

## TEMPLATE 3: THE STOLEN SECRETS LISTICLE

A listicle is simply a list of tips or ideas - something you've no doubt seen many times in emails. But what's special about a "stolen secrets" listicle is that it's an example of a "left field" type of email. A connection between two things you wouldn't normally see together.

And I want to use it to trigger your creativity and get you thinking more widely (and perhaps more bravely) about what you can cover in emails.

So in this context, if you were writing an email about investments tips it wouldn't be "3 investment secrets stolen from Warren Buffet" - that's far too obvious. It would be "3 investment tips stolen from Scrooge McDuck". Or "3 investment tips stolen from Keanu Reeves".

My first "stolen secrets" email was "5 marketing tips stolen from my local coffee shop" where I thought a bit laterally about some of the things my local coffee shop did to drum up business and applied them to marketing for consultants. Of course it helped that I was sitting in the coffee shop at the time.

It proved to be one of my most popular emails. It stood out in people's memories because it was creative and different rather than the marketing tips they were getting based on big consulting or similar firms. And because it was creative the tips were different too, not just the context. It wasn't just the same tips set in a coffee shop, it was different tips because they came from a coffee shop but when you thought about them you realised they could be applied to your situation too and would be different to what others were doing. And it gave readers a vivid picture of me sitting in the coffee shop writing the email - building a more personal connection with them.

There's also something magical about "stolen secrets" that encourages your subscribers to open and read the email. It's a great subject line.

And it all plays into this idea of being interesting in your emails to keep people reading.

The first thing to do is decide on the topic you want to cover. I'd initially keep this fairly broad to give yourself some flexibility when you start looking round for unusual places to learn from.

So if you worked in the field of leadership you might just think of leadership tips in general or team building or delegation or some big topic - then start looking for your source of inspiration.

For the source of the secrets, I'd suggest looking in three places:

1. Your hobbies and interests. So I might look for marketing lessons I could learn from magic or football or comedy.
2. Your recent non-work experiences. This could be a business you visited recently as a customer or a person you spoke to or just something interesting you read. In my case it could be marketing lessons stolen from the guy who came round recently to offer to clean my gutters out, or the brilliant new Mexican restaurant I went to.

3. Something in popular culture - a film or TV show you saw, a book you read. I might write about marketing lessons from Johnny Rose from Schitt's Creek - actually Alexis or Roland would be better as Johnny is supposed to know about marketing.

In each case you're picking a source that you know lots about - either because it's something you get involved with often or because you experienced it recently.

Armed with a broad topic you basically sit and run through each of the categories thinking "are there any links here, any lessons to be learned?". If you find a source that shows potential dig into it a bit more - either from your memory or doing a bit of research. Ideally you're looking for 3 to 5 tips, or one big tip you can "steal".

In my case for example, I thought about magic for a second but realised I'd recently tapped into that vein. Football I'm still a bit depressed about after our defeat to Borussia Dortmund during the week.

So I turned to comedy and I remembered I'd seen an interview with Steve Coogan from 1990 as he'd just broken into the big time as an impressionist long before Alan Partridge. He'd talked about how he had originally planned to be an actor but had done impressions on the comedy circuit just to get his Equity card - and that had led to job offers and opportunities and a career switch.

That sounded like a decent lesson about email marketing: about how you never know what is going to work until you actually start writing and getting stuff out there. With a bit of work (and watching the interview again) I'm sure I could come up with a couple more tips.

And you basically take it from there.

Another potential route into this type of email is more opportunistic. In the case of "5 marketing tips stolen from my local coffee shop" I was actually sitting in the coffee shop watching the world go by and it struck me it might be interesting to write about them. So being observant and noticing when there might be a useful lesson to be learned from something you're engaged in will lead you to more interesting content for emails.

Writing this type of email is a little harder than just tapping in to your experience or the questions people ask you. But it leads to a greater variety of emails and a more interesting and engaging experience for your readers. So I'm going to encourage you to do it.

**Subject Line:** "3 [topic] secrets stolen from [unusual source]"

For example "3 email secrets stolen from Steve Coogan" or "5 leadership secrets "borrowed" from George Clooney"

**Hook:**

There are two sides to the hook. One is to establish the value of the topic you're going to write about - that's the easy bit. The other is to give credibility to the source you're going to use.

If you're using something from your own experience your readers won't know about, or someone not normally associated with the topic, you'll need to spell out why they're a good source of insights on this topic.

For example, “I got my hair cut last week at the same barber’s I’ve been going to for 2 or 3 years. Only this time I really got talking to Mehmet, the owner.

It turns out he’s had a truly interesting life. Huge challenges faced and overcome. In fact there’s a lot we can all learn about leadership from Mehmet’s story”.

Or “We all know Samuel L Jackson from his iconic roles in Pulp Fiction and as Nick Fury in the Marvel series, but did you know he’s appeared in over 200 films and is the second highest grossing actor of all time?

How on earth did he manage to fit in so many roles over the years? It turns out Samuel L Jackson is obsessed by efficiency and uses a number of techniques to fit more into his year than most would in a decade”.

(PS I’m pretty sure Samuel L Jackson isn’t obsessed by efficiency in real life, I just made that bit up to illustrate a point. Mind you, he has made an awful lot of films so he must be doing something efficiently...)

### **Transition:**

The transition is usually a simple intro to what you’re about to share.

E.g. “Here are important 5 things we can learn about leadership from Mehmet’s experience.”

Or “Here are Samuel L Jackson’s ‘insider secrets’ to doing more in less time:”

### **Valuable Content:**

Your valuable content is most likely going to be in the form of a list or bullet points sharing each tip or secret.

It should be fairly simple to write. As with the previous emails, just give each tip a short title and then expand on it in a few sentences.

If you want to get fancy you can intertwine the secrets with a story “When Mehmet first arrived in the UK he had no money, no connections and very little English. So the first thing he did was...” But in truth it’s not needed. A list will be easier to read and digest and the interest comes from the unusual source of the tips not from the cleverness of your writing.

### **Call to Action:**

The tips or secrets will obviously be in an area where you can help. So you can simple segue into an offer of your products or services in this area. You can also jokingly hint that if the person or business had had your help they would have done even better!

e.g. “Mehmet’s story shows how it’s possible for everyone to grow their own personal leadership. And if you’d like a shortcut to building the most important skills for your business then there’s no better place than in Leaderhut. It’s my private community for bright, committed leaders looking to

grow their skills alongside supportive colleagues. [Click here for details](#)".

**Example:**

Subj: 3 Marketing Lessons Stolen From My Local Coffee Shop

About 2 years ago, a new coffee shop called Caffè Latte opened in our local village.

It was a bit of a risk: we had a bypass built a decade ago and since then the village centre has slowly died. And I must admit, I didn't rate its chances of success highly.

But it's worked brilliantly. Not only is it thriving, but it's revitalised the centre of the village. Far more people come into town and use the local shops – and there's a real sense of community returning.

Kathy and I love to take a walk up there a couple of times a week. We often take a book or some work to do and just sit there for a couple of hours.

I've been in there so often I kind of know the business inside out now. And I've picked out three lessons from how Francesca, the owner, has marketed Caffè Latte that I think we consultants and coaches can learn from. Particularly if we're a small firm or one-man-band as Francesca competes against the big chains in other local towns – Starbucks, Costa, Caffè Nero. Just as we might compete against Accenture, KPMG or Linklaters.

**Positioning.** The first thing Francesca got right was the positioning of the business. It's not just a "like Starbucks but cheaper" – pricing is roughly at the same level. She recognised that we don't choose a coffee shop because it's a few pence cheaper than the alternative. We choose it for taste, atmosphere, food – a whole range of reasons.

Yet so many professionals position themselves as "like X, but cheaper" (substitute the name of a big firm for X – usually the firm the professional used to work for).

The thing is, you're not like Accenture or KPMG or Linklaters. You're not a big name that no one got fired for hiring. You're not a bland but safe bet. You're an individual with a whole load of things to offer that you need to focus on rather than just being a cheap version of a big firm.

**Personality.** What Caffè Latte has in abundance is personality. It's a reflection of Francesca really. Quirky, fun. You go there and you feel part of the family – like Norm in Cheers. The staff are all like that too.

As solo professionals or small firms that's something we can do too. We don't have to conform to a bland corporate image. We don't have to please everyone. We just need to find a few clients who can love us for life.

If we put our personality and our passion into our business we can stand out a mile compared to our corporate competitors. Yet so few of us do so.

Instead, we hide behind our smart suits and corporate websites. We speak in corporate tongue rather than in the plain English we'd use at home or with our friends. How many solo professional's

websites have you seen that say “we” when there's only the one of them in the firm (sadly, mine used to be like that too – though thankfully I've grown out of it).

We shouldn't be trying to copy the corporates – we should be trying to find our own unique personality and voice.

**Innovation.** That's a big word. Can a coffee shop really innovate? Well, yes in the sense of constantly trying out new things to see what works and abandoning things that don't.

Francesca started up with a big kids area and creche. Didn't work. So she changed it.

She tried hosting themed days and celebrations. Worked brilliantly.

She tried live music. Didn't work. Stopped it.

She tried changing the menu, adding new food and sweets no one else was doing. Worked brilliantly.

She's used Facebook for marketing. Installed free wifi. Worked brilliantly.

The big chains don't have the flexibility or the bravery to allow their stores to try out new stuff like this. They all have to be the same.

And that's a huge advantage you can have over your big competitors too. In the time it would take them to set up a committee to look into doing a feasibility study to develop a business case to maybe think about something new – you can have tried it out and figured out whether it will work or not.

Yet how many of us use that advantage? How many of us are constantly trying out new offers, new services, new marketing tactics?

Caffe Latte has been such a success they're now franchising the model out across the country.

Maybe we ought to think about what we can learn and apply to get our own equivalent success.

And, of course, if you're ever in the little town of Handforth just South of Manchester – do pop in to Caffe Latte and you might well see me in there.

- Ian

PS Want a crash course in marketing that will get you up to “Caffe Latte” levels in no time? You might want to check out my Consulting Marketing Essentials course [here](#). It'll give you a step by step guide to Positioning, Personality and Innovation - as well as all the practical tools you need to put them into action.