



SELLING SUNSETS

The Language of Travel

Top Tips for Better Emails in Travel & Tourism

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RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

This report has been compiled as part of an Everlytic and BreadCrumbs Linguistics research partnership.

Everlytic is South Africa's largest digital messaging platform, responsible for billions of communication sends every year from the top companies in the country. Everlytic offers the tools to communicate through bulk email, SMS, voice broadcasting, and web push notifications – with data tracking and analytics insights to boost engagement success.

BreadCrumbs Linguistics is an award-winning behavioural communications firm based in South Africa that uses a science-backed approach to communication. BreadCrumbs designs marketing and communication campaigns aligned to behavioural best practice and publishes research papers across topics of communication and behavioural theory.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When it comes to travel and tourism, **it seems we're making up for time lost** during the Covid-19 pandemic. Postponed special occasions, forbidden family reunions, and a lack of agency to explore the world has resulted in many people – globally – turning to travel as a physical demonstration of our return-to-normal.

This has meant a focus on marketing communication for travel brands – and even organisations outside of the travel industry hoping to leverage this **rise in travel interest and expenditure**.

A dominant channel for communicating travel messaging continues to be through email marketing as a way for brands to build trust, boost a sense of adventure, and **ultimately nudge travel bookings**.

This research summary highlights the top **20 travel- and tourism-themed emails** sent from South African brands through the Everlytic platform in 2022. The data was pulled from **3 915 225 990 bulk emails** that clients sent during the year, excluding emails with fewer than 100 recipients. Email ranking was done according to key engagement metrics, including open rates and click-through rates.

As part of the dataset, **10 organisations** accounted for the top 20 emails sent, taken from a client database of **1 015 organisations** including companies directly involved with travel and tourism as their key business function as well as other brands who were promoting themes of travel in their communications.

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2022

TWENTY
TWENTY TWO

3.9 BILLION



BULK EMAILS



1 015 ORGANISATIONS

10 BRANDS



TOP
20
HOSPITALITY,
TRAVEL & TOURISM
MAILERS



HERE'S WHAT WE FOUND

Top 10 Insights

1. The most successful travel mailers were **sent mid-morning right at the beginning of the week**. The best months for travel email engagement were **February and October**.
2. Reference to **rewards and discounts** boosted consumer engagement, particularly where these were **framed as “exclusive”** to customers on loyalty programmes.
3. Language of **urgency**, where consumers feel they **need to act quickly** to secure a deal or special offer, drove better click-through engagement rates.
4. Power of **free**, with reference to **freebies, extra perks and complimentary add-ons** got higher engagement.
5. Subject lines using **imperatives (exclamation marks)** got the highest open rates.
6. Visual language using non-people-based imagery (**including wildlife, sunsets, ocean views, and greenery**) increased interest and engagement.
7. **No emojis were used** in any of the top-performing mailers – across both subject line and body copy.
8. Linguistic tools like **alliteration and superlative adjectives (best, greatest, perfect)** made brand writing more persuasive and boosted engagement.
9. Trends with price references included **placing the price point below** the mailer visuals (making the offer seem cheaper), framing discounts using **“up to” percentages** and presenting offers where the **original cost is struck through (R4 999)** to emphasise the lower cost.
10. Travel sales communications that offered multiple destination options – **but with a single call-to-action button (normally “book now”)** – got the highest engagement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this report, we analysed the 20 best-performing emails sent in the travel and tourism industry – including mailers that included travel-related keywords – in South Africa in 2022.

Some Key Stats

-  **The 20 best-performing emails were analysed**
-  **made up of 5 529 words**
-  **from a database of 1 015 brands**
-  **with more than 3.9 billion travel-related emails sent in 2022**

Here's What We Looked At

We wanted to see what worked best in this dataset for email engagement on the topic of travel and tourism. For this reason, our focus was on the communication patterns that the top mailers revealed.

Here, email ranking is done according to key engagement metrics, including **open rate and click-through rate** as a percentage of the number of people communicated to.

Best-performing emails are defined as the **highest open rates** through the Everlytic platform.

It is worth noting any email that was sent to fewer than 100 recipients was removed from the data set to ensure statistical significance.

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Open Rate

Email open rate is the percentage of people who open a specific email out of the total number of people who you sent the email to. This is calculated by taking the number of people who open the email and dividing it by the number of emails sent that did not bounce (i.e. failed to reach the recipient). This number is then multiplied by 100 to arrive at the email open rate percentage.



Click-Through Rate

A click-through rate (CTR) for email is the percentage of people who clicked on at least one link in an email message. This is calculated by dividing the total number of people who clicked by the number of delivered emails and multiplying that ratio by 100 to arrive at the email CTR percentage.

TRAVEL AND TOURISM TRENDS



HOSPITALITY, TRAVEL & TOURISM

a trillion-dollar industry

Despite setbacks during the pandemic period, this industry had bounced back to reach record highs across flight, hotel, car rental, and holiday package bookings globally.



DIRECT MARKETING IS CRUCIAL

due to online travel bookings

With the majority of modern travel bookings now happening online, the role of direct marketing has become more important than ever. This is a way for travel brands to build trust, boost a sense of adventure, and ultimately nudge travel bookings.



TRAVEL AND TOURISM ONLINE CONTENT

provides a wealth of access

Prospective travellers have a wealth of access to travel and tourism content online and, through smartphones or computers, they are able to research destinations, package prices, and directly compare options between multiple providers.

For these reasons, brand communication in this space is highly competitive and being able to stand out from competitors is critical.

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Leveraging “Revenge Travel”

A recent theme is that of “revenge travel”. This is where **people are looking to maximise travel opportunities** to make up for the lost time during Covid-19; to treat themselves to adventure after a long period of uncertainty and take the much-anticipated trips we dreamed about during lockdown.

Behaviourally, scarcity effect and fear of missing out (FOMO) play a strong role here. During the pandemic, we did not have access to travel, and even when we did, this was mostly limited travel. As a result, people are wanting to make up for lost time, with travel booking trends reflecting this globally.

This behavioural bias – and others – has been incorporated into much of the marketing communication out there currently, and **we'll now delve into deeper detail about the role of behaviour when it comes to making purchasing decisions.**

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF COMMUNICATION

Behavioural Linguistics is a sub-discipline within the field of Behavioural Economics which looks at the **thought processes that go into our decision-making**. This combines elements of economics and psychology to understand how – and why – people behave the way they do in the real world.

The application for brands is significant. By understanding why people choose to act in the ways they do, marketing materials can leverage these insights to ensure **more targeted and effective communication**.

Add Behavioural Linguistics to Your Marketing Toolkit

Any type of successful business today involves the business of behaviour.



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Language is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to change behaviour using a range of message framing and positioning tools.

The key aim for any type of behavioural communication is:

- 1 Build brand affinity and positive sentiment
- 2 Convince the recipient to adopt a viewpoint
- 3 Drive the desired call to action

“

Behavioural Linguistics is about nudging **responsible action using communication** – with the core belief that language is a **powerful way to change behaviour**

”

This report unpacks the linguistic patterns that appear across the best-performing mailers and correlates with increased email engagement, including the recipient taking the following action:

- a Opening the email and
- b Clicking at least one hyperlink

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF COMMUNICATION

The Following Pillars Make Up a Behavioural Linguistics Analysis

SEMANTICS
words

.....▶ Vocabulary choice and word frequencies.

SYNTAX
grammar

.....▶ Sentence length, tense, and use of grammar.

PHONETICS
sounds

.....▶ Literary and poetic devices like alliteration and assonance.

VISUALS
imagery

.....▶ Fonts, colours, GIFs, icons, and imagery used.

HEURISTICS
biases

.....▶ Mental shortcuts we use to make our decisions.

Each of these elements are taken into consideration as part of this research report, **with notable examples detailed as part of the analysis.**









What Does This Mean for Marketing?

We can tailor brand communication to consider how we make decisions. While some decision-making is irrational, **there are predictable patterns to this** that lets us, as communicators, shape our customers' choice architecture.

This helps to **nudge certain behaviours**: for example, opening a brand's email, clicking through to their website or sales platform, and ultimately purchasing their product or service.

THE RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS

On the following pages, we'll unpack the details of what we found in our analysis.

-  Frequently Used Words
-  Subject Lines
-  Visuals
-  Death of the Emoji
-  Hedonic Language
-  Nudgey Numbers
-  Calls to Action
-  The Importance of Timing

THE RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS



Frequently Used Words

In total, 20 emails made up of 5 529 words were analysed. The most frequently used words from all mailers are shown below. Word frequencies show us a variety of interesting phenomena – highlighting the brands' main themes and objectives.

1	You/your	8	Miles	15	Stay
2	More	9	Pay	16	Rewards
3	Now	10	Access	17	Accommodation
4	Book	11	Details	18	New
5	Get	12	Enjoy	19	Plus
6	Travel	13	Free	20	Greatest
7	Our/we/us	14	Holiday		

For this research, closed-class words (e.g. could, must, a, the, in, of) were edited out (except for pronouns) and the focus was on open-class words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs). **These tend to be more indicative of a brand's overall style and tone and give a clear indication of the focus of the brand's message.**

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THE RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS



Frequently Used Word

Word Analyses Revealed 6 Key Language Themes

1 Loyalty

The language of loyalty was clear across all top-performing mailers. Here, there is reference to loyalty programmes and boosted rewards or incentives through booking the travel experience. There was also reference to “exclusive” deals available for loyal customers with calls to action to upgrade to get access to these offers. This is powerful in motivating customers to make a decision to pick the brand – and is also effective for encouraging longer-term behavioural action and repeat engagement.

Examples in ACTION:

- References to travel rewards currencies
- Reaping the rewards
- Exclusive benefits and rewards
- Unprecedented rewards

2 Exclusivity

A trend across all communication is the correlation between language of connection and boosted email engagement, and this research showed similar results. Connection-building pronouns (our/we/us) help to form a relationship with the recipient and was used throughout. What was noteworthy here was the most commonly used words (ranked #1 in the word frequency list) were the pronouns you/your. These second-person pronouns are highly effective in speaking directly to the reader – bringing them into the story of the content and helping them personally visualise the experience.

Examples in ACTION:

- All that’s needed is YOU
- Your budget
- Your bucket list
- Your next trip

3 Superlative

As part of the travel purchasing decision, customers make various choices: where to go, how long to go for, who to book with, how to get there, etc. As a result of this increasingly competitive landscape, language of hyperbole has become common. Here, superlatives are used. These are adjectives used in comparisons to describe something as being of the highest degree or extreme – the best, the most popular, the favourite. Through this, the behavioural bias of social proofing comes to life. We look to the opinions and behaviours of others to help shape our own, so when the messaging is framed as being endorsed by others, we’re more likely to be persuaded by it.

Examples in ACTION:

- Best cruise deals
- Trip of a lifetime
- Greatest deal ever
- Perfect weekend getaway

THE RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS



Frequently Used Word

Word Analyses Revealed 6 Key Language Themes

4 Ease

As consumers we are inherently lazy and always seek out the path of least resistance. Where brand journeys are slick, sleek, and seamless, we're more likely to be persuaded to follow through with a call to action. Because of this, framing processes as simple, easy, quick, and convenient (as long as this is truthful!) is crucial in nudging behaviour – and these themes carry through in the top-performing mailers.

5 Urgency

When a brand sends a sales mailer, the ultimate outcome is that the recipient clicks through to make a booking. When this is framed as limited in time or number, people feel a sense of urgency and are more likely to perceive the offer as more valuable, and more likely to act quicker to secure it. The language of urgency was key across all travel mailers in the top-performing segment.

6 Free

Anything free is hugely motivating and attractive to us. Even just seeing the word releases large amounts of dopamine in our brain which makes us feel happy and more likely to act quickly. The power of free can also help cue another key behavioural response: reciprocity. This is when the goodwill given to a customer is later returned, often in an amplified way.

Examples in ACTION:

- Quick and easy
- See how easy it is
- Holidays are easy with us
- Make travelling effortless and convenient

Examples in ACTION:

- Book now
- Hurry and book today
- Don't miss out
- Limited time only

Examples in ACTION:

- Eat for free, complimentary meals
- Free excursions
- Join for free
- Free open bar

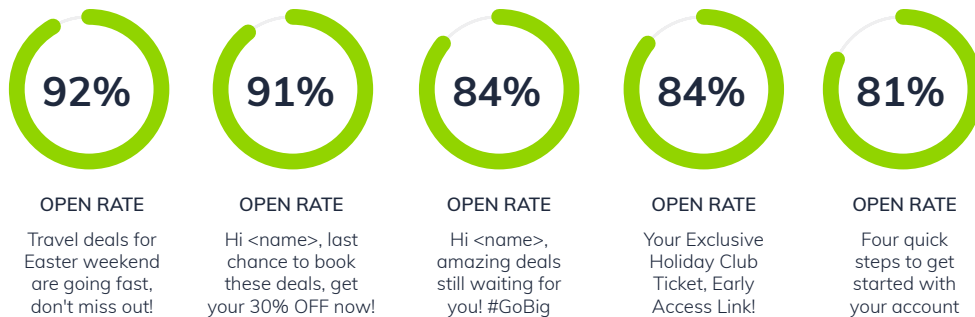
THE RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS

Subject Lines

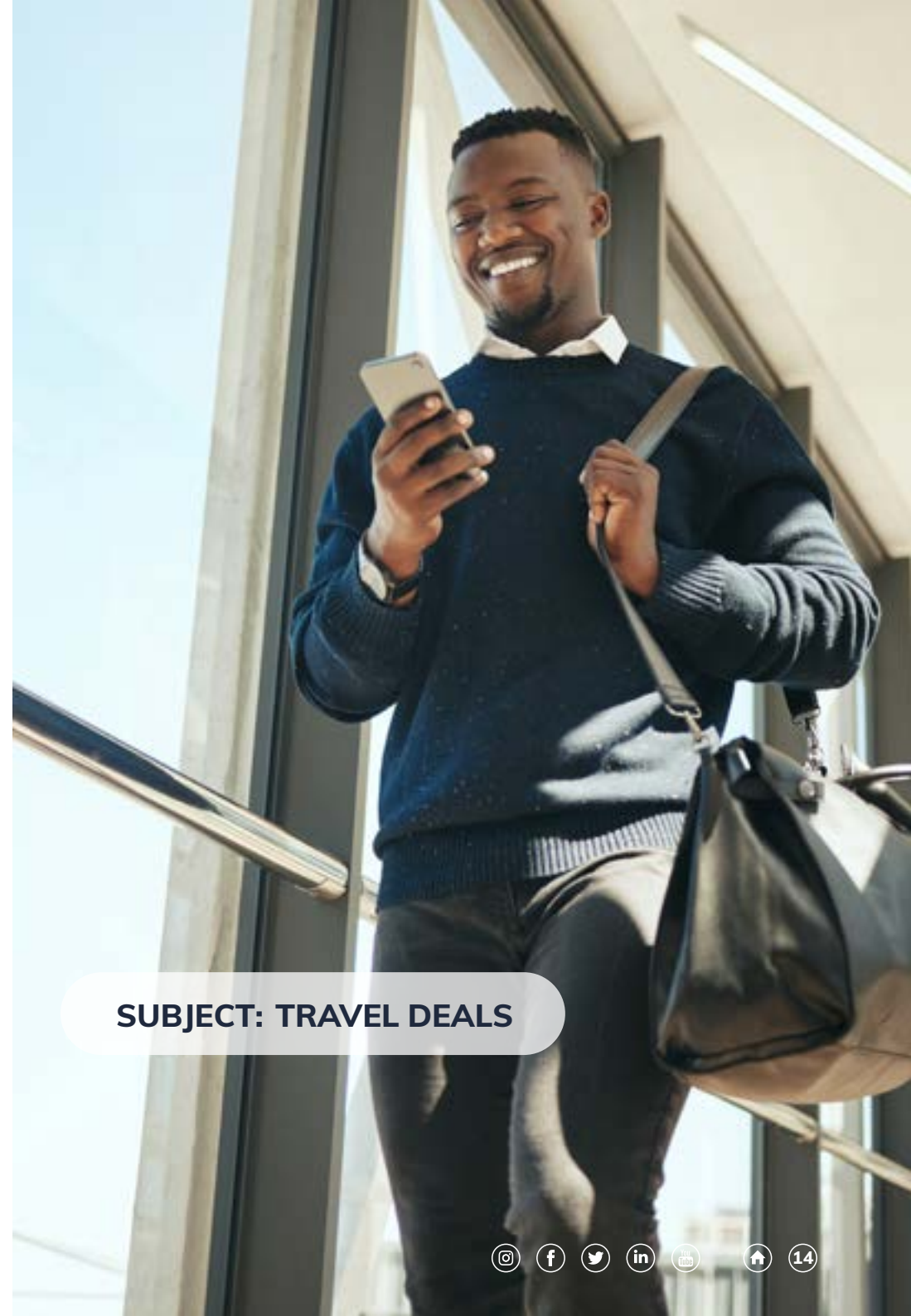
These opening introductions are referred to as “**the champions of email marketing**” and for good reason. We have a few split seconds to grab the attention of our recipients in their often-chaotic email inboxes. **So, crafting clever subject lines that stand out from the crowd is crucial to boost the likelihood of the mailer being opened.**

Considering this, the length of the subject line is particularly important so that it fully displays and doesn't cut off in preview view. **Aim to be short and succinct** so your subject line is in full view even if your reader scans their inbox quickly.

Top 5 Emails Linked to Subject Line Success



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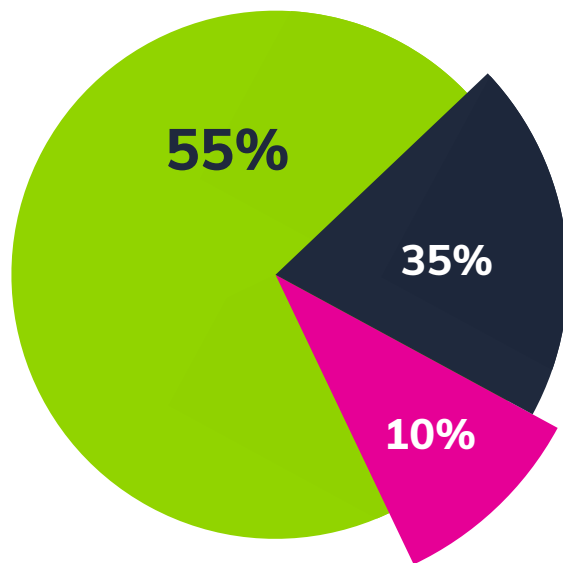


SUBJECT: TRAVEL DEALS




THE RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS

Subject Lines

Of the 20 top-performing mailers, the imperative (exclamation mark) was most popular with the majority of subject lines using this structure, followed by the declarative (standard full stop) and lastly the interrogative (question mark).



KEY

-  Imperatives: command action and drive a sense of urgency
-  Declaratives: tell us something or give information
-  Interrogatives: pique our interest and require a response

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TOP TIP: Better Subject Lines

Test your subject lines. Write a few options for every email and then choose the best, either by testing with your teams internally or using Everlytic's built-in A/B testing to pick the winner.

Keep it short. Between 30 and 50 characters. According to Everlytic insights, emails with 50 characters or fewer have 12% higher email open rates, and 75% higher click-through rates than other emails.

Personalise when possible. Include the recipient's name, or other information specific to location, interests, and more.

Use preheader text. Consider this your subject line's subtitle, where you can add more detail to increase your email's appeal.

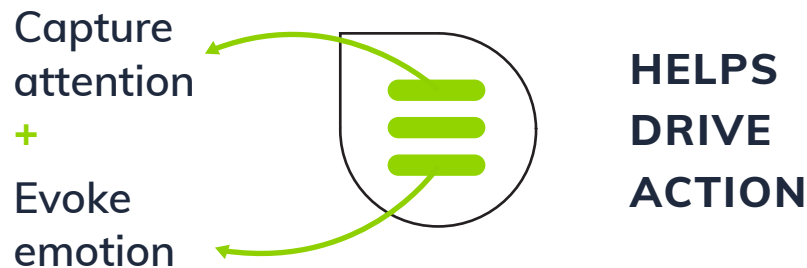
The latest 2022 Everlytic Email Marketing Benchmarks Report showed the average **open rate for emails in the retail industry was 29.28%**.

In the hospitality, travel and tourism industry, open rates in 2022 are at 35.31% – up from 23.75% in 2020.

THE RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS

Visuals

Unlike other types of content, **images have a powerful impact on our brain** and result in both conscious and unconscious reactions and emotions. Our brains are designed to process visual information faster and more efficiently than any other form of information – known as the **Picture Superiority Effect** – and this helps to create a connection with the reader.



There were an impressive **78 travel-related images across the top 20 mailers**, with all but 2 of these mailers including at least 4 visuals. This is significantly more imagery than we've seen in other industry analyses, and can be attributed to the visual requirement in the hospitality sector for customers to **picture the travel experience**.

Key themes for travel imagery included wildlife and aspirational land- and seascapes, images evoking relaxation and rest, as well as imagery of experience and adventure.

Visuals play a vitally important role in cognitive psychology and have been shown to sway thinking, change moods, and drive actions.

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The most popular image types included

- Wildlife
- Sunsets
- Dining/meals
- Swimming pools
- Trees/greenery
- Beds/hotel rooms
- Sea views/beach sand
- Fireplaces/bomas/candles



Also noteworthy is that the vast majority of images did not include people. While behavioural guidelines often recommend having demographically-representative people in images to boost connection, we hypothesise the strength of not including people here helps the reader to picture themselves and/or their families directly in the setting.

One exception to this trend was seen in **user-generated imagery** from a travel brand. Here, all images used were low resolution and had been submitted by readers for inclusion. Customer-generated images are authentic and influential types of content in the travel industry, especially with the rise in 'Instagram travel' so this is a trend we expect to see more of in future.

THE RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS



Death of the Emoji

One of the more significant findings in this research report is emojis were non-existent. After analysing all the top mailers included in the dataset, not one of them included an emoji in either the subject line or in the body text of the mailer.

NUMBER OF EMOJIS: 0

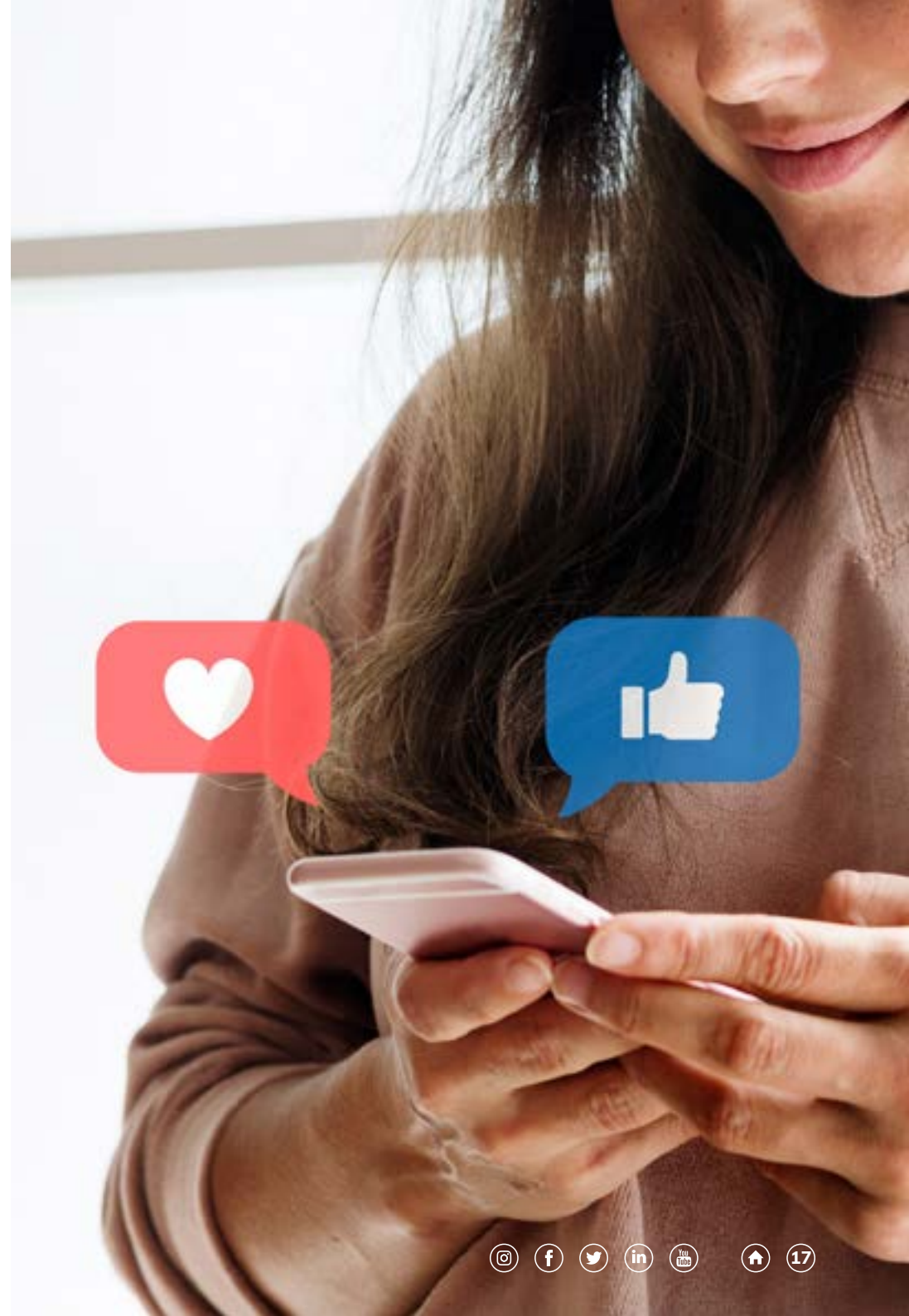
This was a surprising finding. Previous research across all types of marketing and sales communication has shown emojis – particularly used in the subject line – help to add visual interest and increase reader engagement.

As a result, over the past few years, we've seen a steady increase in email marketers adding emojis to their subject lines and there is sometimes a temptation to over-use a tool like this. Our hypothesis is emojis were not considered necessary based on the boosted visual elements in these travel mailers.



TOP TIP

If you're still pro-emoji, we recommend testing them in your subject lines. And, just like how you shouldn't write in all caps or include excessive punctuation, you also shouldn't include too many emojis.



THE RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS

Hedonic Language

We have a tendency to get bored easily and we lose interest in things because of what's termed hedonic adaptation. The solution here is novelty to highlight the excitement linked to travel. **Experiences described in terms of flavours, fragrance, and origin and being creative with copy through adjective use makes travel communication more appealing.**

The Role of Poetic Devices

Alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, repetition, puns, metaphors, and descriptive adjectives are all great linguistic tools for creating engaging writing and, more importantly, persuasive writing. These help to **add an element of fun** into a communication, which has been shown to boost immediate interest and improve longer-term recall.

Examples in Action:

Foreign currency at your fingertips

Luxury lounge access

Trade the hustle and bustle of the city

Summer is loading

The longer you stay, the more you save

Five nights in magical Mauritius

Bushveld buddies: head to beguiling Botswana

Bright blue harbour town of Hout Bay

Get everything under the sun

Botswana on a budget

A truly African adventure awaits

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TOP TIP: Get Rhyming

The rhyme-as-reason bias suggests we're more likely to believe something is **true and credible** (and therefore **more likely to be persuaded** by it) if it rhymes. But why? Because it's an inherent behavioural bias linked to the trust figures we had in our lives growing up. Our caregivers often read and sang rhyming narratives to us as children. As a result, we've come to associate rhyming with trust and credibility. With that comes the increased likelihood of us supporting a brand or product where rhyme is used.

THE RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS



Hedonic Language

The Best Things in Communication Come in 3s

The rule of three is a writing principle that suggests a trio of items (steps, events, descriptions) is more satisfying to read than other numbers. This makes content that's structured in threes more persuasive as we rely on patterns to process information. Three is the smallest number of elements needed to create a pattern. And, so being brief and having a pattern makes content more memorable.

Examples in Action:

What do a chameleon rescuer, a barefoot winemaker and a mayor-restaurateur have in common?

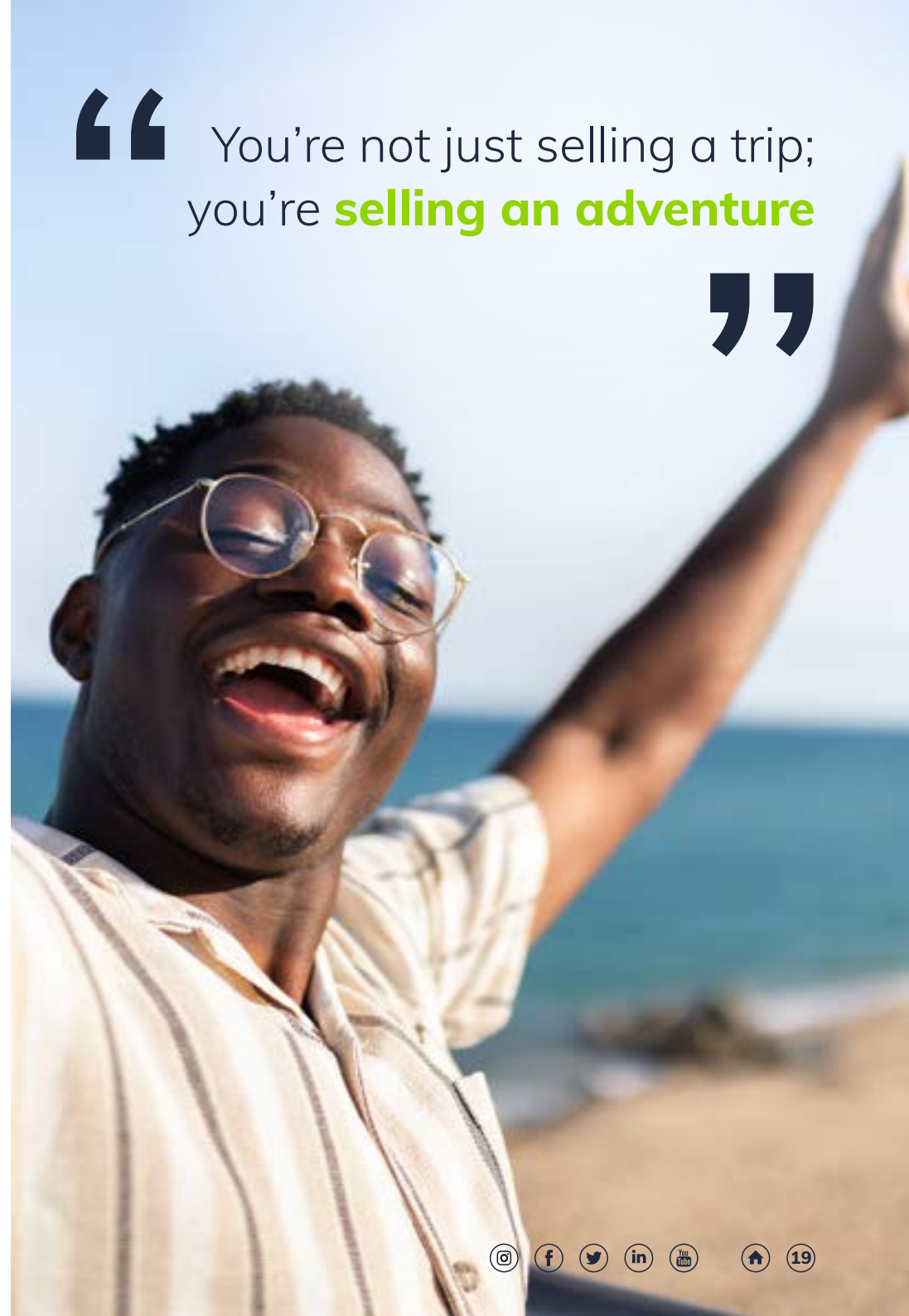
A romantic getaway, revive your soul or indulge in a luxurious adventure

With pool, city or mountain views

Book your holiday, flights and car hire

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“ You're not just selling a trip;
you're **selling an adventure** ”



THE RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS

Nudgey Numbers

Across the top-performing mailers, methods of choice architecture when it comes to pricing were noted. Here, the ways in which offers are marketed play a role in the likelihood of consumers being nudged into action.

Three types of choice architecture were dominant

- 1 Price positioning
- 2 Percentage-framed discounts
- 3 Strike-through offers

1 Price Positioning

In the best performing mailer, with a staggeringly high open rate of 92% and click-through rate of 91%, price points of the holiday packages on offer were advertised using the “down is less, up is more” principle.

An offer seems cheaper – and sells better – when the price is written below it.

The metaphor

“DOWN = LESS” AND “UP = MORE”

is ingrained in most of us and so when we see a price in a low vertical position, we associate “down” with “less” and perceive it as smaller than what it is. What this tells us behaviourally is the **position of the price relative to the product, matters.**

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2 Percentage-Framed Discounts

Where price points were referenced in the top-performing mailers, all referenced **discounts using percentage framing** with the structure “save up to X% off”. Percentage pricing continues to dominate sales mailers with numbers upwards of 30% referenced for biggest impact.

3 Strike-Through Offers

Another compelling way to showcase value is to present an original (higher) price and have a physical strike-through font or design element in order to show the reader what they now qualify for. This is linked to an **inherent anchoring bias** where we see the original price point and anchor on the higher price – which results in us perceiving the new costing as far more attractive.



TOP TIP: Use Nudgey Numbers

Be specific and exact with your price points. If you're selling a travel package, quoting R43 580 signals an authentic calculation. Too often, we round up or down and lose the persuasive power of a real number.

THE RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS



Calls to Action

A call to action (CTA) is the part of an email that encourages the reader to do something. In the hospitality and tourism space, this means clicking through to make a travel booking. **With clear headings and bold CTAs, you can grab your readers' attention and get them to take action.**

CTAs can either be created as text hyperlinks in the copy or standalone buttons. From the analysis, it was clear standalone buttons that catch the readers' attention were more successful at driving email engagement.



TOP TIP

The simple present tense is the “nudgiest” tense there is in English. This means we’re more likely to follow a call to action if it’s presented to us in the “now”. This is because **we have an inherent present bias** which is why we favour more immediate gratification. Where you can frame your marketing message in the present, and offer a now-based value proposition, you’re more likely to convert.

Kickstart Your Weekend Now

Buy Tickets

Explore more

Book Now

Our Valentine's Packages

THE RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS

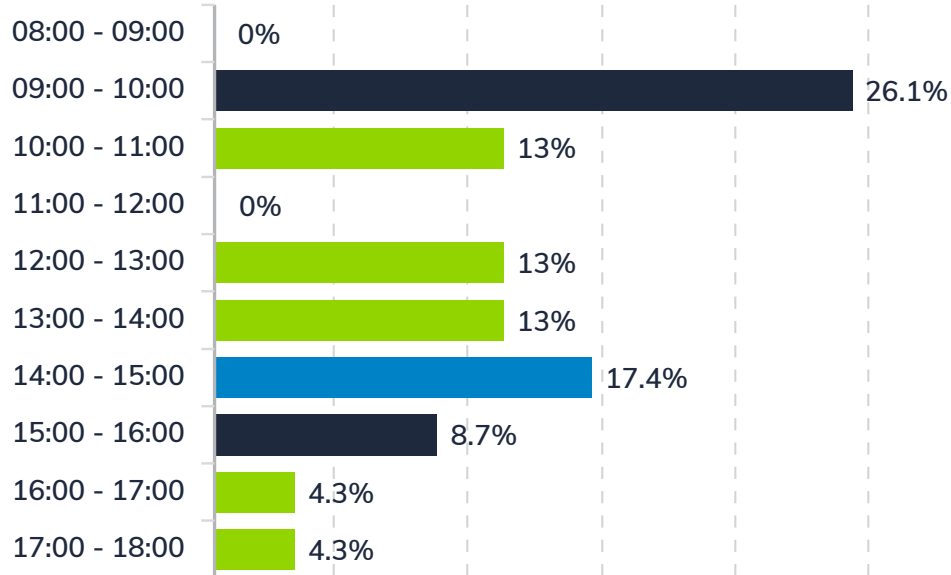


The Importance of Timing

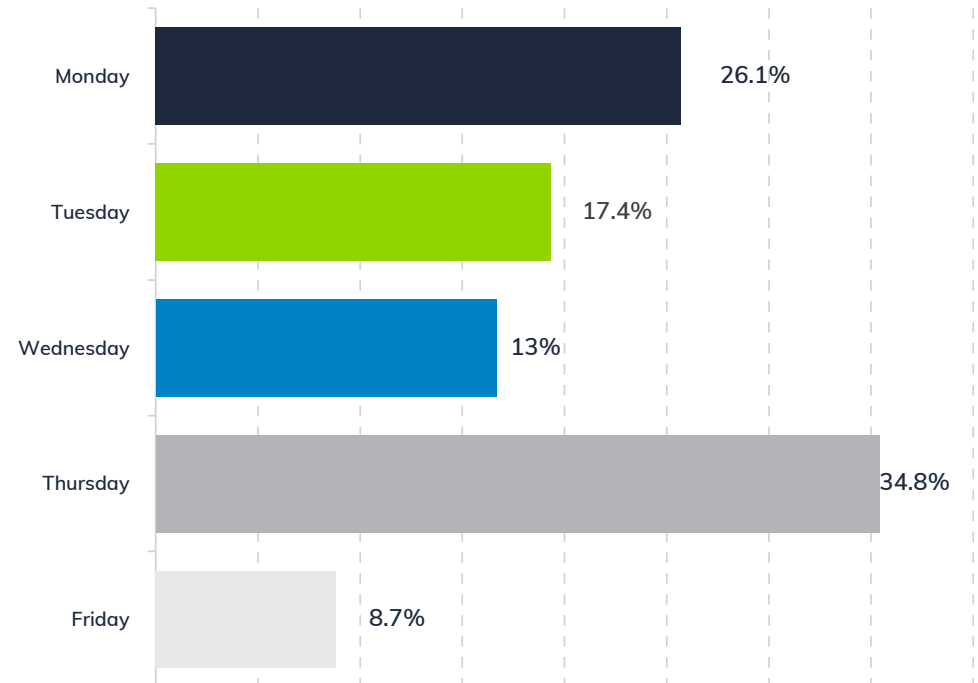
It's not only important to consider what we say, but when we say it. Customers can be more receptive to a communication based on when they receive it. From this data set, we see mid-morning and early-afternoon sends on a Monday and Thursday were engaged with the most.



Time Engagement:



Weekday Engagement:

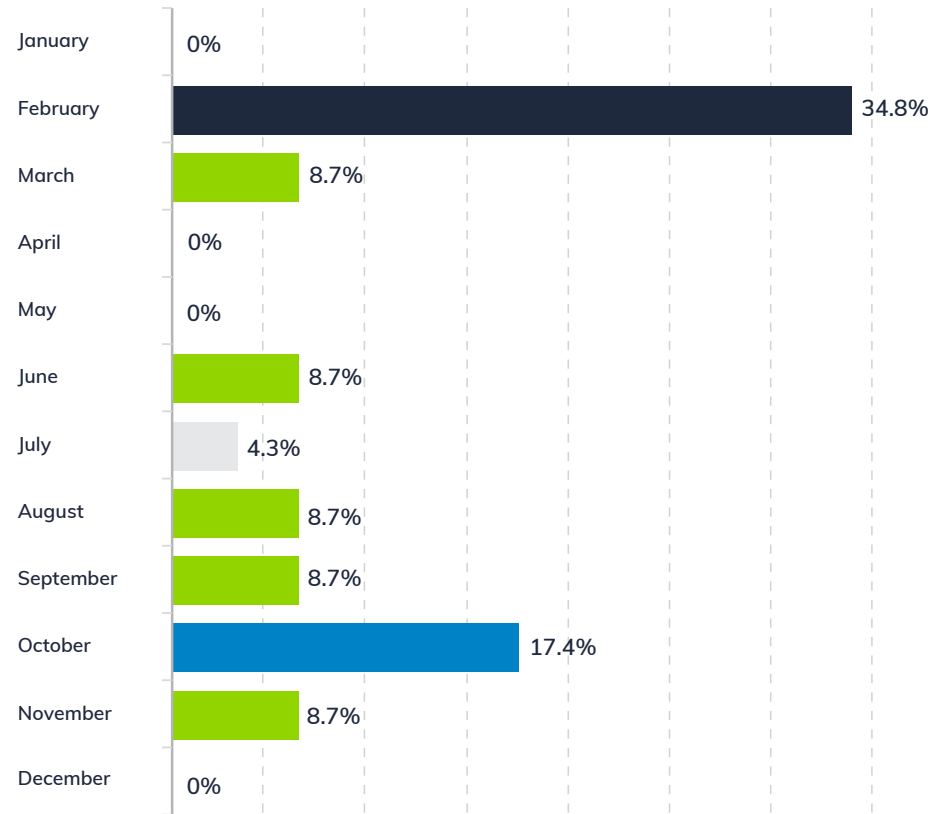


THE RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS



The Importance of Timing

Month Engagement:



Seasonal and Occasion Engagement

The seasonality of engagement is also significant. We see the highest levels of engagement in **February**, followed towards the end of the year in **October**. There are various reasons for this. For many, February is the first full month after the festive period and we may pine for the past holiday season, and turn to new holiday plans as a coping mechanism. In addition, February is marketed as a month of love and testimony to this is that **3 of the top 20 mailers were Valentines-themed**. As we head into the later months of the year, it is likely consumers are starting to plan their festive breaks and the spike in engagement in October hints at this.

BON VOYAGE

FINAL THOUGHTS



As direct marketers, our main aim is to persuade our customers to do something: buy into our brand story, support our products and/or services, and ultimately become loyal ambassadors. **And the more authentically we can do this; the better.** Being able to (ethically) compel someone to act in a certain way is an invaluable skillset and having the framework to guide this can be the difference between brand success and brand failure.

From Parys to Paris, travel communication that incorporates behavioural communication is one of the **most cost-effective and easy ways to improve brand objectives** while still maintaining the consumer's freedom to choose.



From this research, we saw travel communications that incorporated behavioural insights – **paying close attention to the link between language, decision-making, and behaviour** – were most effective. Crafting content and leveraging behavioural insights, in ways that are intrinsically linked to how people think and make decisions, will help a brand to grab attention, engagement, build trust and ultimately persuade.

HAPPY TRAVELS



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