THE DECISION SEQUENCE

MARKETING BUILT AROUND HOW PEOPLE DECIDE

The whole list is the wrong audience

How to sequence outreach

Why sending to the whole list gets you the segment least able to act

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How to sequence outreach

Why trying to engage the whole list gets you the segment least able to act

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

Six to ten Anchor Clients go first, and they go without proof. Hand one of them a peer case study and you've told them they're late.

The symptom

The campaign went to the full list. Same message, same week, everyone who could plausibly buy.

Replies came back. Not many, and all from the same kind of place: mid-level, careful, genuinely interested, and about four approvals away from being able to change anything. The people who could have moved on it inside a week said nothing at all.

So the follow-up gets built for the people who answered. Longer deck, more proof, more documentation, because that's what they asked for. Six weeks later the pipeline is full of accounts that need committee consensus and empty of the ones that don't.

Almost nobody reads this as a sequencing failure. It gets read as a list problem, or a message problem, or a market that turned out slower than expected.

Why it keeps happening

Because the list was sorted by who could buy rather than by who was ready, and a CRM has fields for the first one.

Industry, revenue, headcount, title, region, last touch. Every one of those is a fit attribute, every one of them is sitting in a record somewhere, and none of them say where a prospect sits on the adoption curve. Readiness isn't a field. So the segment gets assembled out of whatever the database happens to hold, the sequence gets built for the segment, and the whole exercise looks rigorous right up until it launches.

There's a second inversion underneath it, and that one does the real damage. The order runs profile first, segment second, personalize third. Build the persona and understand how the person thinks. Then place them in the adoption sequence, which is where receptiveness lives. Then use the persona to write the message.

Most firms start at step two. They sort prospects into segments before understanding who any of them are, which produces timing without insight, and timing without insight produces outreach that arrives on schedule and lands on nobody.

What the buyer is doing at the Access gate

Deciding whether this is worth a conversation right now. That's a question about their calendar and their pain, and it has very little to do with how good your firm is.

Show up where it hurts. The decisive ground is wherever the customer is suffering, and you have to get there first, providing the solution, while asking for nothing. Give before you ask. My own version of it: every B2B buyer bonks. Somewhere around mile twenty-one of whatever they're carrying, and the firm that arrives at that moment with something useful and no invoice attached has done the one thing a skeptic can't argue with. Value given freely is proof of intent and competence. A capabilities deck is proof of a capabilities deck.

Access is also the one gate a sorting model has no opinion about, because it belongs to the conversation rather than to the record. Machines assemble the consideration set. The buyer's stakeholders still pick the winner, in a room, on a schedule that belongs to them. Machine visibility is a ticket into that room rather than a result, and sequencing is the part of execution that stayed human.

The correction

Open a blank page and name the Anchors. Six to ten, by name, person and account. If that page takes longer than an afternoon, you don't know the market well enough to be running sequences in it.

Anchors go first because they don't require anyone's permission and no social proof at all. Alpha competitors, often self-made, motivated by winning, exclusivity, strategic advantage, and the decision runs on *I trust my gut*. Their commitment is what creates the credibility foundation that activates everybody behind them. So build one sequence for those six to ten that leads with problem framing and the unresolved question. Frame it as a partnership with exclusive advantages, preferred access, direct senior involvement. Hold the proof material back, and don't lead with results or service terms.

Everyone else waits until the Anchors move, because everyone else is waiting on them anyway.

Archetype Influencers, the Innovators, second. Intellectual competitors whose reputation depends on being right. Give them the technical validation and the narrative that makes early selection a reputational win.

Archetype Influencers, the Early Adopters, third. Sophisticated, and still needing proof of concept from respected first movers. Anchor traction is that proof.

Early Mainstream, fourth. *I need to make defensible, smart choices.* Committee consensus and documentation, led by social proof from the Anchors and the Influencers.

Late Mainstream, fifth. *I cannot afford to be wrong.* Strip every word about innovation and disruption out of the message. Lead with consensus and the number of respected peers who already committed.

Laggards. Identify them early, allocate minimally, don't pursue them.

Then build the second sequence, the Early Mainstream one, and pay attention to what you're doing while you build it. It's the same evidence in a different order.

Before and after

Before. To the full list, week one: *Join 200+ firms already using our platform. See how peer organizations cut onboarding time by 30%. Download the buyer's guide.*

After. To ten named Anchors, week one: *Nobody has solved the escalation problem your operations group keeps absorbing, and the standard answers stop holding somewhere in the second quarter. Here's the work we've done on it so far. I'd like your read on where it's wrong. Three firms, and we're not selling anything at this stage.*

Run this on your own material

Pull up the last thing you sent to the whole list. Read it once, and answer one question: which segment was it written for?

Count the social proof. The peer logos, the case studies, the deployment numbers, the words *proven* and *trusted*. If that's most of the message, it was written for Early Mainstream, and Early Mainstream is who will answer... slowly, through a committee, with a request for documentation.

Then write the six to ten names down. Do that before the next send goes out. If you can't produce the names, the sequencing problem sits downstream of a market-knowledge problem, and no amount of subject-line testing reaches it.

Signals you've cleared it

Advance when the first replies come from people who can commit without convening anyone. When an Anchor asks about the problem instead of asking for your references. When someone forwards your framing to a peer before you've asked them to, which is the Anchor commitment starting to do its work, and it's what opens the segment behind it.

Hold when the strongest interest is coming from accounts that need consensus to move. That's the Early Mainstream sequence firing early, and adding proof to it accelerates the segment you can't close yet while telling the Anchors they arrived after everyone else. Hold too when you're personalizing messages to people you haven't profiled. That's decoration applied to a guess.

Where this connects

Story from the Field · *The Man Who Understood the Customer*, on arriving at mile twenty-one with something useful.

Research Library · Entry 07, on small commitments. Entry 13, on how buyers move and how touchpoints get sequenced.

Next move · Go to *How to approach the buyer who decides first*.