

National Journal Communications Council

**Media
University**

AMU 414

Building a Better E-Newsletter— Part 2

December 18, 2015

Our Time Together

Highlighting Opportunities to Optimize Newsletter Engagement Across the Life Cycle



The Sign-Up Experience



A/B Testing Fundamentals



Subject Lines



Senders



Time of Day



Personalization



Design



Social Integration



Archiving

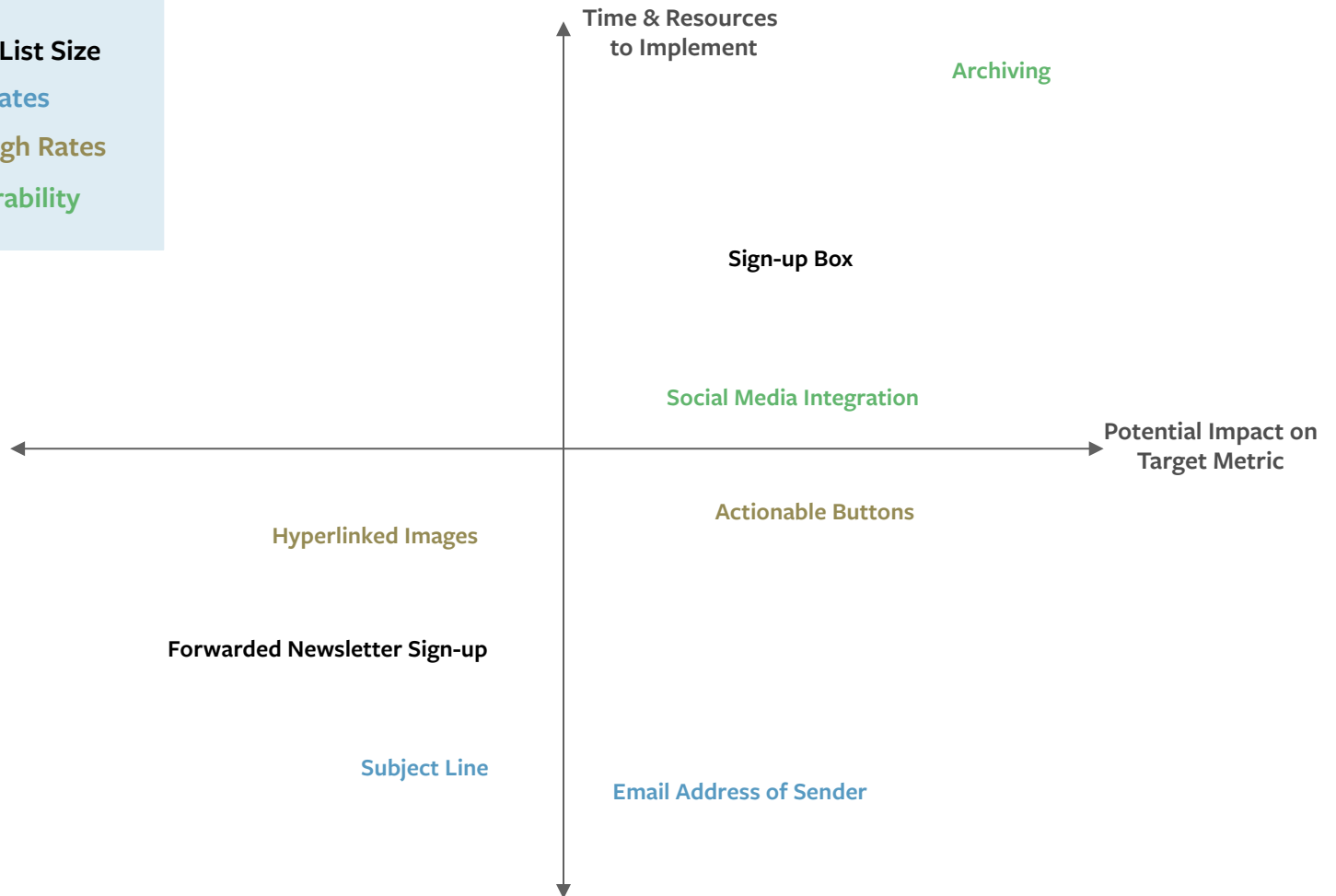
Optimizing Engagement Across the Newsletter Life Cycle

How Targeted Changes Can Yield Meaningful Impacts in E-Newsletter “Weak Spots”

KEY: TARGET METRICS

Subscriber List Size
Open Rates
Clickthrough Rates
Discoverability

E-Newsletter Testing Matrix



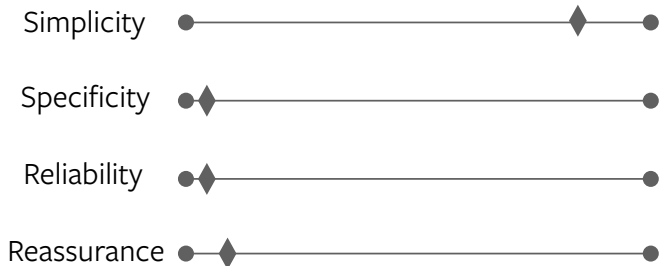


Four Keys to an Optimized Sign-Up Experience

Knowing Which Attributes to Employ in a Sign-Up Yields Better E-Newsletter Enrollment

Sample #1:
Heavy on Social Buttons, Unclear Why

Sample #2:
Sparse Design, Sparse Appeal



Simplicity: Ease of signing up
Specificity: Clarity in what content one will receive
Reliability: Knowledge of when to expect newsletter
Reassurance: Confirmation of successful sign-up



A Simple Template Can Still Incorporate All Necessary Attributes

Balancing a Minimalist Yet Informative Design Defines a Strong Sign-Up

Sample #3: A Concise and Appealing Sign-up

Clear, attention-grabbing
call to sign up

Finite interval for
email push and a
description of
expected content

One-step sign-up

Sign Up

Sign up for the best of our environment research every two weeks—stunning photos, conservation wins, and action alerts.

Email Address **SUBMIT**

Good Start, But Still Room for Improvement

This newsletter thanks you for signing up and then asks if you would send more optional information. It could potentially improve on this by emailing a direct confirmation of your sign-up with initial content.

Simplicity ● ————— ◆ ●

Specificity ● ————— ◆ ●

Reliability ● ————— ◆ ●

Reassurance ● ————— ◆ ●

Engage Readers When They Are Most Passionate About Content

Acknowledging New Subscribers Can Show the Immediate Value in Joining a Newsletter Community

Quartz Daily Briefing Welcome Email

Sample Content
Gives readers a taste of what to expect

Congratulations, you're all signed up for the Quartz Daily Brief. Look for us in your inbox tomorrow morning. You can change the edition you receive by following the link at the bottom of your first Daily Brief.

While you're waiting, stay in touch by [liking us on Facebook](#), or by [following @qz on Twitter](#). And here's a popular chart on [Atlas](#), our site for charts and data.

Valuations of leading ride-hailing companies

Estimated valuation

Uber	\$50 billion
Didi Kuaidi	15
Ola	5
Lyft	2.5
GrabTaxi	1.5

ATLAS

(And if you'd like to unsubscribe at any point, you can do so [here](#).)

Our best wishes for a productive day.

Other Channels for Connecting
Options for following social channels are presented as a way to engage in the interim

Ability to Unsubscribe
Act of good will that also buffers against "zombie subscribers"

Try This At Home

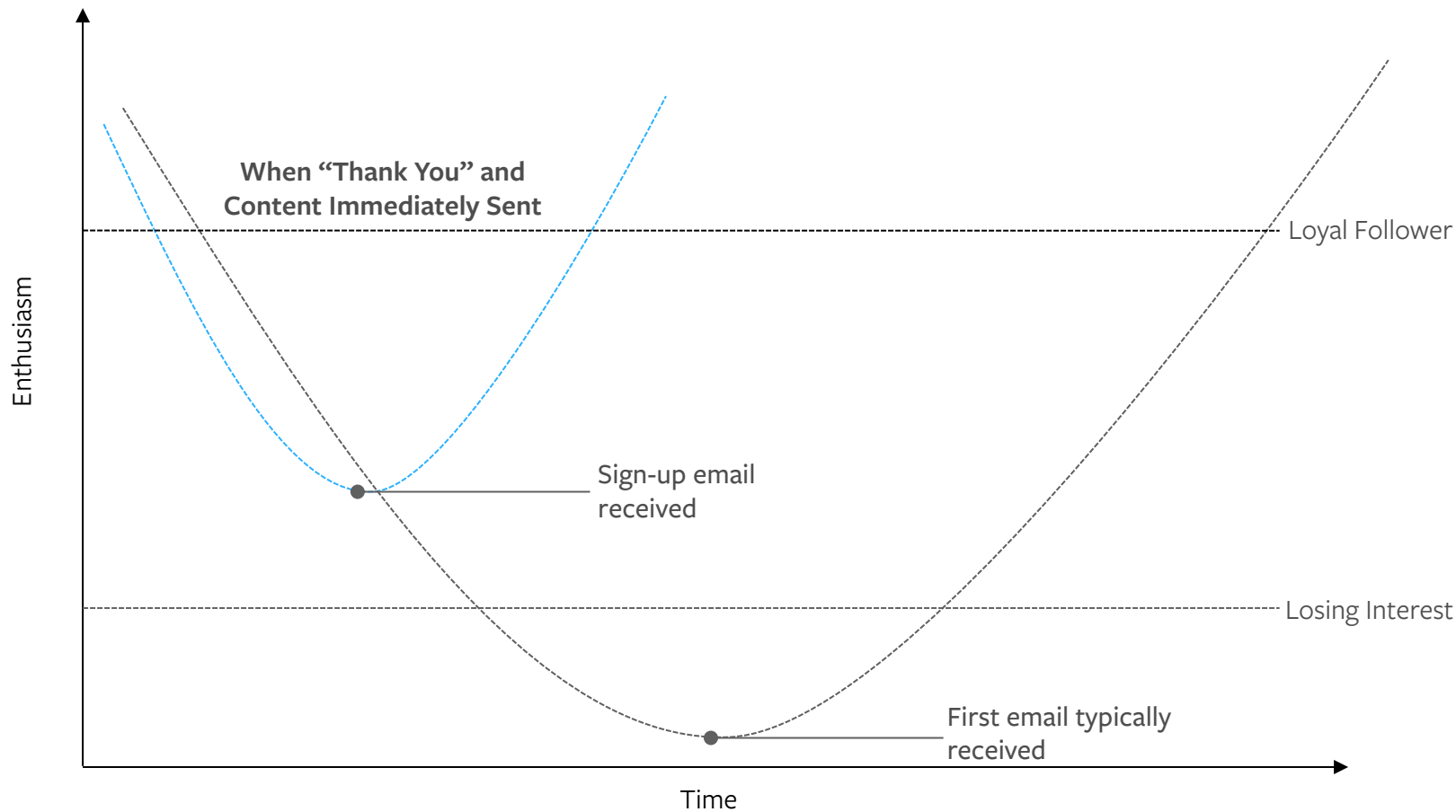
- ★ Consider sending an automated thank you email to individuals who sign up for your newsletter, giving them a taste of the content they should expect to receive in their first one.



Minimizing the Newsletter Enthusiasm Gap

Engage Your Subscribers Immediately After Sign-Up for a Quicker Bounce Back

The “Fervor Curve”



Previewing Newsletter Brings Product from Abstract to Concrete

Giving Readers a Newsletter Preview When Signing Up Can Contextualize Their Expectations

Sign-up Box

Newsletters

Fill out this form to subscribe or update your preferences.

This Week on TheAtlantic.com (sample)

This Month in The Atlantic (sample)

Atlantic Daily (sample)

New from the **Photo Section** (sample)

Daily Newsletter from CityLab (sample)

This Week's Most Popular Stories from CityLab (sample)


I want to receive updates from our partners and sponsors

EMAIL

Preview Display

The Atlantic


This Week on TheAtlantic.com
Thursday, December 3, 2015




The High-Stakes Race to Rid the World of Human Drivers

The competition is fierce, the key players are billionaires, but the path—and even the destination—remains uncertain.

ADRIENNE LAFRANCE






The Ecstasy of Donald Trump

As the public's fear and loathing surge, the frontrunner's durable candidacy has taken a dark turn.

MOLLY BALL



Putting a Human Face on Your Newsletter

Quartz's Mobile-Friendly Testimonials Provide Third Party Validation of Quality, Boost Sign-ups

Section-by-section descriptions of content provide even more specific, individualized value propositions

Rotating reader testimonials are a simple way to boost credibility and create a sense of FOMO

What to watch for today
Prepare for the day ahead with the news that should be on your radar

While you were sleeping
Disconnect without fear because we'll always catch you up on what you missed

“
The @qz daily brief is my news lifeblood. I've basically given up on all other news sites. So good.
MICHAEL JANIAK

“
The Quartz Daily Brief is my favorite daily news-
newsletter. Global view, yet concise + has an appetite
for amusement.
AMANDA HESSER

Try This At Home

- ★ Capture and record positive feedback from members or advocates on your newsletter, whether it comes in via email or social.
- ★ Use these short testimonials alongside your sign-up form, archives, or feature them in the newsletter itself.

The Mechanics of Meaningful A/B Testing

A Statistically Sound A/B Test Should Follow Four Rules



Test Consistently

One day of A/B testing isn't adequate. A meaningful test requires a sustained period of time as certain trial variables could work on a case-by-case basis but not be viable long-term solutions.



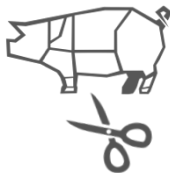
Practice Smart Randomization

While some systems automatically split or segment based off last name, try instead creating case-specific segmentation. This means testing a variable that will resonate with a certain age/political/gender demographic.



Change a Single Variable

Test one variable at a time. This ensures that you can discern cause and effect when significant differences in engagement between two (or more) newsletter variations occur.



Cut the Fat

Do not include individuals who have not opened your email over a prolonged period of time. This could skew your findings by giving overly negative results that reflect individuals who did not encounter the test variable.



Illustrating Consistency in Newsletter Testing

Even Slight Variations in Testing Water Down the Significance of an A/B Test

Original Email

☆ National Christmas Tree Federation Read About a New Breed Of Tree in This Month's Edition of the Yule Log 9:00 AM

Test One

☆ National Christmas Tree Federation How One Christmas Tree Farm Survives in California's Death Valley 5:00 AM

Test Two

☆ Santa Claus Your Monthly Newsletter 9:00 AM

Test Three

☆ National Christmas Tree Federation Read About a New Breed Of Tree in This Month's Edition of the Yule Log 6:00 PM

Test Four

☆ National Christmas Tree Federation New Tree Wows! 9:00 AM

The Finite Art of Subject Line Length

Writing a “Not Too Short,” “Not Too Long,” Goldilocks Subject Line



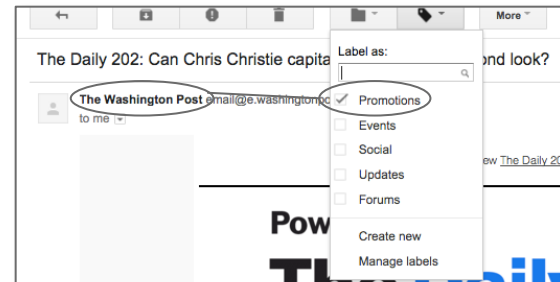
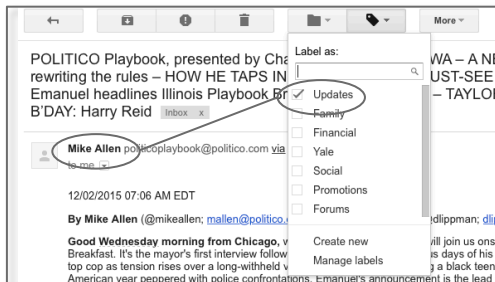
Sample Subject Lines for the National Christmas Tree Federation

	Short	Medium	Long
Sample Subject	<i>40% Increase!</i>	<i>40% Increase in Tree Sales this Season</i>	<i>Foreign Exports Lead to a 40% Increase in Tree Sales this Season</i>
Upside	Short subject lines have the highest open rates; 50% for emails with less than 10 characters & 39% for 10-19 char.	Enough description to ascertain the content of the email while still allowing some of the email body to show in recipient's inbox	Individuals opening email will be self-selecting and most interested in the topic, therefore more likely to click through
But Keep in Mind	Terse subject lines might get people to open, but not click through; you risk annoying them with the lack of information	This is the length most subject lines will be; shorter and longer ones tend to be a conscious effort on the part of the sender	Subject lines with more than 69 characters are opened just 29% of the time—but it may be the right 29% for your list

Ignore the “From” Name At Your Own Risk

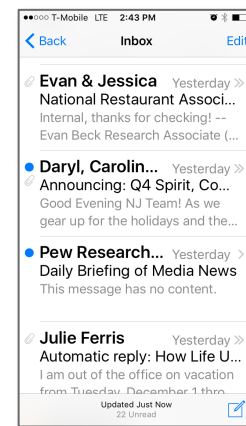
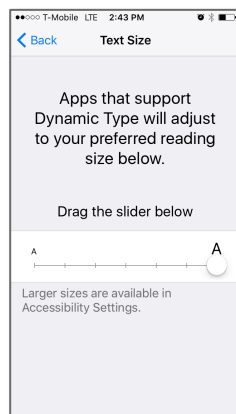
“From” Name Influences Open Rates, Inbox Organization

Inbox Labels: Gmail and other providers automatically label emails and may even sort according to label. The wrong “from” name could contribute to your newsletter being sent to Promotions or your membership renewal going to Spam.



Mobile Devices: Your “from” name could be the most important information a mobile device user sees. Smaller screens often cut off text. Some mobile inbox preferences also allow users to limit the text displayed.

Accessible Fonts: If your audience is older, they may adjust their font size – and make it less likely they’ll see an inbox preview. Your “from” line may be the only thing that’s recognizable.



Always Customize

~~noreply@paypal.com~~

Never use an email address as your “from” name. It may be unrecognizable or worse, may indicate an email is automated or spam. According to ConvinceandConvert.com, 43% of people report an email as spam based on the “from” line.



The “From” Name Should be Recognizable, Trustworthy

The Best Fit for Your Email will Depend on Its Content and Recipients

Clear

Humane Society	PAWgress Newsletter - Upcoming events
Dr. Smith, Humane Society	You Should Adopt A Pet - We a

Trustworthy

Julie Dixon	E-Newsletter Challenge - This week's cha
Santa Claus	What Do You Want For Christmas - Ho h

Attention-Grabbing

Got Milk?	Big Almond is At It AGAIN - Stop the nut!
Donald Trump	Make America Great Again - The media is

Organization Name:

It's likely the recipient already knows and trusts this name. If your content is appreciated, it positively reinforces your organization's reputation.

Combined Name:

Method for building familiarity with a person, campaign, or brand. Can transfer trust from an established name to a lesser-known one.

Personal Name:

Recipient may feel like this is a warmer and more personal touch, but it could backfire if the “from” name sender is not someone well-known or respected. The recipient will also expect the email's content to reflect the sender's personality.

Campaign Name:

Useful if your organization sends lots of emails and wants to distinguish each. Make sure the name is recognizable.

Gimmicky or Celebrity Name:

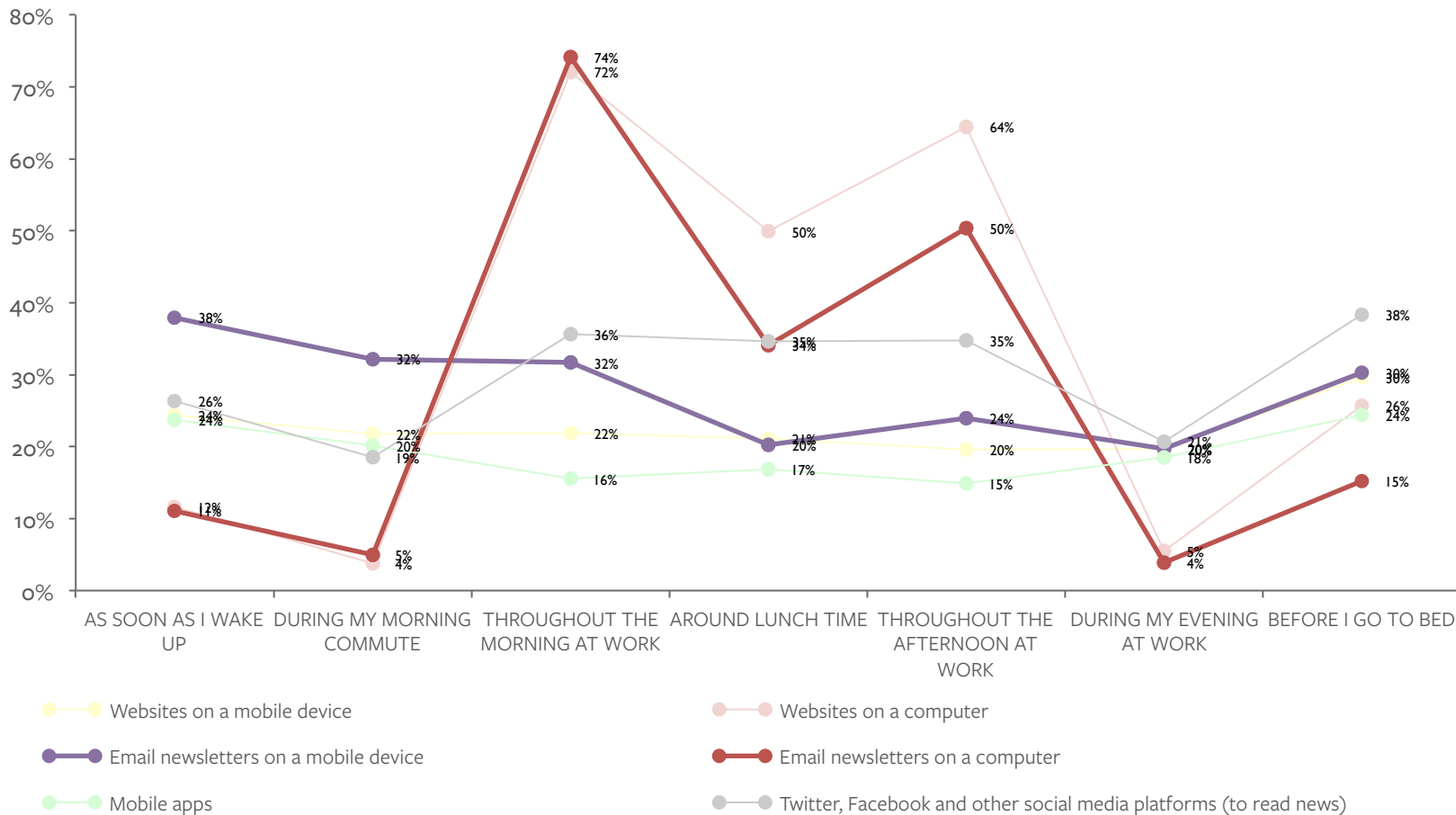
Stands out in a full inbox, but it can be alienating if done poorly. Use rarely.

What We Know About Time of Day From WIA

Mobile Access is Highest In Mornings and Evenings But Desktop Rules the Day

Digital Channels Used for Washington News and Information Throughout the Weekday

Percentage of Respondents by Channel

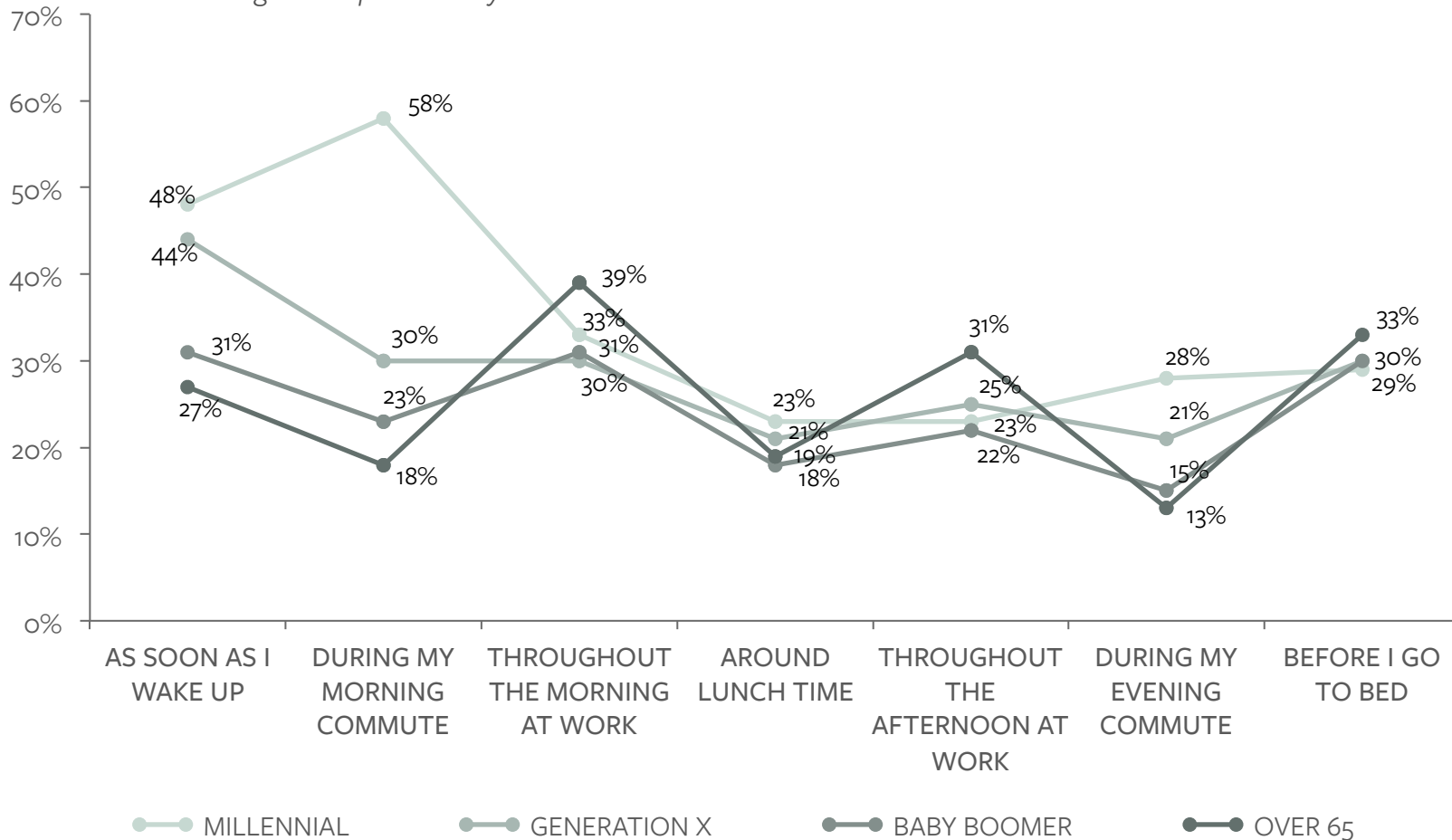


What We Know About Time of Day From WIA

Millennials and Gen X Wake Up With Email; Over 65 Ease Into the Day

Consumption of E-Newsletters on Mobile for Washington News and Information Throughout the Weekday

Percentage of Respondents by Generation

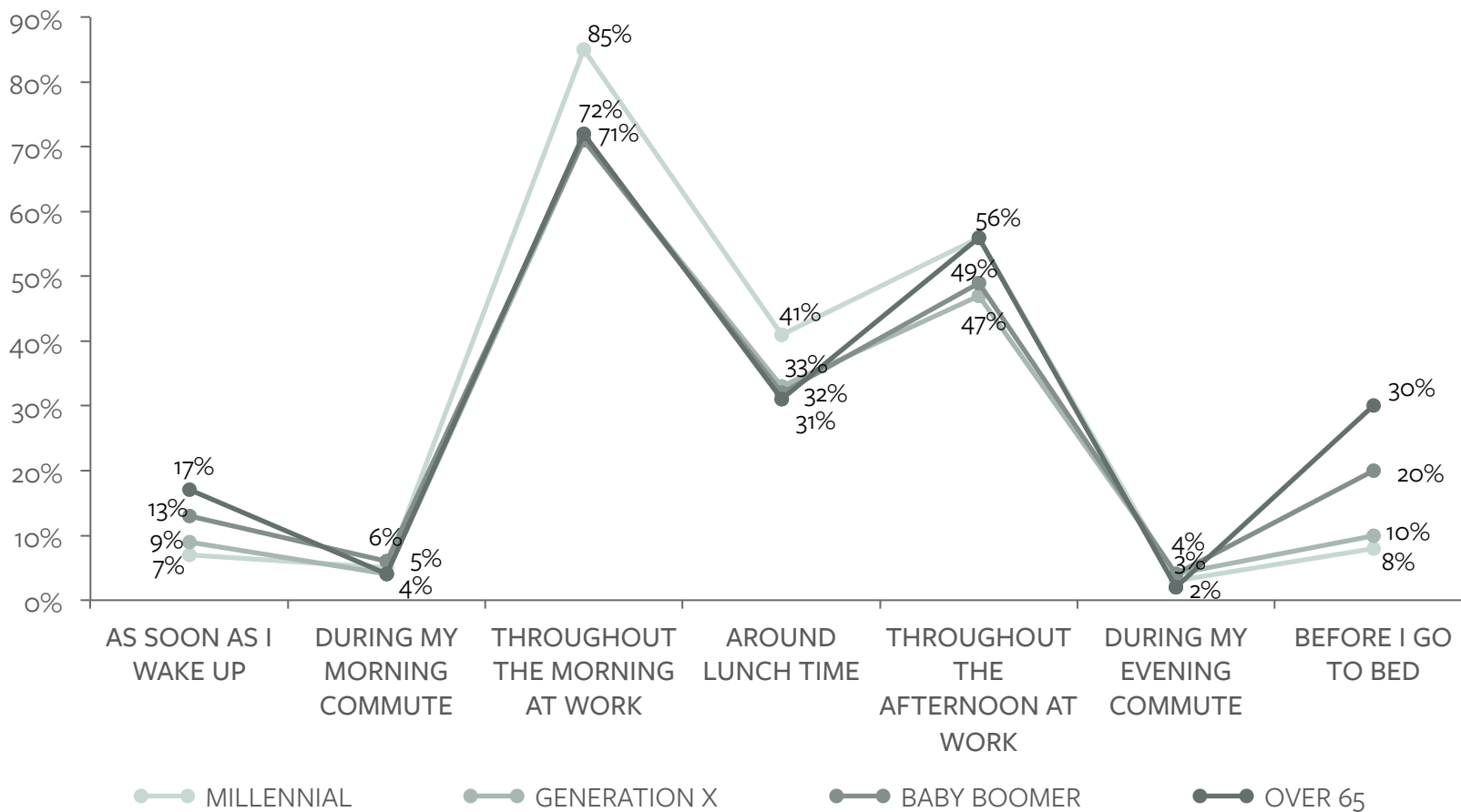


What We Know About Time of Day From WIA

Desktop Use Is Similar Across Generations, but Over 65 More Likely to Access Before Bed

Consumption of E-Newsletters on Computer for Washington News and Information Throughout the Weekday

Percentage of Respondents by Generation



Content Should Fit Your Audience's Schedule

Match Topics and Tone to Readers' Daily Routines

Lunch:

Brevity is key. May include news updates or may be an easier read.

Daytime:

Users are more likely to be on a desktop. Prime time for sending photos, videos, and in-depth reading.



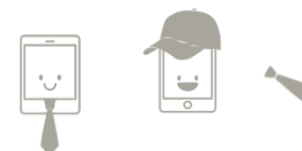
Morning:

Preparation for the day ahead. Informative, typically breaking, but can be fun.



Nighttime:

Fewer users check work-related email. Good time for casual or "shareworthy" content.



Early Evening:

The wind-down. Two options: be personal and less professional, or prepare the reader for tomorrow with upcoming events, topics.

More Opens at Night, But If You Want Clicks, Aim for Midday



An analysis of over 1 billion emails sent by associations in 2014 found that, "messages sent at night had the highest open rates" while "messages sent midday had the highest click rates," according to Informz 2015 Association Email Marketing Benchmark Report.

Weekends are an Overlooked Opportunity

Fewer Emails Enter Reader Inboxes, but Those That Do Are More Likely to Be Read

Find Your Sunday Read In The BuzzReads Newsletter!

The week's best feature stories are just an email away.

posted on Nov. 1, 2014, at 1:33 p.m.



Raymond Sultan
BuzzFeed Staff



Want to get a little more out of your Sunday mornings?



Is the Weekend Open a Metric for Value?

American Press Institute checks to see who opens their emails on the day of send and then again a few days later, particularly if a reader opens it again on a Saturday. Their theory is that a later open could mean the content was worthy of a second, deeper read.

The “Sunday Paper” Effect

- **People still want news on the weekends, but they want different content.** Consider what is in the Sunday newspaper: weekly wrap-ups, long-form articles, better photography, and investigative pieces.
- **Readers still check email over the weekend.** According to Apsis, 32% of people “often” read email on their mobile device on weekends, 31% “sometimes” read email on mobile devices.
- **Email volume is lower on the weekends, but open rates go up,** according to the Informz 2015 Benchmark Report. Maximize your chance for engagement. Your email will stand out and have a better chance of being read.
- **Weekend reads are leisurely,** which is why BuzzFeed, Longform, and other “deep reads” are sent on Friday nights or Sunday mornings.
- **Readers are more likely to be on social media during weekends,** which may increase the chances that your content will be shared. Build opportunities with clear calls-to-action into your newsletter.

Personalization Increases Likelihood of Engagement

Use What You Know about Readers to Create More Relevant Email

Enter email address

▼ Delivery time zone

For early morning delivery

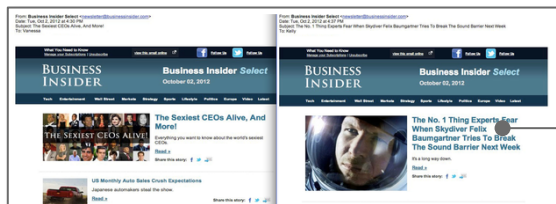
Subscribe

Time of Send: Quartz sends Daily Briefs first thing in the morning, but “morning” is determined by the region of the subscriber.

Subject Line: Newsletter content may be for a general audience, but the subject line can highlight the information most interesting to the individual.

Content: Business Insider tracks the type of articles that a reader opens. Their recommendations can become so tailored that some subscribers think a person is hand-picking content for them.

Social Media Embeds: Customize your social sharing suggestions based on where your recipient has accounts.



Dear *{FULLNAME}*,

At [redacted] we rely on your feedback so that we can [redacted] your employees. We hope you'll provide your candid

WARNING: Don't cross into creepy or annoying. While you can customize greetings, signatures, and “from” names, do so with caution. Readers are annoyed if they're addressed by the wrong name or if they click an email from a familiar “from” name only to find promotional content.

Estée Lauder Online
Stephanie, Receive 20% Off \$100 or Mo... 12/11
View in Browser EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW ...

Improving Open Rates

According to a Constant Contact analysis of 100 billion emails sent through 2014 and 2015, personalized email campaigns result in higher open rates. In some cases, open rates improved by 150%. These jumps are attributed to content's improved relevancy and authenticity.

A/B Testing E-Newsletter Design

The CityLab Daily Email Tests Images' Effect on Click Rates

Control



Test



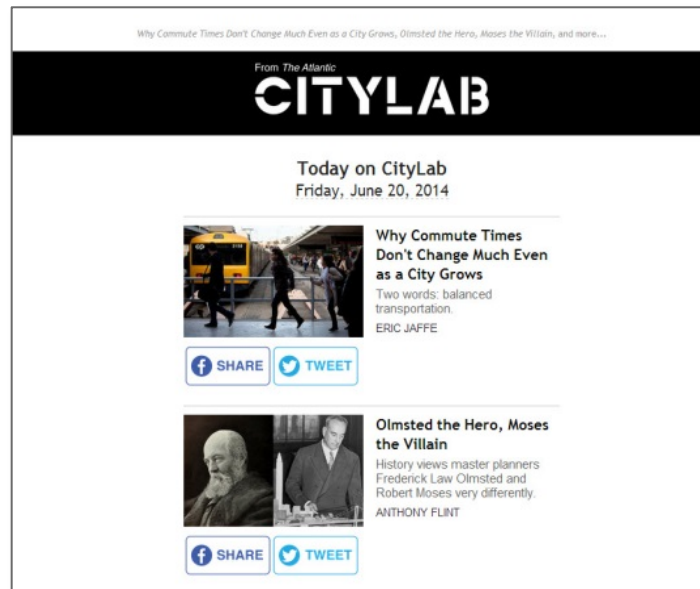
Method

- **Hypothesis:** CityLab expected a higher click rate on emails with no images.
- **Results:** The test email had a higher rate of clicks per open (51%) compared to the rate of the control email (49%) across two days of testing. Results were significant.
- **Recommendation:** Adopt the test email, but consider testing smaller share buttons in the future.

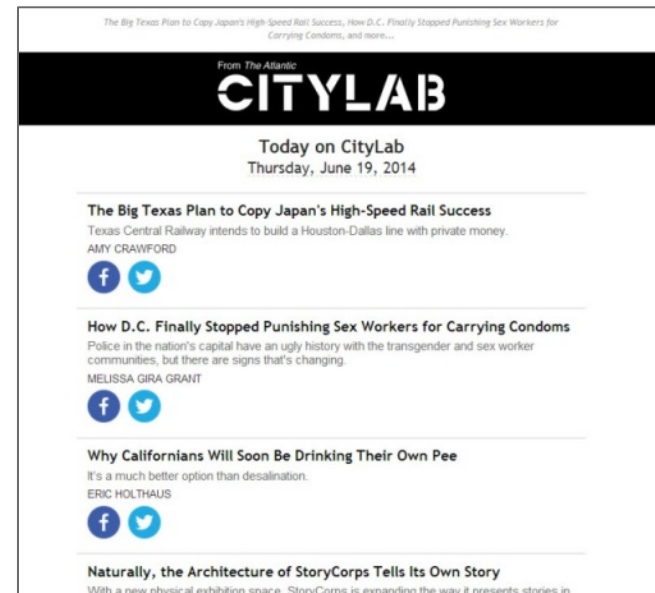
A/B Testing E-Newsletter Design

The CityLab Daily Email Tests Design of Social Sharing Buttons

Control



Test



Method

- **Hypothesis:** CityLab expected a higher click rate on emails with no images and smaller social buttons.
- **Results:** The test email had a higher rate of clicks per open (55%) compared to the rate of the control email (50%) across three days of testing.
- **Recommendation:** Adopt the test email, but in future, consider testing an email button in the share icons per reader feedback.

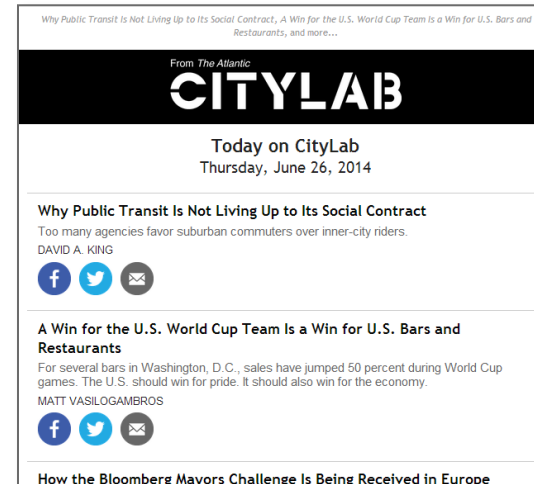
A/B Testing E-Newsletter Design

The CityLab Daily Email Tests Types of Social Sharing Buttons

Control



Test



Method

- **Hypothesis:** CityLab expected a higher click rate on emails with an email share button.
- **Results:** The control email had a higher rate of clicks per open (59%) compared to the rate of the test email (58%) across three days of testing, but the first two tests were inconclusive.
- **Recommendation:** Keep the control email, but if reader demand continues, consider testing an email button again at a later date.

But the Big Caveat

Is it Possible to Have Too Much Optimization? Consider Twitter.

Poor performance on the stock market...

Twitter Shares Slide on Revenue Concerns

Stock down 10% after hours on fourth-quarter revenue forecast



Twitter remains unprofitable, as it continues to invest in talent. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG NEWS

Twitter Inc

NYSE: TWTR - Dec 9 4:37 PM EST

24.32 +0.67 (2.68%)

After-hours: 24.31 +0.01 (0.04%)

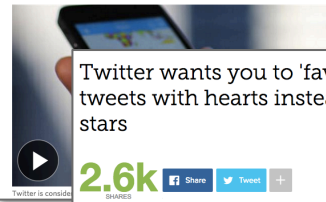
1 day 5 day 1 month 3 month 1 year 5 year max



Led to greater experimentation...

Twitter Mulls Expanding Size of Tweets Past 140 Characters

Messaging service examining how it can extend its signature character limit



Twitter wants you to 'favorite' tweets with hearts instead of stars

2.6k SHARES

Twitter Is Testing Timelines That Aren't in Chronological Order

Written by RACHEL PICK

December 8, 2015 // 09:59 AM EST

Are you a loyal Twitter user? Brace yourself, because your favorite social media platform might get turned on its head: Twitter is experimenting with a new way of sorting your timeline that breaks with the reverse-chronological format it has used since its inception.

And a frustrated user base.

Tim V
@sirencio

Follow

Dear @Twitter. You are not Facebook. You are a real time news and communication platform. Emphasis on time. Time is chronological.

11:41 AM - 8 Dec 2015

44 58

André Silva
@meninodekc

Follow

.@Support .@twitter why is my timeline out of order? It's really hard to follow

4:18 PM - 6 Dec 2015

8 6

Jim Sylvester
@JVSylvester

Follow

@twitter

Out-of-time-order timeline?

NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO

(Give up, there's no magic bullet to increase user count)

12:56 PM - 8 Dec 2015

4 6

Optimization v. Core Values

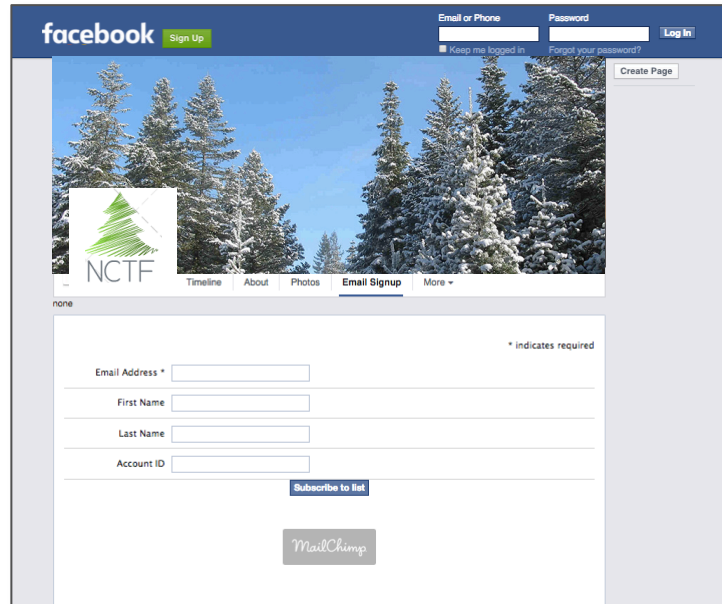
“We continue to show a questioning of our fundamentals in order to make the product easier and more accessible to more people.” - Jack Dorsey, Co-founder and CEO, Twitter

“Too much testing, chasing numbers, can lead you to lose your core values.” – Priya Ganapati, Quartz Director of Platform Products, on e-newsletter optimization

Integrating with Social, From Sign-up to Sharing

Interactions Should be Seamless Across Platforms

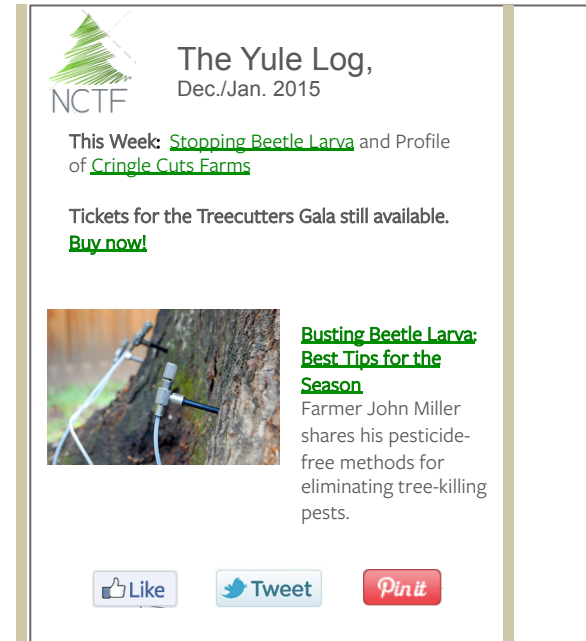
Integrate Email Sign-up on Social



The screenshot shows a Facebook page for NCTF. The page header includes the Facebook logo, a 'Sign Up' button, and fields for 'Email or Phone' and 'Password' with a 'Log In' button. Below the header is a cover photo of a snowy forest. The NCTF profile picture is visible. The main content area features a sign-up form with the following fields: 'Email Address *', 'First Name', 'Last Name', and 'Account ID'. A 'Subscribe to list' button is located below the form. A 'MailChimp' logo is positioned at the bottom of the form area. The page navigation menu includes 'Timeline', 'About', 'Photos', 'Email Signup', and 'More'.

Many email clients make it easy to add a newsletter sign-up form within Facebook Pages. You can then highlight the section in your Page's main menu. When social users wish to sign up, they may do so without leaving the page.

Embed Email Share Buttons in the Text of the Email



The screenshot shows an email newsletter for NCTF. The header includes the NCTF logo and the text 'The Yule Log, Dec./Jan. 2015'. The main content area features the following text: 'This Week: [Stopping Beetle Larva](#) and Profile of [Cringe Cuts Farms](#)'. Below this is the text 'Tickets for the Treecutters Gala still available. [Buy now!](#)'. A small image of a tree trunk with a pest control device is shown. To the right of the image is the text: '[Busting Beetle Larva: Best Tips for the Season](#). Farmer John Miller shares his pesticide-free methods for eliminating tree-killing pests.' At the bottom of the email are three social sharing buttons: 'Like', 'Tweet', and 'Pin it'.

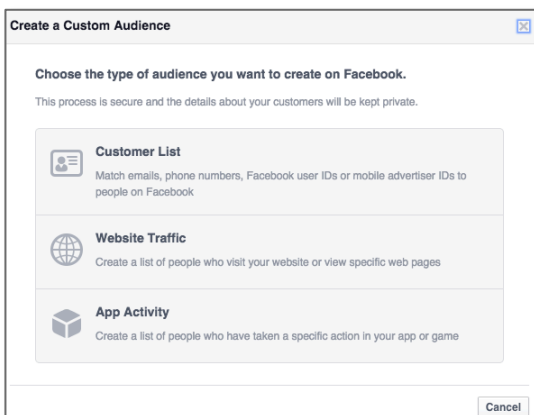
Embed links for social sharing within the body of an email. If your email service doesn't offer social sharing, you can easily fake a "like" or "tweet" button by inserting an image with a hyperlink to a pre-composed tweet or FB message.

Use Paid Social to Boost Newsletter Performance

Create Custom Opportunities to Increase Sign-ups, Opens

#1

Engaging the Hard-to-Reach by Creating “Custom” Audiences From Your Mailing List



Build a “custom audience” on Facebook (a “tailored audience” on Twitter) from your own mailing list. For example, create a list of subscribers who rarely open the newsletter then share a promoted post that features newsletter content and a friendly reminder.

#2

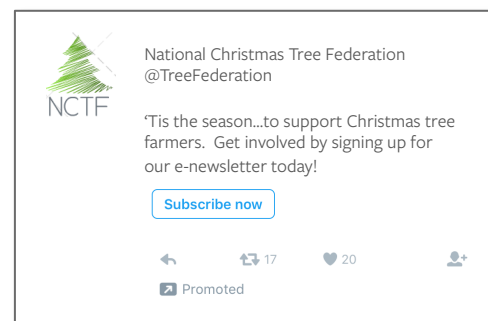
Recruiting Audiences With Shared Interests



Target followers of an organization that share your interests, your geography, or your subscriber base in order to boost sign-ups.

#3

Promoting the Newsletter During Special Events



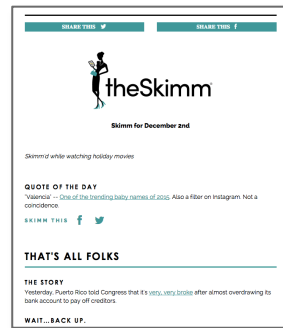
Schedule promoted tweets to coincide with a big event, like during the organization’s conference. On-the-fence audiences could be motivated to take action at a time of raised awareness.

Email and Social Should Complement, Not Overlap

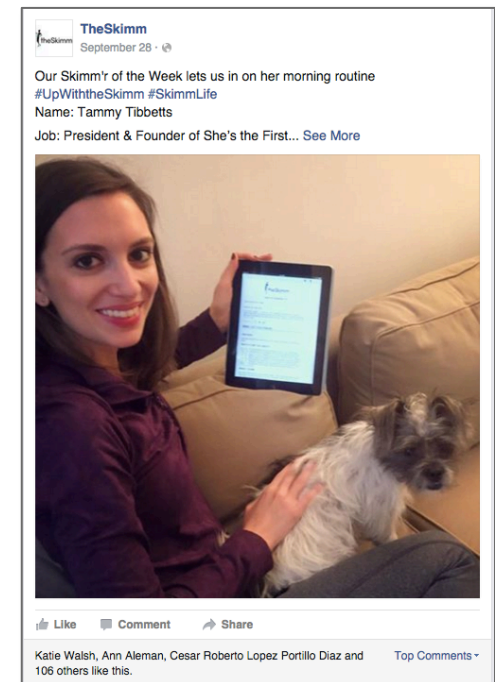
Don't Bore Existing Readers by Re-Releasing Newsletter Content; Engage Them Instead



Get Visual: Include photos or other media that can't be included in a newsletter. Consider highlighting interesting content with a Twitter card



Interact: Host contests or test newsletter knowledge



Encourage sharing: Start conversations about a recent newsletter topic or include a "featured" reader

ATLANTICMEDIA

Content = Newsletter, Engagement = Social

Content happens in the e-newsletter; engagement happens on social. Each format should complement the other, says Shannan Bowen, National Journal's Director of Audience Engagement Strategy.

How to Archive Newsletter Content?

The Dos and Don'ts of Archival

NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE

2015

August 2015 (e-news)

August 2015 (e-appeal)

July 2015 (e-news)

June 2015 (Jared Calhoun)

June 2015 (General)

May 2015 (e-appeal)

May 2015 (e-news)

April 2015 (e-news)

April 2015 (e-appeal)

March 2015

API's Need to Know newsletter

Email newsletter archive

from the American Press Institute

Sign up for Need to Know

12/03/2015 - [Need to Know: Models for growth and reinvention at local newspapers, and how to hire dedicated staff who share your values](#)

12/02/2015 - [Need to Know: Where creative solutions come from, success in crowdfunding journalism, and why it's OK to write the singular 'they'](#)

12/01/2015 - [Need to Know: When to use or avoid jargon, Tribune denies acquisition rumors, and the murky ethics of sources paying for journalists' expenses](#)

11/30/2015 - [Need to Know: How to report about climate change in new ways, a push to return to Twitter share counts, and what's a lie and what's not](#)

11/25/2015 - [Need to Know: A recipe for traffic growth through quality, how to put together a good workplace team, and thoughtful reads for the weekend](#)

11/24/2015 - [Need to Know: Social media passes Google for traffic to big stories, a second life for mobile news app Circa, and profiles in commenting](#)

Don't: List only the date or title in your archive. If a reader can't remember the date of the newsletter, then they can't find it. One keyword may not be enough explanation.

Do: Be descriptive. Save the reader an additional click by including enough information to explain your newsletter's content.

How to Archive Newsletter Content?

The Dos and Don'ts of Archival

E-NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE

Item Name

December 2015 E-Newsletter PDF (5.19 MB)

October 2015 E-Newsletter PDF (7.65 MB)

August 2015 E-Newsletter PDF (4.39 MB)

June 2015 E-Newsletter PDF (3.25 MB)

April 2015 E-Newsletter PDF (1.39 MB)

February 2015 E-Newsletter PDF (2.72 MB)

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By sharing their climate coverage with each other, smaller publishers in Climate Publishers Network were able to jumpstart their coverage

Nieman Lab

PUBLISHED 12/02/15 8:14 AM

Beginning in May of this year, several dozen publishers worldwide have been sharing climate coverage with each other through the Climate Publishers Network. The network's goal was to help publishers ramp up their climate coverage ahead of COP21 without needing to hire more staff or stretch their resources. While some of the larger European daily publications were more hesitant to grab stories from the network, smaller publishers say the network has allowed them to jumpstart their climate coverage. El Deber editor David Duster says though they could not contribute to the network at the same pace as other publishers, "We are a small newspaper with few resources, and we couldn't pay as much attention [to climate stories] as we wanted."

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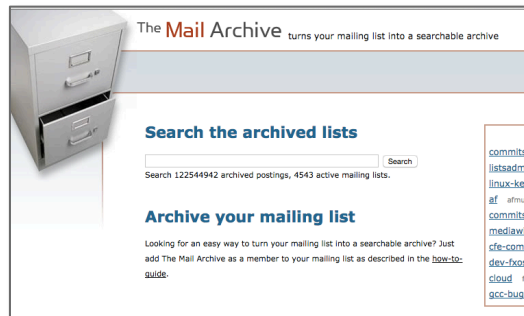
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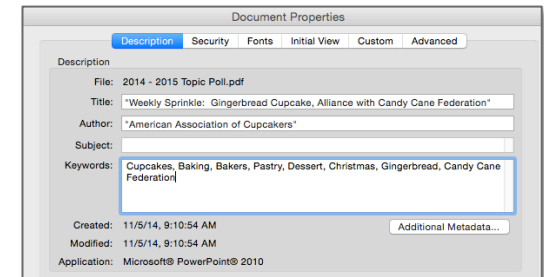
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