

CHECKLIST · FREE RESOURCE

COLD EMAIL CHECKLIST

*B2B outreach that lands in the inbox, gets read and gets replies,
GDPR included*

Cold email checklist

Cold email in 2026 is harder than it was and better than its reputation. Google, Microsoft and Yahoo now enforce authentication and complaint limits; one careless campaign can burn a domain for months. At the same time, inboxes are so full of obvious automation that a short, specific, human email stands out more than ever. Reply rates of 5 to 10 % on well-built B2B lists are normal in our own outreach; 1 % is what you get from blasting.

This checklist covers the whole chain: the domain setup that keeps you out of spam, the list that is actually legal to email in the EU, the email itself, the follow-ups and the measurement. It is written for small teams selling to other businesses in Europe. If you sell to consumers, stop here: cold email to private individuals is not allowed under GDPR and the ePrivacy rules, and no checklist changes that.

Work through it in order. The technical part is boring and non-negotiable. The writing part is where most people over-think and under-test.

What is inside

1. Domain and deliverability
2. The list (and the law)
3. The email
4. Follow-ups
5. Measure and improve
6. What to do first

Domain and deliverability

If this section is not done, nothing below it matters. Your emails are being filtered before anyone sees them.

- ☐ **Outreach runs from a separate domain, not your main one**
→ `firstname@getmaisonmint.eu` style. If it gets burned, the company inbox survives.
- ☐ **SPF, DKIM and DMARC are set up and pass on that domain**
→ Send a test to a free checker such as mail-tester.com and fix anything red. DMARC policy at least `p=quarantine`.
- ☐ **The domain was warmed for 2 to 4 weeks before any campaign**
→ Low daily volume, real replies, gradual ramp. Most sending tools include a warm-up feature; use it.
- ☐ **Daily volume per mailbox stays under 30 to 50 emails**
→ More mailboxes, not more volume per mailbox.
- ☐ **Spam complaint rate stays below 0.1 % (Google's hard limit is 0.3 %)**
→ Check Google Postmaster Tools weekly. One bad campaign can get a domain blocked.
- ☐ **Every email has a one-click way to say no**
→ A plain line like Reply stop and I will not write again is fine for B2B. It is also what keeps complaint rates near zero.
- ☐ **Emails are plain text or near-plain, no tracking pixels in the first touch, at most one link**
→ Heavy HTML, images and multiple links are the classic spam signals.
- ☐ **Bounces are removed automatically and the list is verified before sending**
→ A hard-bounce rate above 2 % hurts the domain. Verify with a tool; a cheap one is enough.

The list (and the law)

In the EU, who you email is a legal question before it is a marketing one. Legitimate interest covers B2B outreach when it is relevant, proportionate and easy to refuse. That means a tight list, not a big one.

- ☐ **Every contact is a business role with a plausible professional interest in what you sell**
→ Marketing manager at an e-commerce company, yes. Random employee scraped from LinkedIn, no.
- ☐ **The list is 50 to 200 people per segment, built by hand or by a strict filter, not a 5,000-row export**
→ Small lists get personalised. Personalised gets replies.
- ☐ **You can state the legitimate interest in one sentence, and it is in your privacy notice**
→ We contact marketing decision-makers at companies in sectors we serve, about services relevant to their role.
- ☐ **Opt-outs are logged and honoured across every tool, forever**
→ A suppression list in the sending tool and in the CRM.
- ☐ **Data stays in the EU or under an adequacy arrangement, and the processing is recorded**
→ Check where your sending tool stores data. A line in the records of processing is enough.
- ☐ **No private email addresses, no consumer contacts, no purchased lists of unknown origin**
→ All three are how companies end up with a data protection complaint.
- ☐ **Each contact has at least one specific, true fact you can reference**
→ A recent post, a job change, a product launch, a hiring page. If you have nothing specific, they do not belong on this list yet.

The email

Under 80 words. One idea. One question. Written like a person who respects the reader's time.

- ☐ **Subject line is 2 to 5 words, lower case or sentence case, no clickbait**
 - quick question about [topic], [their company] + [your thing], saw your post on X. Boring wins.
- ☐ **First line is about them, not you, and could not be sent to anyone else**
 - If you could swap the name and send it to another company, it is not personalised.
- ☐ **Second line names the problem you suspect they have, specifically**
 - From the outside: noticed your Meta ads all send to the homepage, or your site is not showing in AI search results for [query].
- ☐ **Third line is what you do about it, with one proof point**
 - One number, one named outcome (anonymised if needed). Not a paragraph of services.
- ☐ **The ask is low-effort and specific**
 - Worth a 15-minute look? beats Can we schedule a call to discuss synergies? every time.
- ☐ **No attachments, no calendar links in the first email, no more than one link**
 - Earn the link in the reply.
- ☐ **Signature is short: name, role, company, city, one line of why you are credible**
 - No banners, no social icons, no legal paragraphs.
- ☐ **Reads naturally out loud and contains nothing an AI would write**
 - Delete every I hope this finds you well, I wanted to reach out, leverage, synergy and unlock. Short words, real sentences.

Follow-ups

Most replies come from the second or third email. Most spam complaints come from the sixth.

- ☐ **Sequence is 3 to 4 emails over 2 to 3 weeks, then stop**
→ Day 1, day 4, day 9, day 16 is a reasonable rhythm.
- ☐ **Each follow-up adds something new: a case, a relevant article, a different angle on the problem**
→ Just bumping this gets deleted and reported.
- ☐ **Follow-ups are in the same thread so the context is one scroll away**
→ Reply to your own email; do not start a new one.
- ☐ **The last email closes the loop politely and gives an easy out**
→ I will leave it here. If it becomes relevant, you know where I am.
- ☐ **Replies are answered within one working day by a human**
→ Automation gets the reply. A person earns the meeting.
- ☐ **Templates exist for the three reply types: interested, not now, not relevant**
→ Not now gets a date to come back; not relevant gets a thank-you and a suppression.

Measure and improve

Cold email is a numbers game only if you track the numbers. Open rate is no longer reliable; look at replies and meetings.

- ☐ **Reply rate and positive reply rate are tracked per segment and per template**
→ Target: 5 % replies, 2 % positive, on a well-built list. Below 2 % replies, the list or the first line is wrong.
- ☐ **Meetings booked and deals won are tracked back to the campaign in the CRM**
→ The only numbers that matter at the end of the quarter.
- ☐ **One variable is tested at a time: subject line, first line, ask**
→ Fifty emails per variant minimum before deciding.
- ☐ **Bounce and complaint rates are reviewed weekly**
→ The health of the domain is the health of the channel.
- ☐ **Winning emails are saved as templates with their numbers**
→ A library of what worked is the real asset after six months.

What to do first

Set up a separate domain with SPF, DKIM and DMARC, warm it for three weeks, and meanwhile build one list of 50 people you can say something specific to. Write one 70-word email and three follow-ups. Send. Read every reply. Adjust. That is the whole method; the checklist just keeps you honest.

We run B2B email programmes for clients who want the pipeline without building the machine. Our own cold outreach is how most of our international clients found us. Book a free 30 minutes at mintagency.eu/contact if you want to talk it through.

Book a free 30 minutes

Written by Sarah Johanna Ferara and the Maison Mint team, Tallinn. Figures marked as our own data come from client accounts we manage and are illustrative. Free to share; please link to mintagency.eu/resources when you do. © Mintagency OÜ 2026.