BuildUp BOOKINGS

05

BONUS 05 OF 11 · MASTERING VACATION RENTAL MARKETING

The Dream 100: Homeowner Outreach That Gets Replies

A companion resource to the 2nd edition

WHAT YOU'LL HAVE WHEN YOU FINISH

A scored list of the 100 properties you actually want, a five-touch email sequence written to earn a reply rather than close a deal, and the rules that keep you out of the spam folder and out of legal trouble.

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PART 1

Do this now

Start here. Each one works on its own.

1 **Accept that one email is not a campaign.**

A busy owner who would have replied can miss touch one entirely. If you send once and stop, you have done the hard work of building a list and then thrown away most of its value.

2 **Cut your target list down, not up.**

One hundred properties you genuinely want beats a thousand you scraped. You are going to personalize every first touch, and that is only possible at small numbers.

3 **Delete the phrase "a leading vacation rental property management company" from your drafts.**

Every competitor says it, no homeowner believes it, and it costs you the only thing you have in a cold email: credibility in the first two lines.

4 **Remove any result you cannot substantiate.**

"Saw a 50% increase in bookings within three months" is the kind of line that ends a conversation the moment an owner asks which property. If you cannot name it and stand behind it, cut it.

5 **Get your cold outreach off your main sending domain.**

Send from a subdomain. If cold email damages your sending reputation, you do not want it taking your guest confirmations and newsletters down with it.

6 **Put your postal address, an opt-out, and a sales-email line in the template.**

All three are legally required for commercial email in the US, including a one-to-one note to a single owner. Build them into the template once so you cannot forget.

7 **Get your Pro Forma built before you send anything.**

The email's only job is to earn a reply. The Pro Forma is what actually converts. Sending before it exists means winning the reply and then going quiet for a week.

PART 2

The depth

The full method.

Why the single long email fails

The default cold email in this industry is one message of about 400 words that introduces the company, lists three services, tells a success story, and asks for a call or a coffee. It is a reasonable letter. It is a bad cold email, for three reasons.

It asks for too much too early. A call is a big commitment from a stranger. The first email should ask for something a busy person can say yes to in one line.

It talks about you. Company introduction, our team offers, our goal. A homeowner reading it learns what you sell and nothing about their own situation.

It only exists once. No follow-up sequence, so a homeowner who was mildly interested but busy that week never hears from you again. That is where most of your pipeline was.

Build the list before you write anything

Where the properties come from. You have more sources than you think, and the free ones are better than the paid ones:

- **OTA listings in your market.** Filter for the property types you actually manage. Owner-managed listings are visible if you know what to look for: inconsistent photo quality, no branded name, sparse amenity descriptions, response times measured in days.
- **Calendar gaps.** A property sitting empty through a weekend you know books solid is the single strongest signal on this list. It is also the most useful thing you will ever open an email with.
- **County short-term rental permit records.** Public in most jurisdictions. Names, addresses, sometimes contact details.
- **Properties that left another manager.** Listings that switch from branded to owner-managed presentation are actively in the market whether they say so or not.
- **Purchased or AI-assisted target lists.** These exist and they are easy to get — you supply a target area, a demographic and a property type. Treat them as a starting point for research, not a list to mail. Use AI to organize and deduplicate records from public sources, never to fill in an owner name, address or email it did not get from one; models invent plausible ownership records. Verify every name.

Where the contact details come from. An OTA listing tells you a property exists, nothing more. Airbnb's Terms of Service bar using its messaging tools or members' personal information to send commercial messages without consent, and bar scrapers and other automated collection. Never pitch an owner through Airbnb or Vrbo messages, never pose as a guest, and review listings by hand. Get the owner's name and mailing address from county property and STR permit records, and an email only from a source you can name. No email? The property goes on your direct-mail list. The book runs the Dream 100 through both.

What to record for each one. If you cannot fill the personalization column, the property does not belong on the list yet:

FIELD	WHY IT MATTERS
Owner name	First-name greeting or nothing
Property name / address	Specificity is the whole game
Property type, bedrooms, sleeps	Determines whether you actually want it
Where you found it	Tells you what you legitimately know
The specific observation	The one true sentence that proves this is not a mail merge
Fit score	See below
Touch dates and outcome	Otherwise you will double-send

Score fit before you invest in outreach. Not every property you *can* get is one you *want*. Score each on the things that actually predict a good relationship — revenue potential, condition, distance from your existing cluster, and how realistic the owner's expectations appear to be. A property that fails on owner expectations will cost you more than it earns no matter how good the revenue looks.

The one rule

The email's job is to earn a reply. Nothing else.

Not to explain your services. Not to establish your credentials. Not to book a call. Every sentence that does not move the reader toward a one-line reply is working against you. This is why the sequence below is short to the point of feeling uncomfortable — under 120 words per email, most of them well under.

The five-touch sequence

Spacing: day 1, day 4, day 9, day 16, day 30. Stop immediately on any reply, and stop permanently on any opt-out.

Touch 1 — The observation (day 1)

Subject: Your [street or property name] listing

Hi [First name],

I manage [number] properties here in [market] and came across [property name or street]. [One specific, true observation — a calendar gap, a photo set, a minimum-stay setting.]

I'm curious whether that's deliberate or just how it ended up.

[Your name]
[Company] · [Phone]
[Postal address]
This is a sales email. Reply "no thanks" and I won't contact you again.

The whole email is one question a busy person can answer in four words. "Deliberate or just how it ended up" is doing the heavy lifting — it is genuinely curious, it is easy to answer, and it gives the owner room to admit something is not working without feeling sold to.

Touch 2 — The useful thing (day 4)

Subject: Re: Your [street or property name] listing

Hi [First name],

Following up on this. One thing worth knowing regardless of whether we ever work together: [a genuinely useful, specific insight about their market or listing — a booking window, a seasonal pattern, a pricing floor, a setting that is costing them].

That's true whether you self-manage forever or not. Thought you'd want it.

[Your name]

Give something away with no hook attached. This is the email that separates you from everyone else in their inbox, and it only works if the insight is real. If you do not know something specific and useful about their situation, you are not ready to email them.

Touch 3 — The offer of proof (day 9)

Subject: What [property name] could do

Hi [First name],

Last note on the numbers. I can put together a projection for [property name] — expected revenue by season, what we'd charge, and what you'd net after expenses. Takes me about an hour and there's no obligation attached to it.

Want me to send it over?

[Your name]

Now you ask for something, and it is still small: permission to send a document. The Pro Forma does the actual selling.

Touch 4 — The different angle (day 16)

Subject: The part owners usually ask about

Hi [First name],

Most owners I talk to aren't really asking about revenue. They're asking who deals with the 11pm call about the hot tub, and whether they'll still be able to use their own place at Thanksgiving.

Happy to answer both, honestly, including where we're not a good fit.

[Your name]

If money was not the hook, try the real reason people hand over a property. Naming where you are not a good fit is the most persuasive sentence in the whole sequence — and only usable if you mean it.

Touch 5 — Closing the file (day 30)

> **Subject:** Last note from me
>
> Hi [First name],
>
> I'm going to stop emailing — I'd rather not be the guy cluttering your inbox.
>
> If it's ever useful, my number's below. And if you'd like that revenue projection at any point, just reply with the word "numbers" and I'll put it together.
>
> Thanks for the time,
> [Your name] · [Phone]

Removing the pressure is what gets some owners to respond, and "reply with one word" is the lowest-effort ask in the sequence.

Every touch carries the same footer as touch one: company, postal address, and the sales-email opt-out line. It is shown once above to keep the templates readable; it is not optional on the others.

What never goes in a cold email

- **"A leading provider / premier / best-in-class."** Unverifiable and universal. It reads as noise.
- **Any result you cannot name and substantiate.** If you say a property grew 50%, be ready to say which property and over what period.
- **Made-up urgency.** "Only taking three more properties this year" when you would take thirty.
- **Your full service list.** Three bullets on marketing, management and guest services tells the owner nothing they did not assume.
- **"Just following up."** Every follow-up should carry something new.
- **Attachments on a cold send.** They make a stranger's email look riskier to spam filters and to the reader. Offer, then send on reply.
- **A calendar link in touch one.** Too big an ask from a stranger.

Deliverability: the part that decides whether any of this is read

Perfect copy in the spam folder performs at zero.

- **Send from a subdomain**, not your primary domain. Isolate the risk.
- **Authenticate it.** SPF, DKIM and DMARC configured on the sending domain. Non-negotiable now that the major inbox providers enforce it for bulk senders.
- **Warm the domain up.** Start at a handful of sends a day and build over weeks. A new domain sending hundreds on day one looks exactly like a spammer because it behaves like one.
- **Send as plain text.** No images, no tracking pixels, no HTML template, minimal links — ideally none in touch one. A designed email announces itself as bulk.
- **Personalize the first line for real.** Not a merge field. The specific observation.
- **Keep volume low and human.** A few dozen a day, sent from a real mailbox by a real person.
- **Watch your bounce rate.** Verify addresses before sending. High bounces damage a sending domain quickly.
- **Know the inbox rules.** Gmail and Yahoo require SPF or DKIM from every sender, and Gmail's guidelines say not to send to people who did not sign up. Keep cold volume small, keep spam complaints near zero, and stop the moment they rise.

The legal floor

If you are sending commercial email to US recipients, CAN-SPAM applies. It is not onerous, and the requirements are worth building into your template once:

- **Accurate headers.** Real from-name, real from-address, real reply-to.
- **No deceptive subject line.** The subject must reflect what the email is actually about.
- **Identify it as a commercial message.** Clearly and conspicuously.
- **A valid physical postal address.** Street address, registered PO box, or registered private mailbox. It can sit unobtrusively in your footer, but it must be there and it must be current.
- **A working opt-out.** A reply email or one web page, nothing more: no fee, no login, no personal information beyond their email address. It must keep working for at least 30 days after each send.
- **No exemption for one-to-one or business email.** A personal note to one owner is commercial email if its main purpose is to win their business.
- **Honor opt-outs within 10 business days**, and never sell or transfer a suppressed address.
- **You are responsible for what is sent on your behalf.** Hiring an agency or a lead-gen firm does not transfer the liability.

Penalties are assessed **per email**, which is the detail people miss — one non-compliant send to a thousand homeowners is not one violation, it is a thousand. Build the footer into the template and this stops being something you have to think about.

If you have owners or prospects outside the US, the rules are stricter, and consent-based rather than opt-out-based. That is worth an actual conversation with a lawyer rather than a paragraph here.

What happens after the reply

The reply is the win, and it is also the moment most owner acquisition falls apart — because nothing is ready.

Have your **Pro Forma** built before you send touch one. It should project revenue by season using realistic rates and occupancy for that specific property, then subtract the real costs: your management fee, routine maintenance, marketing, utilities, insurance, local taxes, and any financing the owner has told you about. Net operating income and cash flow at the bottom.

The reason to include the expenses rather than only the headline revenue is that it sets expectations you can actually meet. An owner who signs on the strength of a gross revenue number and then sees their first statement is an owner who leaves in year two.

Track it, or you are guessing

Reply rate is the only meaningful number on the first three touches. Not open rate: Apple Mail Privacy Protection loads images in the background whether or not anyone reads the email, so opens are inflated anyway, and a tracking pixel is one more thing that makes a cold email look like bulk mail.

METRIC	WHAT IT TELLS YOU	WHAT TO CHANGE IF IT IS BAD
Reply rate by touch	Which email is doing the work	If touch 1 is near zero, your observations are not specific enough
Reply rate by fit score	Whether your targeting is right	Low replies from high-fit properties means the copy; high replies from low-fit means the list
Bounce rate	List quality and domain health	Verify addresses before the next batch
Replies → Pro Forma sent	Whether you are following through	A gap here is the cheapest fix available to you
Pro Forma → signed	Whether the projection is credible	If this is low, your numbers or your fee structure are the problem, not the email

PART 3

Worked example

One example, all the way through.

Ridgeline Cabin Co. — fictional company, 40 mountain cabins in one valley, the running example across these bonuses.

One row of the list

FIELD	ENTRY
Owner	Dana R.
Property	118 Fox Hollow Road — 3BR cabin, sleeps 8, hot tub
Source	Spotted on an OTA listing (3BR + hot tub filter). Owner and mailing address from county property and STR permit records; email verified before sending.
Observation	Empty the first two weekends of October — the two busiest leaf-season weekends of the year. Also has a 5-night minimum, which is why.
Fit score	8 / 10 — right size, right amenity, 12 minutes from existing cluster. Unknown owner expectations.
Touches	T1 sent Oct 2 · T2 sent Oct 5 · **replied Oct 6**

Touch 1, filled in

Subject: Your Fox Hollow Road listing

Hi Dana,

I manage 40 cabins here in the valley and came across your place on Fox Hollow. Noticed it's open the first two weekends of October, which are usually the two busiest of our whole year — looks like the 5-night minimum might be what's doing it.

Curious whether that's deliberate or just how it ended up.

Sam
Ridgeline Cabin Co. · (555) 019-4827
[Postal address]
This is a sales email. Reply "no thanks" and I won't contact you again.

Why it works: the observation is specific, verifiable, and genuinely useful to Dana whether she ever replies or not. It also demonstrates local knowledge in one clause — *usually the two busiest of our whole year* — without any claim about Ridgeline at all. Fifty-eight words before the signature.

Touch 2, filled in

Subject: Re: Your Fox Hollow Road listing

Hi Dana,

Following up on this. One thing worth knowing either way: most of our October bookings come in between mid-July and mid-August, and they're overwhelmingly 2- and 3-night stays. A 5-night minimum filters out most of that demand before you ever see it.

True whether you self-manage forever or not — thought you'd want it.

Sam
[Same footer as touch one]

Why it works: it gives away the actual answer to the problem named in touch one, with nothing attached. Dana replied to this one. Fifty-six words before the signature.

What Ridgeline deliberately did not send

No company introduction. No service list. No "leading provider in the valley." No claim about revenue lift for another cabin. No calendar link. No attachment. No tracking pixel.

PART 4

Your turn

Your worksheet. Print it and fill it in.

Your list

#	OWNER	PROPERTY	TYPE / BR	SOURCE	THE SPECIFIC OBSERVATION	FIT /10
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						

Expand to 100. If the observation column is blank, the row is not ready to send.

Your observation bank

The hardest part of this system is having something true and specific to say. Build the bank once and reuse the *categories*, never the sentences.

SIGNAL YOU CAN LOOK FOR	THE OBSERVATION IT PRODUCES
Calendar gap on a weekend you know books solid	
Minimum-stay setting fighting local demand	
Photo set that undersells the property	
Missing amenity filter they'd qualify for	
Pricing flat across wildly different seasons	
Slow response time visible on the listing	
Recently switched from managed to self-managed	

Your compliance footer

Write it once. Paste it into every template.

Physical postal address: _____

Opt-out line: _____

Sending subdomain: _____

☐ SPF configured ☐ DKIM configured ☐ DMARC configured ☐ Domain warmed

☐ Pro Forma template built and ready to send

Your sequence tracker

PROPERTY	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	REPLIED?	PRO FORMA SENT	OUTCOME

PART 5

How you'll know it worked

What to check, and when.

Within a week of the first batch — you are watching deliverability, not performance. Bounces low, no spam complaints, replies arriving in your actual inbox. If touch one produced nothing at all from twenty-five well-researched properties, the problem is your observations, not your timing.

Within a month — the full sequence has run on your first batch and you can see which touch produces replies. Don't be surprised if later touches, including the closing email, outperform touch one. If touch five is your best performer, your sequence length is probably right.

Within a quarter — the number that matters is not replies. It is Pro Formas sent and properties signed. A high reply rate that produces no signings means the emails are working and the offer is not, and that is a different problem living in your fee structure or your projection credibility.

The honest expectation: this is a slow channel with a long cycle. Owners switch managers at renewal points, after a bad season, or after a bad experience — not because your email arrived. Much of what you plant now converts months later, not weeks. The operators who win at owner acquisition are the ones still sending in month nine.

The failure mode to watch for: working the list once, getting a modest response, and concluding cold outreach does not work. It usually happens before the sequence has finished running.

PART 6

Where this lives in the book

Where to read more in the book.

Sections: *Focus Shift: Middleweight Homeowner Marketing* (Middleweight) — where the book introduces the Dream 100, pairs this email with direct mail to the same list, and sends you here for the sample. *Focus Shift: Turn data into dollars with your homeowner target data list* (Lightweight) — where target lists come from, and the Pro Forma in full detail, including every expense category it should contain. *Focus Shift: Featherweight Homeowner Marketing* — the homeowner landing page and USP your replies will land on. *Focus Shift: Homeowner Marketing Tactics for Massive Growth* (Heavyweight) — where this becomes a system rather than a campaign.

If you plan to run paid ads to homeowners as well as email, read *Advertising For Homeowners, Not Just Guests* in the Heavyweight chapter alongside the Paid Search bonus. A signed homeowner is worth more over their tenure than almost any single booking, and if your tracking gives homeowner leads no value, value-based bidding will starve your best channel.

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Want help putting this to work?

We've worked with more than 300 vacation rental companies on direct bookings, homeowner acquisition, SEO, paid media and AI search. If you'd rather not do this alone, book a free call at **buildupbookings.com**.

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