decided what it believes, or that somebody is trying angles until one works. First framing has a long reach because it decides which mental label the firm gets, and every later touchpoint gets interpreted through that label instead of judged on its own.

What the buyer is doing at the Credibility gate

Working out whether these people understand the problem well enough to be taken seriously.

Frame inconsistency answers that question badly without ever stating anything false. Every claim in the sequence would survive a fact check. What doesn't survive is the impression that the firm holds a settled view of what's wrong, which is the one thing a buyer would be hiring them to have.

The compounding runs in both directions, and that's the part worth sitting with. Reinforce the frame and each contact is worth more than the last, because the reader is adding to a model rather than starting one. Contradict it and you're spending money to create confusion. That's how a firm increases spend, output and channel coverage and goes backwards, with every dashboard reporting more of everything.

The sorting systems buyers increasingly ask do something similar. Consistency of positioning across a firm's own material is one of the things they weigh, and a sequence that argues two ways averages into neither.

The correction

Pick the frame at the sequence brief. One line at the top, loss or gain, in plain words. Then require every touch to be checkable against that line before it ships. Four seconds per email, and it's the entire control.

The selection rule is about the buyer's condition, not the firm's mood that quarter.

Loss framing fits a buyer already carrying a problem they haven't named. Something is costing them and they've been absorbing it as the way things are. The work is naming it.

Gain framing fits a buyer whose situation is fine. Nothing is on fire. They're deciding whether to reach for something, and a warning about a problem they don't have reads as a firm inventing a fire so it can sell an extinguisher.

Both are legitimate. Neither one is the correct answer in general.

Most firms are repairing rather than building, so here's the procedure for a sequence already in market. Read all of it in order, start to finish, in one sitting. Find the touch where the frame turns. Then rewrite forward from there.

Forward, for two reasons. The touches that already went out can't be recalled, and the frame the reader is holding is the early one. And the turn almost always came from the piece that was added later to fix something, which means rewriting backward would preserve the accident and discard the argument.

Before and after

Before. *Touch one: what another year of this costs you. Touch three: the growth firms your size are seeing right now. Touch five: how far behind a year of waiting puts you.*

After. *Touch one: what another year of this costs you. Touch three: where that cost shows up first, and who notices it. Touch five: what it looks like by the time it reaches the board.*

Nothing in the before is wrong. Touch three would win an award on its own.

When this doesn't apply

A different sequence to a different segment can carry a different frame, and it should when the segment is in a different condition. This governs one sequence to one audience, not a firm's entire body of work. A buyer who has named the problem and acted on it has changed state, and the next sequence they receive can be built on gain without contradicting a word of the one before it.

A single reply to an inbound question isn't a sequence and doesn't owe the frame anything.

Run this on your own material

Print the subject lines and opening sentences of the sequence you're running right now. In order, on paper.

Mark each one L or G in the margin. Don't deliberate. Any line you'd argue about for thirty seconds is already a problem, because your reader gives it a fraction of that.

Then look at the column. A clean run of one letter is what you're after. A block of L followed by a block of G shows you exactly where somebody added the balancing piece. Letters alternating all the way down means nobody owns the sequence at all.

Ten minutes, and you can do it before the next send goes out.

Signals you've cleared it

Advance when replies start using your framing back at you. When someone forwards touch four to a colleague and the colleague's question is about the same problem touch one raised. When a first call opens with the buyer describing their own situation in the terms you set.

Hold when you can't mark your own sequence without rereading it. Hold when a touch gets defended on the grounds that it's a strong piece of content, which defends the asset and says nothing about its place in the sequence. Hold when the answer to which frame is this comes back as both, or as it depends on the reader.

Where this connects

Story from the Field · *The Four Words That Defined a Good Mother*, on what a firm trades away when it changes the frame.

Research Library · Entry 03, prospect theory and loss aversion. Entry 02, heuristics and cognitive biases.

Next move · Go to *How to connect one email to the last*.