

National Journal Communications Council

**Media
University**

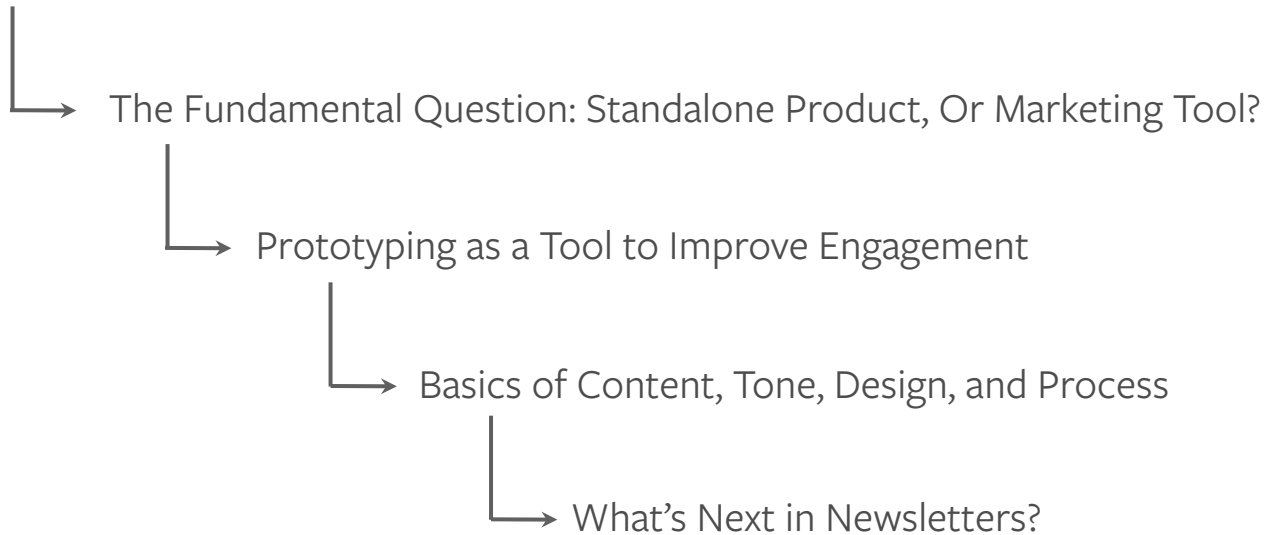
AMU 414

Building a Better E-Newsletter— Part 1

November 19, 2015

Our Time Together

Setting the Foundation: Why Everyone's (Still) Talking About Newsletters



The Most Important Choice

Your Philosophical Approach to Your Newsletter Will Dictate Content, Format, and Measurement

Conveyor



“Our main objective is to drive traffic to content hosted elsewhere. The newsletter is a distribution mechanism, not a product in itself. It’s part of a web of communications, and our website is the hub.”

- Pew Charitable Trusts

VS.

Standalone Product



“At Quartz, our newsletter stands alone. It’s not a marketing channel. There’s a sense of satisfaction in getting everything you need to know.”

- Quartz

“People should only click links if they want to know more, or find it really interesting--not because we left something out.”

-Buzzfeed

Conveyor Function Drives Content and Form

Text Creates Curiosity Gaps, While Strong Visuals Inspire Engagement

Unrelated Content Suggestion

Teases other content on website for hyper-engaged readers

Organizational Brand at the Forefront

Recurring header features organizational mission to reinforce brand

Sweeping Visuals

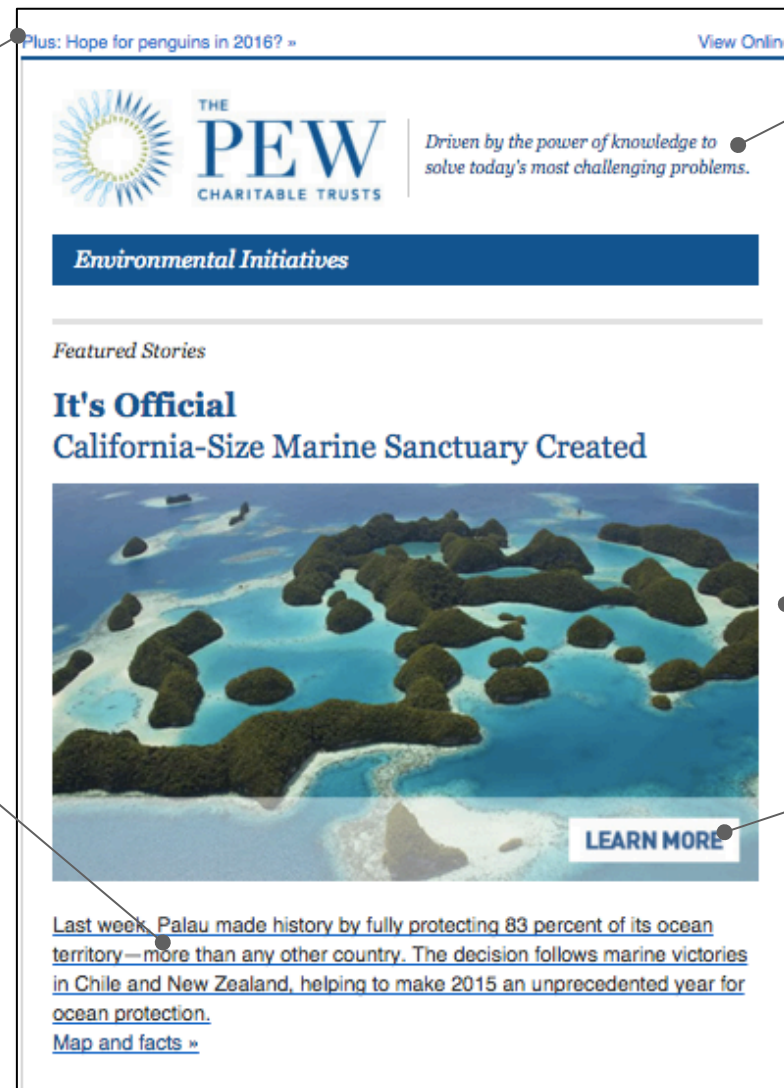
Better as an initial eye-catching statement rather than a factual informer, used heavily because Pew's audience opens primarily on desktop

Calls to Action

Custom overlaid visual calls-to-action implore the reader to go back to the website and call attention to additional content; Pew has seen significant increases in clickthroughs than images or text alone

Summarized Content

Hyperlinked text gives a brief topical rundown but suggests the reader take closer look



Standalone Newsletters are Rich In Content, Less About Visuals

Largely Self Contained Products that Encourage, But Do Not Require, Leaving the Platform

Consistent Sections

Each issue has repeat sections, offering the reader a predictability to their experience

Detailed Summaries

Story descriptions are in depth enough as to not require clicking through, but hyperlinks to various sources are available



Newsletter Mission Statement

Mission statement accurately describes the newsletter's specific goal, not just that of the organization—and because of this, the organization's brand is secondary

Lack of Images

Keeps focus on the stories and insights offered, and makes for a lighter load time

How API's Goals Translate to a Standalone Product

When re-thinking their newsletter last year, API wanted it to be "unique and actionable," and for readers to "apply that-day practices." This specific vision translates into their plan for content, which each day includes both basic information for a story but lots of options for readers to dig deeper.

Approaches to Prototyping a Newsletter

Should You Demo the Finished Product or Go Piecemeal? Start in Private or Go Public?

AMERICANPRESS
institute



Audience Testing:

Private testing improves the product without disrupting an existing audience.

APi wanted to launch a completely new product to replace an existing newsletter. They presented the newsletter to 5 to 10 core members of their target audience for feedback.



Product Testing:

“The whole enchilada” – one launch, less confusion.

Since they had previously relied on an aggregation service, APi wanted to test the new work-flow of working in-house on a newsletter. They worked privately for two weeks until they were comfortable with the process. The final launch piece included an introduction note about the changes.

BuzzFeedNEWS



Public testing helps you target your audience.

BuzzFeedNews was launching a new venture. They approached their newsletter as an opportunity to learn about their potential audience, sharing their work with groups on social media.



“Snackable” – more opportunities to get it right.

BuzzFeedNews had about a month to develop a finished product. Releasing prototypes of the newsletter section by section allowed them to work quickly and focus their testers' feedback.

How you test your newsletter will depend on:

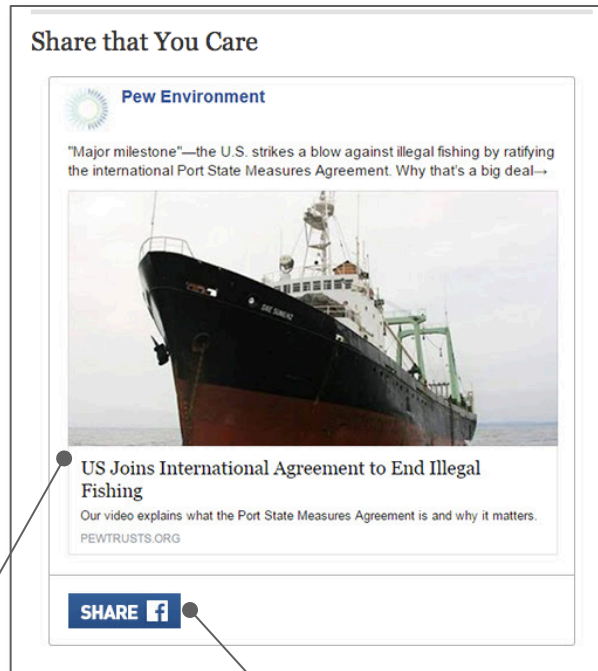
- Audience: Are you starting a new product or do you have a loyal following?
- Deadlines: How quickly will you need a finished product?
- Product: Are you replacing an old product? Supplementing it? Or starting fresh?

Integrate Opportunities for Engagement

Newsletter Can Be a Strategic Vehicle for Amplifying Social Content

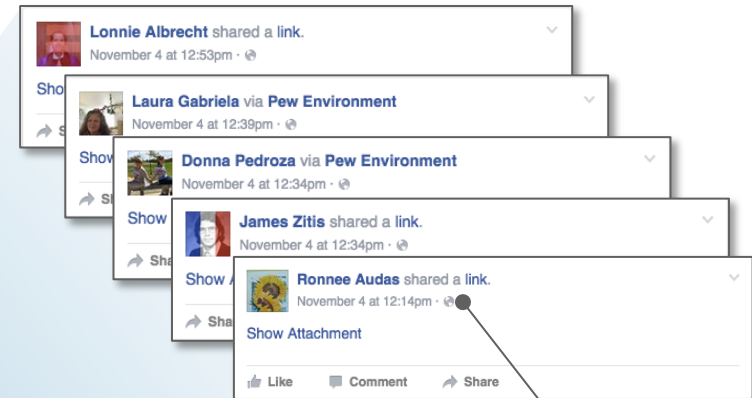
Pews Integrates Specific Social Content into Weekly Newsletters...

...and Posts See Regular Boosts in Engagement



Pew includes full-width screenshots of recent social posts in its environmental advocacy newsletter

Images are overlaid with custom “share” buttons that direct readers to the original post on social media



Although the original post was more than a week old at the time it was featured in the newsletter, much of the engagement appears to have come from the subsequent newsletter push—not the original post on Facebook

Keys to Successful Mobile Optimization

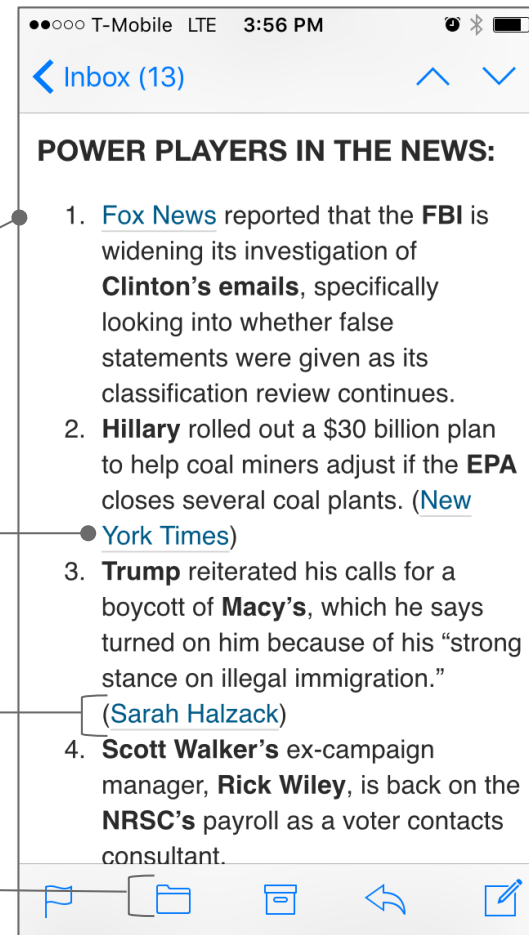
Tips from E-Newsletter Writers, Managers, and Strategists

Make text “scannable.” Break up text with plenty of white space. Use bold or larger text to indicate importance. Fonts should be easy to read on a small screen.

Important information should be at the top. Less important information should occur further down. This is true for each section within the email, too.

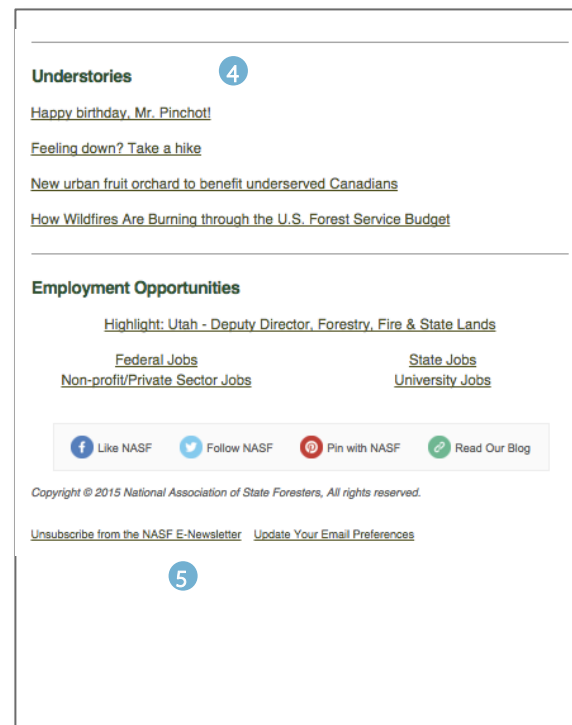
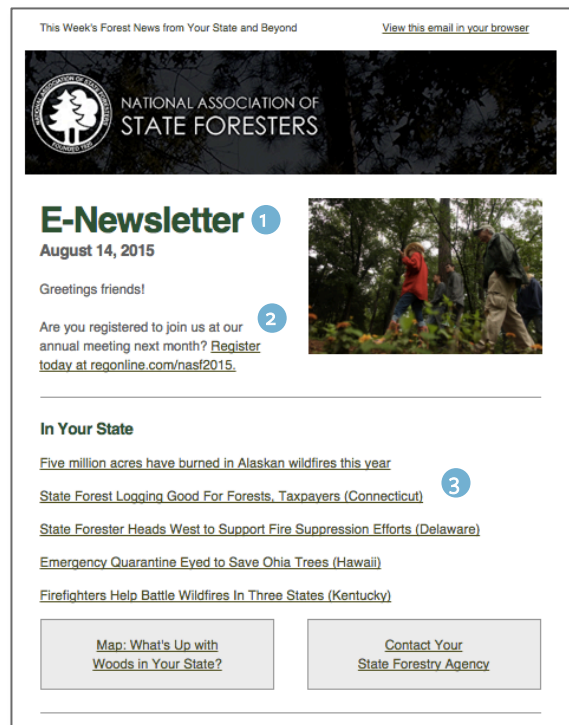
Make sure links are distinct from the rest of the text. Underline the text or use a different font color to make sure links pop.

Links should be at least as large as a key on the keyboard. Anything smaller becomes difficult to click.



Newsletter in Action: National Association of State Foresters

Wonderfully Simple Works, But Room for Incremental Improvements



- 1 NASF does not need to announce in bold that the email is an “E-NEWSLETTER.”
- 2 Instead, important information, like the reminder to register for the annual meeting, belongs at the top.
- 3 “In Your State” is a great idea for a section, but it’s hard to scan. NASF could move the state to the beginning of each headline or they could personalize it based on subscriber information.

- 4 The “Understories” headlines are unclear. NASF could add sources, so readers know where they are clicking. They could also add short descriptions to save readers from clicking through to stories they may not find interesting.
- 5 The newsletter has clear “unsubscribe” and “preference” options.