

*How to Create*  
**EMAIL**  
**NEWSLETTERS**  
*That Don't Suck*



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# Introduction.

*I*f you've ever been on the receiving end of an email newsletter, you know that these marketing messages can be as dull as a dishwasher. I get it -- when you're not sure what to write, but you feel like an email has to go out, why not send an update about products, services, and what's going on at your company?

Unfortunately, the result is often a whole lot of generic, irrelevant content sent to a poorly segmented list — and that results in low open/clickthrough rates and lots of unsubscribes. That means best case scenario, your reputation is dinged in your subscribers' eyes; worst case scenario, your reputation is dinged by Return Path and future email deliverability is negatively impacted.

But there are awesome email newsletters out there. So what separates the triumphs from the tragedies? And how do you ensure your email newsletter is successful? We'll dive into these questions later in this guide, but first, let's define what an email newsletter is, and what it isn't.

An email newsletter is an email from a business that communicates announcements about products, services, industry, or general company information. It includes a mix of content, like event reminders, surveys, educational information about your product, service, or industry, and promotions and other offers.

An email newsletter is not a dedicated promotional email that contains information about just one offer; a digest that simply summarizes a roundup of content you've published; a lead nurturing email (although a side effect certainly may be a better nurtured lead); or a transactional email that provides order information or prompts a shopper to complete a purchase. These other types of emails are important parts of your email marketing strategy, and you can learn more about them in this guide.

Now that we're all on the same page, let's discuss why you would send an email newsletter, and how it could help you hit your goals.



*01*

**WHY SEND  
EMAIL  
NEWSLETTERS?  
DO I EVEN NEED  
ONE?**

**M**ost marketers have been there — you’re sitting around a conference room, trying to figure out how to best engage leads and customers, sell more product, or just “stay top-of-mind” for your target audience, and someone decides there’s a solution that can solve all of those problems at once: an email newsletter!

And then suddenly it’s you that’s been chosen to do it. Oh, and make sure that open and clickthrough rates don’t dip. That sound good?

I’ve been in that situation before, and I was worried. Even though email newsletters are one of the most common types of emails to send, they are actually some of the hardest to do right. It’s hard because it includes a mix of different types of content about different parts of your business, including event reminders, surveys, educational information about your product, service, or industry, and promotions. And because it’s not an email designed to serve one purpose — say, about one promotion, one digest of previously published content, one lead nurturing email, or one transactional email providing order information, email newsletters have a difficult time trying to get readers to complete a call-to-action.



... But that doesn't mean you shouldn't do them. If done right, you could develop a really engaged subscriber base, and potentially nurture them into qualified leads and customers. At the very "least," you could engage your company's evangelists, and they could help bring in business. And that's definitely something you don't want to miss out on. Repeat after me:

## **NOT EVERYONE NEEDS A NEWSLETTER.**

Actually, most people don't need a newsletter. In fact, most of you marketers out there probably have better things to do with your time than search for content and compile it into a messy template that no one's going to read in the first place. Or your newsletter might be wildly successful and an integral part of your marketing strategy. Here's how to determine if you should have a newsletter:

## **REASONS YOU MIGHT NEED A NEWSLETTER:**

- Your boss is making you send one out.
- You have an internal newsletter (in which case this guide isn't all that relevant).
- You have had recent proven success with newsletters.
- You think you will have success with this method and it is the best use of your time (you have nothing else to do?).

## ADVANTAGES OF NEWSLETTERS:

- Spread brand awareness. By building habitual communication with your email subscribers, you enable them to recognize your brand and associate it with a positive sentiment.
- Leverage existing content. Many companies do quick summaries of their most popular blog posts and link to the articles from their newsletter.
- Include different types of content. For instance, the same newsletter can contain a popular blog post, a new offer, an announcement of an upcoming event, information about a discount, and a link to a survey.
- Guaranteed reach (unlike social media).

## *How* **BuzzFeed** *does it:*

“Email is such a natural fit for BuzzFeed because you never have to explain to people how to share it. People see it and go, ‘Oh, my buddy or my mom or my coworker would really love this.’ They click the forward button and just send it along. It’s that easy. Because BuzzFeed is built entirely around what people want to share, email has been great for us.”

- Dan Oshinsky, BuzzFeed’s Newsletter Editor



## THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN DECIDING:

In your industry, are there successful email newsletters that people like to subscribe to? What's in them? With the resources you have available to you — budget, time and internal support — could you be successful?

It's a lot of work, you will need the time and manpower to:

- Proofread copy
- Create compelling calls-to-action
- Design it to work for multiple inboxes and devices
- Avoid spam triggers
- Brainstorm clickable subject lines
- Unlike blogging, there's no redo or update button for newsletters
- You need to have a lot of content/other stuff going on for a good newsletter.

You shouldn't waste your time working on an email newsletter if it isn't right for your marketing. So do some research. In your industry, are there successful email newsletters that people like to subscribe to? What's in them? With the resources you have available to you — budget, time, and internal support — could you be successful?

Then, re-examine your business' goals. Are they trying to increase the number of leads? Better qualify leads to speak with salespeople? Close more deals? Or retain more customers?

If your industry isn't really interested in email newsletters or you lack the internal support to send them out, it might be time to reconsider. Or if your goals don't line up with what a newsletter could accomplish, your time might be better spent setting up lead nurturing email workflows, or not even sending emails in the first place — perhaps creating content for your blog, instead.

So gather some data, create a plan of action (either for a successful newsletter, or another activity), and go chat with your superior. Even if you disagree with his or her vision in an email newsletter, your boss will be glad you came prepared with a plan for success.

Okay, let's say you've found that you should do an email newsletter. What next? Head over to section two to uncover email newsletter best practices you should follow.



02

**THE ANATOMY  
OF A GREAT  
EMAIL  
NEWSLETTER**

*A*s I mentioned earlier in this guide, one of the biggest problems with email newsletters is that they are often cluttered and unfocused because they are supporting every aspect of your business. Product news goes right next to PR stories, blog posts go next to a random event week ... it's kind of a mess. Email — whether it's a newsletter or not — needs one common thread to hold it together.

A way to help reduce the randomness of an email newsletter is by keeping it to one very specific topic. So instead of it being about your company in general, maybe it's dedicated to one vertical.

For example, if HubSpot were to send out a newsletter, we could do one solely on social media for business. In it, we could gather together recent blog posts on social media marketing, events that all social media marketers should go to, and maybe even a quiz of the best social media tools you use. By tying together those pieces of content all under the umbrella of social media for business, the email newsletter would be much more focused and engaging.



## **ANATOMY TIP #1:**

# **BALANCE THE CONTENT OF YOUR NEWSLETTER TO BE 90% EDUCATIONAL AND 10% PROMOTIONAL.**

Chances are, your email newsletter subscribers aren't down to hear about your products and services 100% of the time. While they may love you and want to hear from you, there's only so much shilling you can do before they tune out.

Case in point: I have a thing for shoes, and I especially love this one shoe site. I willingly opted in to the company's email list, but it now sends me emails 2-3 times a day to buy, buy, buy ... and when I see its sender name pop up in my inbox, I want to scream. Now, if they sent me educational content — maybe about the latest styles of shoes, or how to pair certain styles with certain outfits — I might be more inclined to buy from them, or at least start opening their emails again.

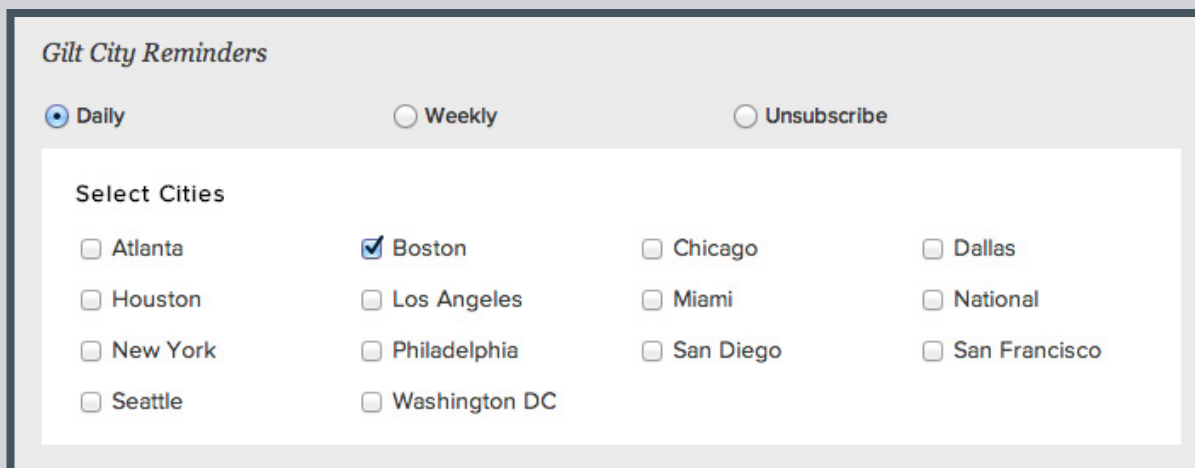
Don't be that company. In your email newsletters, get rid of the self promotion (most of the time) and focus on sending your subscribers educational, relevant, timely information. Unless you actually have an exciting, big piece of news about your product, service, or company, leave out the promotional parts.

## ANATOMY TIP #2:

# SET EXPECTATIONS ON YOUR 'SUBSCRIBE' PAGE.

Once you've figured out your newsletter's focus and content balance, make sure you're properly communicating about them on your subscribe landing page.

Get specific: Tell potential subscribers exactly what will be in the newsletter as well as how often they should expect to hear from you. As a subscriber, wouldn't that be awesome? You'd go in with open eyes knowing exactly who you will be receiving email from, what they will be sending you, and how often they'll be sending it to you. As a marketer, having this information up front will help diminish your unsubscribe and spam rates as well. Here's an example of this from Gilt City:

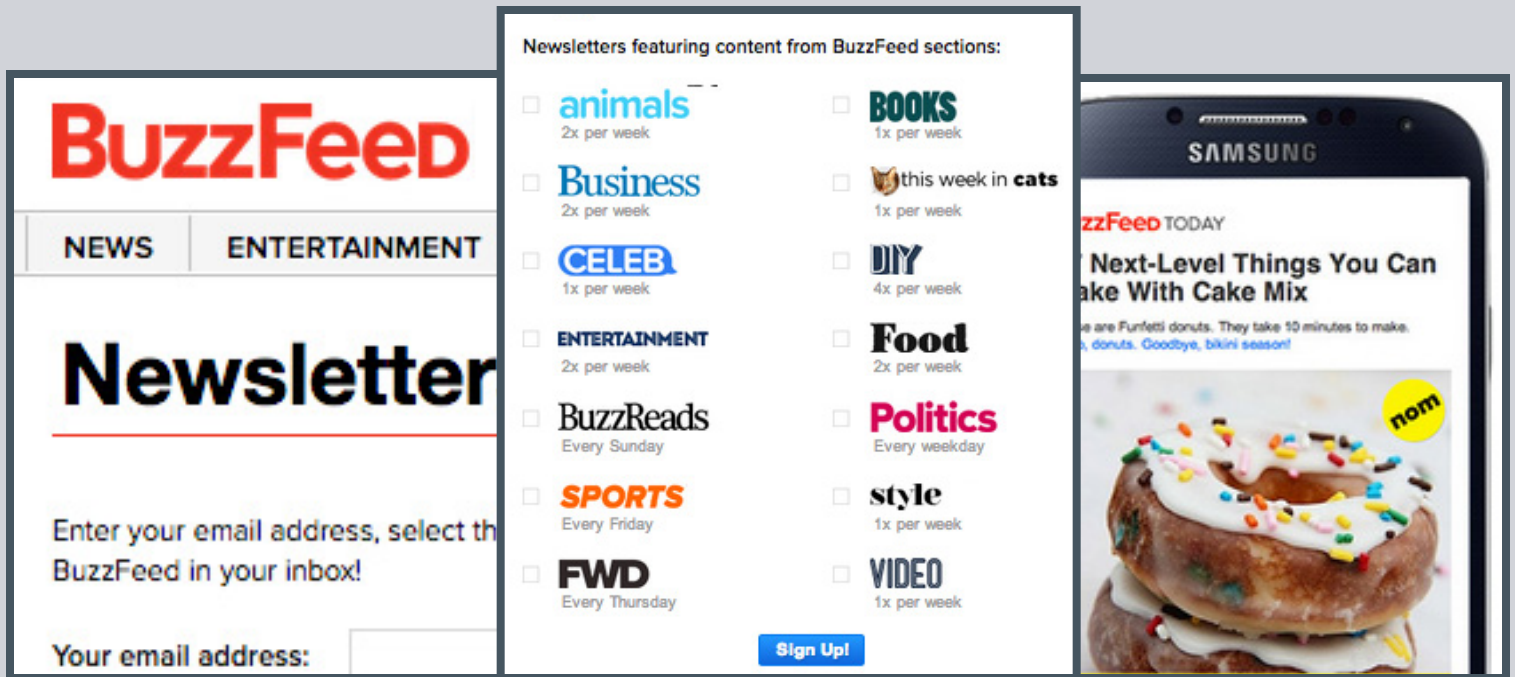


*Gilt City Reminders*

Daily       Weekly       Unsubscribe

Select Cities

<input type="checkbox"/> Atlanta	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Boston	<input type="checkbox"/> Chicago	<input type="checkbox"/> Dallas
<input type="checkbox"/> Houston	<input type="checkbox"/> Los Angeles	<input type="checkbox"/> Miami	<input type="checkbox"/> National
<input type="checkbox"/> New York	<input type="checkbox"/> Philadelphia	<input type="checkbox"/> San Diego	<input type="checkbox"/> San Francisco
<input type="checkbox"/> Seattle	<input type="checkbox"/> Washington DC		



## How BuzzFeed does it:



“We have this big daily list that is more around what’s buzzing and being shared on our site right now. Instead of trying to segment down on that list into different types of audiences, we’ve created a bunch of different types of newsletters people can opt in to. If you go to our email newsletter subscription page, we’re up to 14 different email newsletters right now (and expect to grow more over the next year). These very specific email newsletters let people say, ‘I love the cats, but what I really want to find out about is about your book coverage. Send me those links only.’”

- Dan Oshinsky, BuzzFeed’s Newsletter Editor

## ANATOMY TIP #3:

# GET CREATIVE WITH EMAIL SUBJECT LINES.

Even if your subscribers sign up for your emails, there's no guarantee that they will open your emails once they get them in their inbox. Many marketers try increasing familiarity with their subscribers by keeping the subject line the same each day, week, or month that they send it.

But let's face it, those subject lines get old — fast — for subscribers. Why? Because there's no incentive from the subject line to click on that specific email right this instant. A better approach would be to try to have a different, creative, engaging subject line for each newsletter you send.

One company who does this really well is Thrillist. Here's a collection of email newsletters I've received from them over the past few days:

Thrillist BOS	Inbox	A Fight You'll Want To Get In - version of Thrillist
Thrillist NATION	Inbox	PIZZA Ice Cream. No Joke. - version of Thrillist
Thrillist BOS	Inbox	The Biggest Opening So Far This Year Is... - v
Thrillist NATION	Inbox	WARNING: This Email Is RED HOT! - version
Thrillist NATION	Inbox	What's Your State's Biggest Food Chain? - vers
Thrillist BOS	Inbox	You Need To Drink All Of These - version of Th



## **ANATOMY TIP #4:**

# **PICK ONE PRIMARY CALL-TO-ACTION.**

**IF YOU ONLY CLICK ONE THING,  
CLICK THIS.**



Okay, part of what makes a newsletter a newsletter is that you're featuring multiple pieces of content with multiple calls-to-action (CTAs). But, that doesn't mean you should let those CTAs all have equal prominence.

Instead, let there be one head honcho CTA — just one main thing that you would like your subscribers to do, and the rest of the CTAs are a “in case you have time.” Whether it's simply to click through to see a blog post or just to forward the email to a friend, make it super simple for your subscribers to know what you want them to do — and then do it.

## **ANATOMY TIP #5:**

# **KEEP DESIGN AND COPY MINIMAL.**

Like I said before, a newsletter can easily feel cluttered because of its nature. The trick for email marketers to make a successful email newsletter look uncluttered revolves around two things: concise copy and enough white space in the design.

## **CONCISE COPY IS KEY BECAUSE YOU DON'T ACTUALLY WANT TO HAVE YOUR SUBSCRIBERS HANG OUT AND READ YOUR EMAIL ALL DAY.**

You want to send them elsewhere — your website or blog, for instance — to actually consume the whole piece of content. Concise copy gives your subscribers a taste of your content — just enough that they want to click and learn more.

White space is key in email newsletters because it helps visually alleviate the cluttered feel, and on mobile, makes it much easier for people to click the right link.

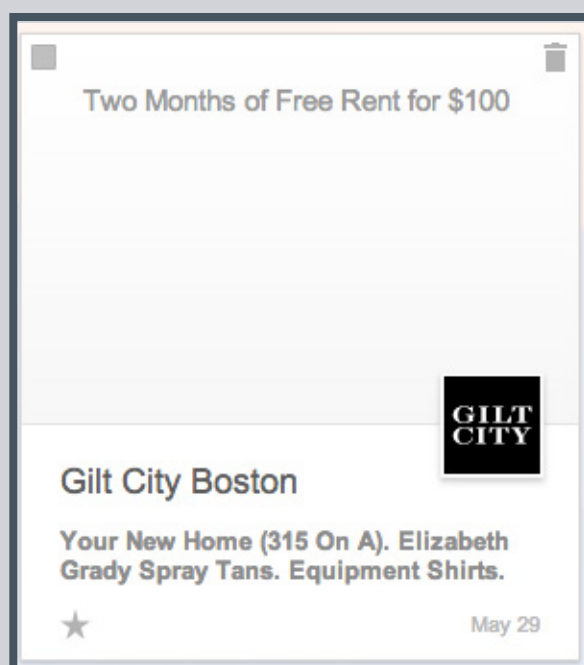
## ANATOMY TIP #6:

# MAKE SURE IMAGES HAVE ALT TEXT.

Given that visual content is incredibly important to the rest of your marketing activities, it'd make sense that you'd want to include them in your emails ... right?

Right. But email's a little bit trickier. Most of the time, people won't have images enabled, so you've got to make sure your images have one essential component: alt text. Alt text is the alternative text that appears when images aren't loaded in an email. This is especially important if your CTAs are images — you want to make sure people are clicking even without the image enabled.

Each email marketing program is different, but you can [CLICK HERE](#) for a tutorial on how to add alt text to email. You can also see an example of alt text in action in the image to the right:

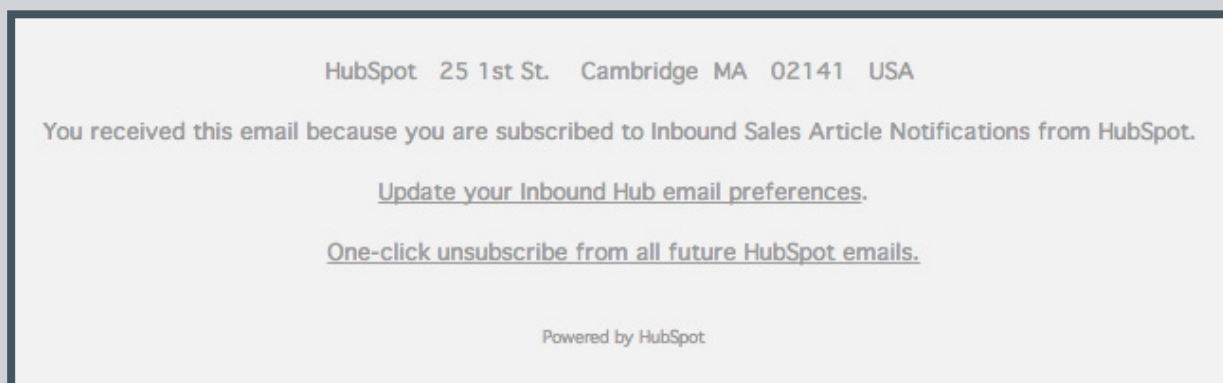


## ANATOMY TIP #7:

# MAKE IT EASY FOR PEOPLE TO UNSUBSCRIBE.

This seems a little counter-intuitive, but it's key if you want to maintain an active, engaged subscriber list. Don't use weird language like "Alter your communication with us." Don't hide an unsubscribe button behind an image without alt text. Besides keeping your list healthy, having a clear unsubscribe process will help ensure your email isn't marked SPAM before it hits the rest of your list's inbox.

You can see an example of this below:



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**BuzzFeed** TODAY

## 18 Sure-Fire Methods For Getting Out Of Bed In The Morning

Are you excited about getting out of bed on a Monday? Probably not. [But this strategy might keep you from hitting snooze.](#)



## *How* **BuzzFeed** *does it:*



“After working on the newsletter for over a year, we kind of have a formula for what content performs well. We know what type of content people love to share, what type of content people love to see in their inboxes.

People love sharing content on email that makes them seem smart or helps inform their friends or colleagues or causes them to react. When content makes them angry or happy or sad, they tend to share it. So when I’m picking content for the daily newsletter, I tend to choose that type of content, a mix of stuff that’s gonna make you smile and make you curious.”

- Dan Oshinsky, BuzzFeed’s Newsletter Editor

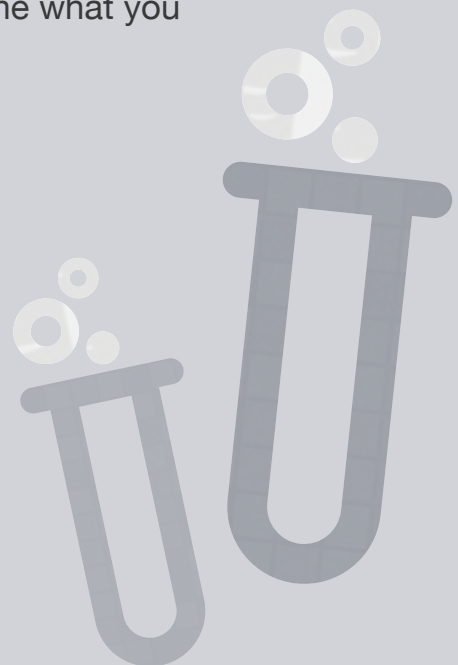
## ANATOMY TIP #8:

# TEST, TEST, TEST.

I know I just listed out a whole bunch of “best practices” to make sure you’re doing email newsletters right, but you’ve also got to find out what works for your company and your list. Just like different cultures of people prefer different things, different groups of email subscribers prefer different things.

So use these email newsletter best practices as a jumping off point ... and then experiment to find your secret sauce. Run an A/B test on subject lines. Change up your CTA copy. Heck, even try not including images. The world is your oyster for your email newsletter, so find out what it likes.

Now that we’re all on the same page, let’s determine what you should be measuring in your email newsletters.

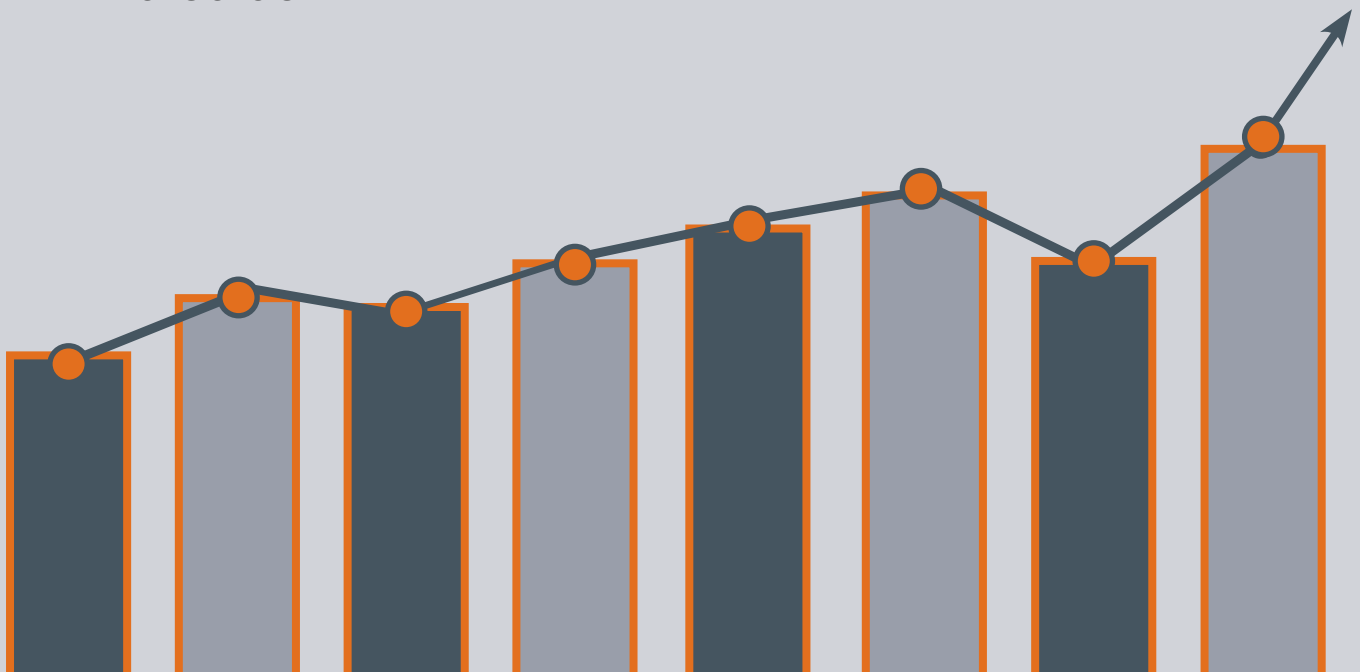


03

**HOW TO  
MEASURE  
YOUR EMAIL  
NEWSLETTER**

# WHAT IF YOUR NEWSLETTER WAS **TANKING**, BUT BECAUSE YOU WEREN'T CHECKING THE HARD DATA, YOU KEPT ON DOING IT?

Talk about a lot of wasted time and resources. To make sure you're armed with the right information to guide your marketing decisions, you should keep your eye on the following metrics. They'll give you a pretty comprehensive picture of how well your newsletter is doing, which'll help you figure out whether you should be investing time in email newsletters.







## CLICKTHROUGHS

One of the reasons you're sending an email newsletter in the first place is to get people to click on something (or a few things) ... so tracking the number of clicks you get on newsletters over time is a great way to judge if your newsletter is useful. If the number is slowly going down newsletter after newsletter, you might need to rethink your newsletter strategy.

Also, because newsletters have many different elements people can click on, you should see which links get the most clicks within the email. That information can help you adjust your strategy for choosing and arranging content within the newsletter based on what its goal is.

Notice that I didn't (and won't) mention opens before clicks. Opens are notoriously hard to measure. An email is only counted as 'opened' if the recipient also receives the images embedded in that message, and a large percentage of your email users likely have image-blocking enabled on their email client. This means that even if they open the email, they won't be included in your open rate, making it an inaccurate and unreliable metric for marketers. Sure, you can keep an eye on the metric and react if it dives drastically from one newsletter to another, but the metric itself doesn't give you reliable information.

# RED FLAG!

## YOUR CLICKTHROUGH RATES ARE DISMAL.

Are your email newsletter clickthrough rates consistently hovering below 4.3%? According to Epsilon's most recent study, that's the industry average. While your industry may be different, it's a good benchmark to keep in mind. If your email newsletter clickthrough rates are way below that, you've got a problem. And if that's been a problem for you for a while, go on and cut your email newsletter and focus on creating more targeted, clickworthy emails.

You're not ready to give up on improving email newsletter clickthrough rates? Read on.

[Here's a post with some fabulous tips](#) for increasing email clickthrough rates. If you're reading this now, chances are you can also read that article, so I won't steal much of its spotlight. But one of my favorite tips in that post is to hit your subscribers over the head with a call-to-action — it's the one fix that could give you immediate positive results.



## CONVERSIONS

Besides measuring what people are clicking on in your emails, you should be looking at what they do after the click. Do they convert on the landing page form? Or maybe sign up for the event you advertised? Or maybe just click on a CTA in a blog post?

Regardless of what you want people to do after they click on your email, you should be tracking those actions. The reason you send emails isn't just to get clicks — you want people to do something after they click, whether it be consuming a piece of content or becoming a customer. If your email tool is hooked up to the rest of your marketing software, tracking this metric becomes easy.



## LIST GROWTH

Over time, you'll want to get more and more people clicking and converting on your email newsletters because the more they do those things, the more likely it is you'll hit your monthly goals. More people in your list generally means more people will click on your email, and more people will convert on the content. Sure, list growth isn't everything, but you need to have enough people getting your newsletters in the first place to make the rest of your numbers follow suit.

# RED FLAG!

## NO ONE IS SUBSCRIBING TO YOUR NEWSLETTER.

If you're not growing your subscriber list, you've got a problem. No matter what your goals are — generating leads, closing customers, or developing a vibrant, happy customer community — your list should be bigger from month to month.

More people in your list means more opportunities to reach your goals, so if your list is staying stagnant from your initial send or even petering off, you might want to think about whether you want to continue your email newsletter.

If you'd like to improve what you already have, take a look at how people sign up to get your newsletter in the first place. Consider new, frictionless ways for people to sign up for your blog — maybe as a widget in your blog sidebar or as a check mark on a landing page. Maybe you run a Twitter campaign to get people to sign up. The important thing here is to get creative — and if multiple attempts at generating new subscribers don't work, swiftly get rid of your email newsletter. Please, whatever you do, just don't buy any lists.



## FORWARD RATE

This metric is actually essential for list growth. It sounds weird, but growing your email newsletter list by emailing people who are already in your database works because of the possibility of forwarding. So if you're trying to get people to forward your emails, you also need to keep an eye on how many people are getting the content forwarded to them.

Your "forward rate" isn't a set-in-stone number — you'll need to look at a composite of metrics to see how forwards impact your email newsletters and database growth. Email marketing programs can't tell how many people click the "Forward" button on an email, but there are two ways you can get an idea of your "forward rate":

- If the content you link to in the email newsletter has a form on it, you can track the number of conversions on that form.
- You can include a call-to-action with a short, trackable link to forward the email to a friend, and track the clicks on that link.

Neither metric is perfect, but they can give you a general picture of how forward-friendly your email is.



## DELIVERY RATE

Generally, we're talking about all of those emails that aren't hard and soft bounces — bounced emails that can't be sent to an inbox because the inbox is full or the address isn't valid, among other reasons. So your delivery rate is the total number of emails sent minus the total number of bounces, divided by the total number of emails sent.

Your delivery rate should be above 95% — if you notice it slipping below that in general, try to clean up your list. If you notice one newsletter in particular has a low delivery rate, see if there are any spammy red flags that would make an ISP block your email from being received.



# RED FLAG!

## YOUR SPAM RATES ARE GOING THROUGH THE ROOF.

If you're buying lists, you pretty much deserve the spam rates you get ... but if you've organically grown your list, it's incredibly frustrating to have people mark your emails as "spam." The older and more unengaged the list is, the more likely you are to get hit with those spam complaints — so you should go ahead and cleanse that list to only newer, engaged subscribers.

But if you're noticing that a targeted, fairly recent list is hitting spam on your email newsletter, it might be time to close shop. While subscribers may want to receive emails from you, the newsletter probably isn't the right approach in that situation. Go on — it's okay to let it go.

However, it's possible there's been a mistake. Maybe your subscribers mistakenly signed up for the newsletter or had a very mean competitor sign them up as a joke or something. Regardless, if you want to make sure your email subscribers are truly prepared to engage with you from the get-go, try enabling a double opt-in for new subscribers. Most email providers have this functionality built in — you just have to set it up yourself. HubSpot customers, [here's a tutorial on how to set yours up.](#)



## OVERALL ROI

If you're going to use email newsletters to grow your business, you should be able to tie their efforts to your bottom line. With closed-loop analytics, you can figure how many visitors, leads, and customers your email newsletter content generates, and how much revenue they all bring in. This is definitely the most difficult of the metrics to track, but if you can use your marketing software to find these numbers, your boss will be very, very happy.

All in all, there are really three main takeaways here:

- 1** Always make sure you're keeping an eye out for your email newsletter performance.
- 2** If any of these red flags pop up, run tests to see if metrics can improve.
- 3** Run a few tests and nothing improved? Get rid of your email newsletter.

Seriously. If it's not working, just get rid of it. While your boss may have wanted an email newsletter in the first place, they'd much rather have a solid, successful email marketing strategy.



# RED FLAG!

## YOU'RE NOT HITTING YOUR MARKETING GOALS.

Last but certainly not least, you've got to step out your email metrics bubble for a second. If you're so focused on open rates, clickthrough rates, spam rates, and the numbers on your list, you're going to be missing out on the whole point of you sending email.

Whether you're using email newsletters to generate leads, get customers, or delight customers, you've got to always take a step back and see if your email newsletters are accomplishing those goals. (Closed-loop analytics can help you tie your company goals to marketing activities.) If you're not hitting your overall marketing goals with your email newsletter, it's probably time to reconsider.

If you're hesitant to completely cut your newsletter from your activities, try aligning the content you feature in the newsletter more tightly with your marketing goals. For example, if lead generation is your marketing goal, you want to make sure nearly every component of the newsletter drives toward that goal. Take a good, hard look at your content and its metrics to see how it's achieving your goals — or not — and then only feature the best content in the newsletter to reach your goal.

04

**EMAIL  
NEWSLETTER  
MISTAKES  
NEARLY  
EVERYONE  
MAKES**

**“IT’LL HAVE EVERYTHING OUR CUSTOMERS CARE ABOUT, ALL IN ONE PLACE.”**

**“OUR LIST WILL BE DIFFERENT — PEOPLE WILL LOOK FORWARD TO GETTING OUR NEWSLETTER.”**

**“SINCE WE’RE ONLY SENDING IT ONCE A MONTH, IT’LL BE A BREEZE TO PUT TOGETHER.”**

Any of these optimistic declarations sound familiar? While all of these things may become true for a few lucky individuals, most often, email newsletters flop. They become an uninteresting mush of content that people automatically ignore, archive, delete, or straight up unsubscribe from.

That being said, here are the most common mistakes nearly every marketer makes when creating an email newsletter, and how you can avoid them:

# MISTAKE #1: HAVING A POORLY SEGMENTED LIST

As with any email marketing, the content in your email newsletter should be relevant to your audience. And that doesn't happen without list segmentation. The problem is, often email newsletters are sent as the catch-all content — it's so generic, it can apply to everybody on your email list!

Or no one at all ... because as we'll discuss in more detail later in this section, generic content doesn't get you far. Your email newsletter should only go out to those recipients who are interested in the subject matter of the newsletter. I can tell you right now that there are people on HubSpot's own email list that don't give a whit (not a typo) about marketing automation, but are extremely interested in how to get leads from social media; and vice versa. If my newsletter focuses on the latest social media developments — is it wise to send that newsletter to subscribers who wanted to hear about marketing automation software? I think not.

There are two ways to remedy this. The first is to marry the interests of both list segments and write a newsletter about, say, social media marketing automation. The more list segments you have, however, the more difficult it will become to create newsletter content that applies to everyone. If you're facing this problem, the better solution is to tailor content to each list segment. This means either segmenting lists yourself and creating newsletter content that is relevant to that list segment, or letting recipients opt in to newsletters about a specific subject matter.



Finally, whenever you create a call-to-action on your website for a visitor to sign up for your email newsletter, be as clear as possible about the content of that newsletter. Setting these expectations up front will help you capture those who truly want the content your newsletter will cover, and filter out those who will ultimately be disappointed with the content of your email.

## MISTAKE #2: INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Email newsletters often suffer from a few types of information overload: either the breadth of information covered is too wide, the quantity of information is too overwhelming for any reader to actually consume, and/or the information is just plain not interesting. Let's break down how to avoid each of these problems.

We'll begin with the issue of covering too wide a breadth of information, which we touched on earlier in this section. If you send an email about too many subjects, it's too unfocused to be relevant to anyone.

Let's play a game of "one of these things is not like the other" to demonstrate the concept further. You run email marketing for a clown college, and for your next email newsletter, you want to touch on the following topics:

- Clown financial aid application deadline
- Clown work study programs
- Clown intramural sports leagues
- Student loan options for clowns



What would you leave out? The information about sports leagues, right? It's not that some of your prospective and current clown students aren't interested in sports clubs at the school, it's just that not all of them will be. Create a newsletter that talks about what that entire list segment cares about (in this scenario, that's paying for school) and save the sports talk for another list segment that cares about extracurriculars.

Just as you should provide your readers a focused subject matter in your emails, you should help them maintain that focus by limiting the amount of text in the email. Often times, email newsletter creators will try to write an entire article about a particular subject matter — but is an email really the place to detail what options clowns have for student loans? If it requires more than a couple sentences of explanation, a web page is the more appropriate venue.

**WRITE A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE CONTENT IN YOUR EMAIL NEWSLETTER, THEN INCLUDE A LINK TO READ MORE ON YOUR WEBSITE SO YOUR READER ISN'T OVERWHELMED WITH TEXT IN THE EMAIL.**

Not only is this easier to consume, but it also drives visitors to your website, provides opportunities for reconversion, and gets you more indexable pages filled with great content to improve your SEO!

Finally, newsletters often suffer from talking about information that no one cares about, which usually takes the form of self-promotional content. It's not that you shouldn't talk about your product, service, or company — that's part of the definition of an email newsletter. But there's a way to present that information that demonstrates value for the reader, instead of appearing like a relatively meaningless press release or announcement.

## **ASK YOURSELF THE “SO WHAT?” OF ANY ANNOUNCEMENT YOU'RE MAKING.**

For example, why does it matter to the reader that you're launching a new product? Will it make them better at their jobs? If so, how? Announce the feature, and then explain the end benefit of that feature for your reader. If you can't think of an end benefit, nix the content from your newsletter.



## **MISTAKE #3: COMPETING CALLS-TO-ACTION**

In most email marketing, with every new call-to-action you include, the effectiveness of each is diluted more and more. So in an email newsletter with so many different pieces of content contained therein — surveys, deadlines, offers, product launches, etc. — it's easy to break one of the cardinal rules of email marketing: including only one call-to-action!

So how do you get past this? The first step is acceptance — there will be more than one call-to-action in your email newsletter. But that doesn't mean they have to compete with one another. Take a step back, and ask yourself what you want your recipients to do when they read your newsletter. What's the point?



**CLICK THIS**

**NO, CLICK THIS**

**WAIT, THIS TOO**

Let's revisit our clown financial aid example. Perhaps the email marketing manager decided the point of the newsletter is to show prospective students the options they have at their disposal to pay for school — financial aid, work study, and student loans. These may all point to different pages on the website when the reader clicks through on the story, but the call-to-action on each of those pages could point to one all-inclusive guide about paying for clown college. The end goal is the same: getting clowns to pay for school. Each of those pieces of content, the pages a reader lands on when they click through, and the calls-to-action available to them on those pages all contribute to that goal.



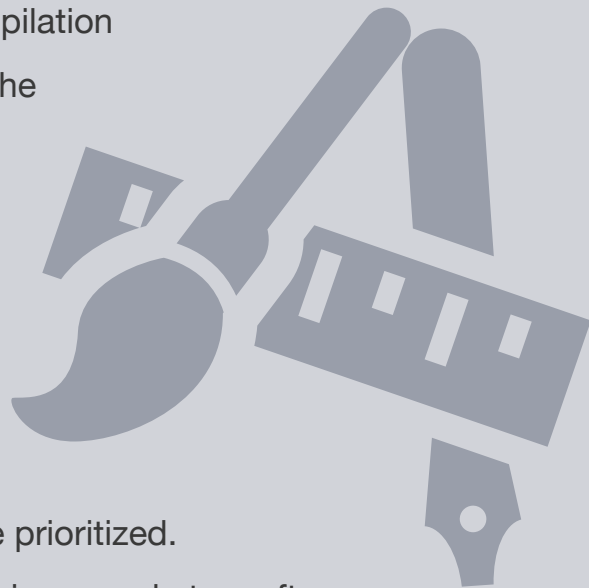
You can also use design to emphasize one particular story over others. For example, if the financial aid deadline is the most important part of the newsletter, it should act as a feature story and take up more room in the newsletter than the rest of the stories. In fact, let's look at how else design can make or break your email newsletter.

## MISTAKE #4: INCONSISTENT DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Because email newsletters are a compilation of stories, many businesses change the appearance of the emails from send to send to accommodate the ever-changing content. It makes sense — images could be different sizes from week to week, there might be an uneven balance of content, or you can't decide which content should be prioritized.

But instead of making the difficult choices, marketers often just adapt their newsletter design to accommodate that send's specific needs.

Don't do it! Not only does it take lots of time to edit your email template, but it confuses your regular readers. Use a standard format for every single newsletter so it is recognizable to your subscribers. That means the same layout, the same image alignment, and the same placement of links and calls-to-action so your reader can scan and find the information they want.



## **MISTAKE #5: VAGUE SUBJECT LINES**

This is an easy fix, but such a common email newsletter faux pas. Often, the subject of an email newsletter is something along the lines of Weekly [Company X] Newsletter or Monthly [Product Y] Update.

### **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? WHAT WILL THE READER LEARN?**

The interesting part of the email isn't the frequency at which the recipient receives it — it's the juicy information you're divulging!

Email newsletters have the opportunity to be chock full of interesting content, and as such are a very useful inbound marketing tool. So it's a shame when marketers put significant time and effort into compiling and sharing their best announcements, offers, and content in an email newsletter, only to have it fall on deaf ears. Use these tips to ensure your next email newsletter is a smashing success and leads to an ever-increasing, dedicated list of subscribers that look forward to reading your email content.

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**EXAMPLES OF  
GREAT EMAIL  
NEWSLETTERS**

To help inspire you to make the best email newsletter for your company possible, we compiled seven of our absolute favorite email newsletters. They are all fabulous for different reasons — some have exceptional design, some have exceptional copy, some have exceptional calls-to-action ... but all are excellent at solving for their subscribers' needs.

So go on, check out these examples and get inspired to make your own email newsletters even better!



# THESKIMM

If you want to stay up on what's happening in the world and have some delightful writing delivered to your inbox first thing in the morning, look no further than [theSkimm](#). It's a daily roundup of what's happened in the news in short, punch paragraphs. Bonus: You don't have to click out of the email to read more for the news if you don't want to.



**THE STORY:** The government is still not open for business. Day three.

**WHY IS THAT AGAIN?** After three years of close calls and putting Band-Aids over disagreements on how the government should spend its money, Congress ran out of last-minute deals. In order to fund the government, Congress needs to pass a spending bill. House Republicans, pushed by [members of the tea party](#) (uber-conservatives from districts that don't heart Obama) want to tie funding for the government to defunding or delaying Obamacare. That's a non-starter for the Democrat-led Senate and the president. Since Congress couldn't get its act together to agree on a bill, the government shut down for the first time in 17 years.

For your own email marketing, theSkimm is the place to go if you're looking for writing inspiration or for emails without much visual content. Simply divine.

[NoshOn.It's email newsletters](#) are insanely well-designed and supplemented with visual content — oh, and also helpful if you're an aspiring foodie. Just check out the examples below to see what I mean.

**TRUSS**

**How to Easily Truss a Turkey**

Trussing helps cook a turkey evenly and makes the final presentation picture-

**COOK**

**Turkey Times & Temps**

Everything you need to know about roasting a turkey including a cooking time

**CARVE**

**How to Carve a Turkey**

Learn the right way to carve and present a turkey with step-by-step instructions. Plus, learn our trick for keeping the skin crispy even after resting.

[Hand me a knife >>](#)

The layout goes from having one column to having almost two with “truss,” “cook,” and “carve” — a perfect way to balance a featured piece of content with the supplemental content of an email newsletter. They also selected one topic for the whole newsletter and then visually connected those dots for the readers with the red labels on the images.



# LITMUS

You'd hope that an email marketing testing company would have great emails ... and [Litmus](#) definitely does.



While the content of the emails is certainly interesting, I'm especially digging the design — the blocks of color help break up the newsletter into sections that are easy to differentiate.

Bonus: The color scheme makes the newsletter, as a whole, look cohesive, yet it lets the sections stand out from each other.

# HACKER NEWSLETTER

Not all of us are hackers, but we can all appreciate a well-put-together email newsletter. [Hacker News](#), a site that aggregates top news in the tech and startup worlds, may not send an email that everyone reading this blog would love to click on, but it sends an awesome roundup of top stories every day that we could emulate in our own marketing.

## hackernewsletter

Issue #179 // December 12, 2013 // [View in your browser](#)

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The book section below is always popular, so I wanted to mention two guys I happen to know that have new books out: John Foreman's [Data Smart](#) and Dan Lewis' [Now I Know](#). I can't recommend both of them enough. —kale

### #LEARN

[Linear algebra tutorial in four pages](#) //minireference comments →

[Introduction to Artificial Neural Networks - Part 1](#) //theprojectspot comments →

The newsletter is clean and minimal, but still sends a ton of really great content its subscribers' way. The way it distills potentially overwhelming information is by bucketing content into sections. The newsletter also looks very similar to the site, so for those who love the site and how it's laid out (aka people who are subscribed to the email newsletter), it's a comforting, familiar way to consume content.

# GENERAL ASSEMBLY

With [Gmail's new image update](#) allowing images to automatically appear in emails, they're more important than ever to your newsletter. And there's lots of creative things you can do with images in your emails — such as use animated GIFs.



**Share Your Story: Creating Compelling, Clickable Content**  
Tuesday, 1/14, 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm



**The Short List: Choosing Critical Features For Your MVP**  
Monday, 1/6, 6:00 pm - 8:30 pm



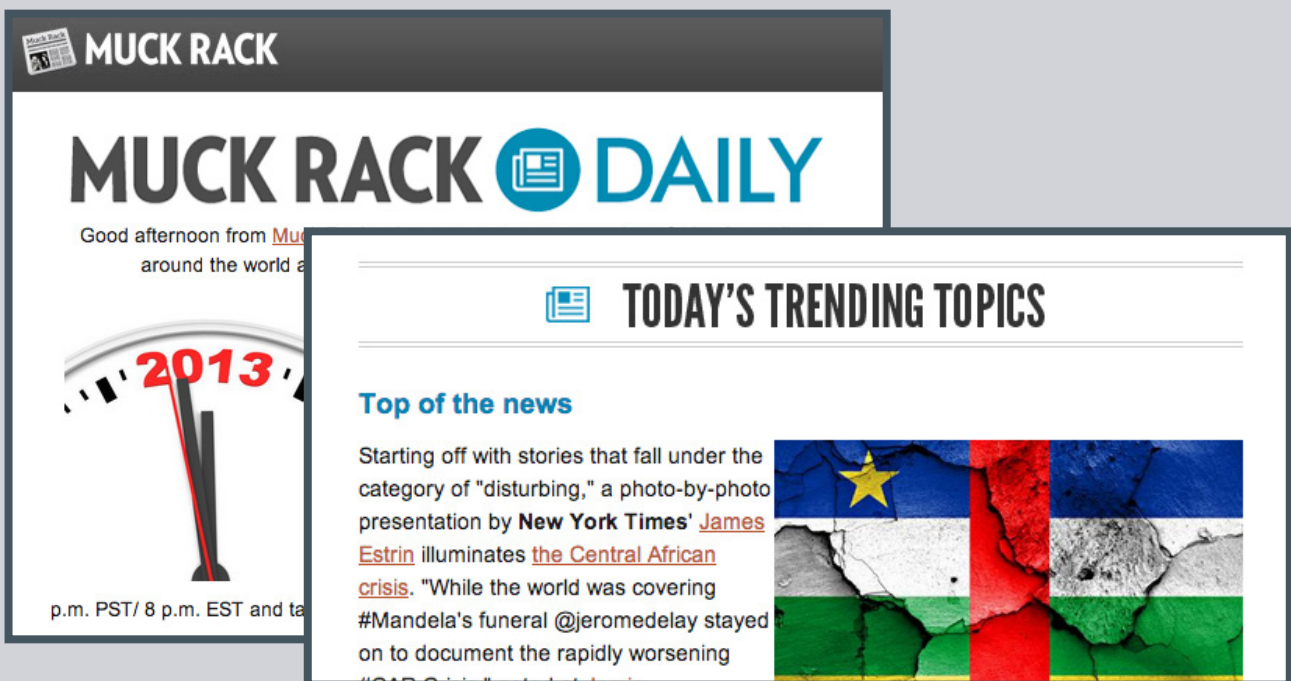
**Creative Process For Coders**  
Monday & Wednesday, 1/13 - 1/15,  
7:00 pm - 8:30 pm

Check out the newsletter from [General Assembly](#), an organization that helps expand professionals' skill sets, to see this in action (the screenshots above just don't do it the justice it deserves). Prominently featuring the GIF at the top and having an otherwise minimal layout makes this newsletter attractive but also incredibly scannable.

If your subscribers are just looking to get some quick info in a newsletter format, think about how you could replicate some of General Assembly's newsletter success.

# MUCK RACK DAILY

[Muck Rack](#) impressed me within an hour of signing up for their email list. I was looking for great email newsletters to use for a blog post (sound familiar?) and I heard that Muck Rack had a great one. I wanted to see it for myself and signed up.



Within an hour, I received my first email from them with the subject line: "MRD: 'Funny, clever and not full of gifs.'" Obviously, I like all three of these things, so I click through. I see the email below.

The design is gorgeous — the bold fonts and colors are striking, but not distracting. The copy is flawless (what else would you expect from a company catering to journalists?). It's scrollable and engaging. Just the perfect email newsletter package.

# MEDIUM

Last, but certainly not least, is [Medium](#), the recently popular blogging platform/media site. They have a ton of people publishing posts on their site every day — which is a lot of content for the average person to filter through. To help bring great content to the surface, Medium uses a weekly email newsletter. And after I open this newsletter every week, I end up going to visit several Medium posts without fail. Mission accomplished for Medium, right?

## Welcome to **Medium**

Spend time with some of our favorite posts from the past week

Parenting • 9 min read • by Mark Oppenheimer

### **Forty Thoughts on a Fourth Daughter**

I have four children under age seven

Here's why: The newsletter — similar to Hacker News' newsletter — is pretty much only text. But because of the way that Medium uses text variety and section dividers, they're able to give you a ton of content in one email without it feeling overwhelming.

I really wanted to use their email in here to remind you that you don't need to be a visual content creation wiz to have awesome newsletters (though that certainly won't hurt). As long as you are solving the needs of your subscribers, you're going to have a great newsletter.

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# CONCLUSION & CHECKLIST

**N**ow, you're probably realizing that sending an email newsletter requires juggling a lot of moving pieces. You've got to worry about proofreading the copy, creating compelling calls-to-action, designing the email to work for multiple inboxes and devices, avoiding any spam triggers, and brainstorming clickable subject lines, all while staying within the confines of email law.

(Oh, and if you mess any of it up, there's no "redo" or "update" button.)

So here's a comprehensive checklist to make sure you don't miss out on any of these crucial steps:



# EMAIL NEWSLETTER CHECKLIST

- Determine your newsletter's goal.
- Gather your content.
- Design your template.
- Add in body content.
- Add in personalization tokens and smart content.
- Choose your subject line and sender name.
- Tidy up loose strings.
- Make sure you're legally compliant.
- Test different browsers and email providers.
- Send.
- Analyze and iterate.



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