

PLAYBOOK

High-End Specialty Ecommerce

Handshake Outreach email sequence, adapted.

Four messages, one sequence. Mail-merge ready.

ADAPTATION 11

Category notes

This is the only category in the document where the visitor probably did look at a specific product, not just a category. NN/g research on luxury shoppers identifies a Discover → Consider → Purchase → Use journey, with the Consider phase often lasting weeks or months on big-ticket items. Cart abandonment in luxury is documented at around 82%, the highest of any ecommerce vertical. The temptation is to revert to cart-abandonment tropes (urgency, scarcity, discount). Resist. Specialty buyers are buying into a brand and a story, not just a SKU. The Stix golf example in the original brief is a textbook case: relevant emails, but no warmth, no human, no narrative. The fix is to be the brand voice that earns the consideration phase.

Insider terms vary by sub-vertical, but generally: SKU, lifetime warranty / repair-for-life programs, sustainable sourcing / provenance, made-to-order vs. in-stock, capsule collections / drops, atelier or workshop tours, white-glove delivery, return windows on bespoke vs. stock items, founder-led brands, direct-to-consumer (DTC). Critical: this adaptation can name the category the visitor browsed (e.g., “golf clubs,” “saddle leather goods,” “high-end audio”) but should not name the specific SKU — that crosses into creep territory.

MESSAGE 1 OF 4 / SEND WITHIN 4-24 HOURS

Message 1: The Honest Hello

Acknowledge the cold contact. Sound like a human, not a brand. Give one useful insight.

Subject: A note from [First Name], founder of [Brand]

Hi –

You stopped by [Brand]'s site recently looking at [category]. You didn't sign up. People who buy what we make don't usually decide quickly – the consideration phase on a [category] purchase often runs months – and I want to respect your pace.

I'm [Name], [founder/role] at [Brand]. I'm writing because I'd rather introduce myself once than appear in your inbox as a brand template. The thing I'd want to know first if I were in your position: how are these actually made, and where, and by whom?

The short answer for us is [2-3 sentences – the workshop, the people, the materials, the why]. Not the polished marketing version. The actual version. [Founder-voice, specific, slightly imperfect.]

I'll send two more short notes over the next couple of weeks – one about the part of [category] selection that catalogs don't capture, and one about a customer whose story I think you'd find useful. They're not promotions. Easy unsubscribe.

– [Name]

Founder, [Brand]

[Direct reply-to]

MESSAGE 2 OF 4 / SEND 3-4 DAYS LATER

Message 2: The Inside Knowledge

The costly signal: tell them what the catalog photos hide — honestly.

Subject: The thing the catalog photos don't tell you

[Name],

Following up. The hardest part of choosing in [category] online is that the things that decide whether you'll love it three years from now don't photograph well.

On a [category item], the photographable parts — [list 2-3 surface aesthetics] — are where most brands compete. The unphotographable parts are where the difference shows up over time. [3-5 sentences of substantive, specific, expert content. Examples: how the leather patinas, where the stitching wears first, what kind of repair is and isn't possible at year five, which specs in the marketing copy don't matter and which ones do. Include at least one piece of advice that applies whether or not the reader buys from you.]

Here's the part I'd tell my own brother. [One specific piece of advice that points away from your most expensive option — “if you're a beginner, the [entry-level item] is honestly enough; the [premium item] is for people who've worn out an entry-level one” or similar.]

If you want to see what the actual production process looks like, [link to a workshop video, factory tour, or how-it's-made page]. No form, no email gate. It's just there.

— [Name]

MESSAGE 3 OF 4 / SEND 5-7 DAYS LATER

Message 3: The Story

One real customer who waited two years. Not all sales should happen fast.

Subject: The customer who waited two years to buy

[Name],

Wanted to share a story.

About four years ago a guy I'll call David started reading our newsletter. He'd been following [Brand] on Instagram, came to the site a few times, almost ordered, didn't. He sent us a question by email about [a specific specs/sourcing question]. We answered it. He went quiet for a year. Then asked another question. Quiet for another year.

He finally bought – the [specific product line] – about two years after his first visit to the site. We knew because his order email matched the questions email. I called him after the order shipped, mostly out of curiosity, and asked what made him finally pull the trigger.

His answer surprised me. It wasn't a sale. It wasn't a new model. It was that he'd been waiting until [a specific personal milestone – a job change, a 50th birthday, paying off a loan]. He'd known he wanted it for two years. He just hadn't given himself permission to buy it. The question for him was never whether the product was right – it was whether he was ready.

I'm sharing this because most ecommerce email is built around the assumption that the obstacle to purchase is the product. For the kind of customer [Brand] tends to attract, the obstacle is usually personal – timing, milestone, life stage – and no amount of discounting changes that. What changes it is patience, and the brand being there when the moment arrives.

Three years later David has bought from us four more times. Each one for a similar moment.

If you have questions about [category], reply to this email. Not a chatbot – my actual inbox. I'll send one more note and then leave you alone.

– [Name]

MESSAGE 4 OF 4 / SEND 5-7 DAYS LATER

Message 4: The Clean Close

Three options. The exit is graceful. The questions are theirs to use — with anyone.

Subject: Last note from me

[Name],

Last email unless you want to stay in touch. Three options:

If you're ready to buy: Reply with the question that's still in the way and I'll answer it personally. If you'd rather just go ahead, [direct link]. We ship within [X days], every order ships with [whatever proof-of-craft signal you use — hand-signed card, repair-for-life pamphlet, etc.], and if it isn't right for you, our return policy is [specific terms in plain language].

If you want to stay in touch: Our once-a-month note is mostly process and people — new pieces in the workshop, behind-the-scenes from the team, occasional customer stories. Two or three sales a year, not weekly. [link] to subscribe.

If [Brand] isn't right for you: Whatever you end up buying, three things separate good [category] from great [category]: (1) repair-for-life or genuine repair programs, not just “limited warranty,” (2) provenance and people — if you can name the workshop and the makers, you're buying something with a story; if you can't, you're buying brand marketing, (3) the second-hand market — if your piece holds value when you're done with it, the original price was real value; if not, you paid for the logo. Two brands besides us we'd happily recommend in this category: [name 1-2 actual competitors with similar values].

Either way, thanks for spending time with [Brand].

— [Name]

Founder, [Brand]

How to ship this

- **Replace the brackets.** [Brand], [Name], [role], [link], [product category] — every placeholder filled, nothing left in template form.
- **Pick a real founder or product lead as the sender.** Not a customer service rep. Use a real direct reply-to from the actual person.
- **Render the body as plain text.** HTML email part, slightly large font (~16-17px), warmer-than-white background. Looks typed. Reads typed. People scan plain text differently.
- **Mind the cadence.** Message 1 within 4-24 hours. Message 2 at day 3-4. Message 3 at day 8-11. Message 4 at day 13-18. Then stop.
- **Honor the promise.** If you said “last email,” it's the last email. Reactance kills the relationship faster than silence.