

CASE STUDY · EMAIL AUTOMATION

My inbox sorts itself, saves client files, and drafts replies for my OK.

Part 1 is my own inbox: rules file my email, a client's whole email history saves itself with every file, and songs a client emails me arrive with AI-written prompts ready. Part 2 drafts replies to my outreach — **and nothing sends until I approve it.**

PART 1 · MY OWN INBOX: SORTING

NEW MAIL			WHAT HAPPENS
Clients/Northpine	Northpine Tree Co.	New photos for the homepage	Labeled · stays in inbox
Clients/Ridgeline	Dana, Ridgeline Auto	Can we change our hours on the site?	Labeled · stays in inbox
Billing	Hosting company	Your invoice #1042	Labeled · filed away
Notifications	Ad platform	Your weekly ad summary	Labeled · filed away
no rule matches	A friend	Lunch Friday?	Left alone

SAMPLE Every name on this page is made up, but the folder layouts below are the real ones. Sorting runs on rules I wrote — who it's from, words in the subject — so no AI is needed here.

A client's complete email record

3x A DAY

Northpine Tree Co./correspondence/

TRANSCRIPT.md

every email, word for word

index.csv

one row per email

messages/2026-09-12_in_New-photos/

message.eml

the exact original

attachments/

photo-1.jpg, quote.pdf

linked/

videos + files it links to

Every email with that client, both ways, saved as one running transcript — 54 so far. Attachments come down with each email, and a second script pulls in the videos and files the emails only link to: 3.1 GB. It searches Trash too, where it found 9 real emails before they were deleted.

A client's songs, ready to work on

EVERY 30 MIN

songs/

2026-10-04 Summer Road/

Summer Road.mp3

saved exactly as sent

Their words.txt

what they asked for

Suno prompts.html

written by AI · Copy

needs a look/

anything odd

A client emails songs to be remade. Only mail that really came from them is used — their address plus the email's own security stamp. Each song is saved untouched, AI writes the prompts for the next step from their own words, and I get a notification.

WHAT KEEPS IT SAFE

✓

Reading can't change anything

The record and song jobs use a read-only key: they can't send, move or delete. No job here sends email.

✓

Client mail stays put

Sorting files away only bills and notifications, using its own separate key. Mail no rule matches is left alone.

✓

Proven, not assumed

50 saved emails were re-downloaded and matched exactly. The song job has 51 tests, proven by breaking each safety check on purpose.

Status: the client record updates itself three times a day. Sorting and the song pickup are built and tested and have run by hand; their every-30-minutes schedule is being switched on.

Julian Holien · Email automation case study · page 1 of 2

Sample data: every name shown is made up

PART 2 · REPLIES TO MY OUTREACH

When a business writes back, AI sorts the reply. Common replies get a draft in wording I approved in advance, with two real open times from my calendar — **and nothing sends until I approve it from my phone.**

What happens to each reply

Interested
"Sure, show me what it looks like."

Suggests a time
"Could we talk Tuesday at 2?"

A common question
"What does it cost?" · "How does it work?"

Any other question, or pushback
"We already do something like this."

Asks to stop
"Please take me off your list."

Unclear — or anything fails
An odd reply, an AI error, no open times

Draft for my OK

Comes to me

No reply

A draft that shows them a real example
Plus two open times from my calendar and a booking link.

Checks the calendar first
Free: a draft saying yes. Busy: a draft offering two times that are free.

Answered in approved wording
Then two open times to talk it through.

Comes to me to answer by hand
A "no thanks" never gets a canned reply.

Added to the do-not-contact list
No reply, and no more emails.

Comes to me, with their message attached
When it isn't sure, it doesn't draft.

THE APPROVAL STEP

1

One email per draft
Their message, the draft reply, and an approve and a deny link. Each link works once and expires after 7 days.

2

Tap approve, then confirm
Opening the link changes nothing; only the button does, because email security scanners open links on their own.

3

It sends as a reply to their email
From the same inbox, within about five minutes, and I get a text when it has gone.

SAMPLE The real approval pages, run on a made-up draft.

TAP 1 · CONFIRM

You are about to APPROVE

Draft reply — question — to Ridgeline Auto Repair (dana@ridgelineauto.example).

Approving sends the drafted reply from the pinned cold inbox within ~5 minutes.

Yes — APPROVE

TAP 2 · DONE

✓ APPROVED

Reply to Ridgeline Auto Repair will send within ~5 min.

WHAT KEEPS IT SAFE

✓

The AI sorts. It doesn't write.
It only labels the reply and copies out any time they suggested — and that time must appear word for word in their email.

✓

Every draft is checked
Only two allowed links, no number that isn't from the calendar or their email, no promise words like "guarantee." Fail one: it comes to me.

✓

Nothing goes out stale
If they write again before I approve, the old draft is canceled. Right before sending, it checks the do-not-contact list again.

Status: running since August 2026 on my own outreach, which is now paused. No real reply has needed a draft yet, so the draft-and-approve steps have only run on sample replies and in 131 automated tests.

Built with Python · Gmail API · Claude (no tools, fixed format) · scheduled jobs on my Mac and a server · calendar API · Netlify Functions.

Want your email handled like this — without losing control?
I build email automations that sort, save and draft, and wait for a person's OK.

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