Creating a Nimble Newsletter Workflow Optimized for New Ideas

Jacqueline Boltik and Kim Bode

#ONA20
Meet your hosts:

Jacqueline Boltik  
CEO, Yellow Brim  
@jacqueboltik  
www.yellowbrim.com

Kim Bode  
Product manager, newsletters and messaging,  
Los Angeles Times/San Diego Union-Tribune  
@kim_bode  
www.bode.kim
Ahead of this session, we shared a survey to better understand the current state of newsletter ideation and production workflows across the industry.

We asked: What are the biggest obstacles you face when launching a new newsletter or improving an existing newsletter? What is your biggest newsletter workflow pain point that you wish to solve?

- Lack of resources, time, collaboration, and buy-in from around the organization
- Technical hurdles (templates, lists mgmt., ESP)
- Promotional support / list acquisition
- Lack of a structured launch plan/strategy/prioritization
- Motivation is missing
- Hiring challenges
- Data
A timeline of newsletters at the Los Angeles Times

- 2015: ESP migration
  - Add newsletter editor & producer
- 2016: ESP migration
  - Start including ad sponsorships
- 2017: ESP migration
  - New CMS launches
- 2018: ESP migration
  - New company ownership (LAT/SDUT)
- 2019: Kim starts at CalTimes
  - Template updates
  - New CMS launches
  - Start using Osmosys
- 2020: ESP migration
  - Ads manager
Newsletter production workflow at CalTimes in 2020
Time to scale: At CalTimes, we’ve (re)launched 8 newsletters so far in 2020.
Some considerations for your **tech stack**:

**Rented Stack**

**Pros**
- Low friction, easy to get started
- No or lower financial risk
- Out of the box CMS <> ESP integration

**Cons**
- Inability to control roadmap/features
- Lack of data transparency
- Audience policies and communication set by stack
- Significant revenue share might be required

**Owned Stack**

**Pros**
- Customizable
- Can be more cost effective over time
- Full ownership of data
- Full ownership of audience / outreach

**Cons**
- Need to know your requirements
- Up front cost
- Non-trivial configuration between systems (CMS, ESP/CRM)
Let’s pause for a moment.

Do you have questions or insights to share?

- What works for you? And what doesn’t?
- How do you evaluate where you put your resources?
- What’s your best newsletter hack or surprise success?
We asked: Where do new newsletter ideas come from in your organization?

Selected 'Other' replies:
- Biz dev team
- Living in the world / what I notice around me
- Writing as a form of self-therapy and as a prompt to explore my own identity

Newsroom 80%
User research 30%
Product development 30%
Innovation/special initiatives team 23%
Unsolicited reader feedback 21%
Consumer marketing 18%
Advertising 16%
Other answers 25%
We asked: What are the top reasons for launching a new newsletter?

- Honing in on a specific topic area that you or your organization is specialized in covering: 70%
- Driven by the news/current affairs: 64%
- Drive conversion to paid membership/subscription: 55%
- Reaching beyond existing audiences: 50%
- Executive whim: 39%
- Advertising revenue opportunity: 30%
- Membership/subscription benefit (gated access): 27%
- Tapping into the voice and following a prolific writer: 25%
- Other answers: 14%

Selected 'Other' replies:
- Nurturing existing audience
- Drive conversion to my online courses
- Community need that we can serve
We asked: What are the most common reasons for why you or your organization pass on a new newsletter idea?

- There is no one who can write it: 57%
- Lack of support from leadership: 32%
- Lack of data on prospective audience: 27%
- No one's taking initiative to drive and manage the launch: 14%
- No apparent advertiser interest: 9%
- No one is available to turn the draft into an email: 7%
- No apparent reader revenue opportunity: 7%
- Other answers: 31%

Selected 'Other' replies:
- Startup costs
- Overall lack of resources
- Worried it's not long game enough
- Lack of product team support
- Nobody who can do the back-end tech or is willing to
We asked: If you had to choose, what is the one metric that matters (OMTM) for evaluating if a new newsletter is successful?

Unique open rate  30%
Total open rate  18%
New membership/subscriber conversions  11%
List growth rate  9%
Quality of reader responses  7%
The newsletter writer is happy :)  5%
Click rate  5%
Click-to-open-rate  5%
Other answers  10%

Selected 'Other' replies:
- Quality of product
- Number of paid subscribers who receive it (whether they signed up before or after subscribing)
- Advertising revenue
When you **vet a newsletter idea**, consider this:

- **Community first**
  - Who is this newsletter for? Why do they need it?
  - How are you engaging with them -- or not? How do you plan to reach them?
  - How can you provide opportunities for the community to connect with you and with one another?

- **Goals**
  - What do you want to achieve with this newsletter? And does it line up with your overarching mission/strategy?
  - How do you plan to measure success?
  - Could this newsletter generate revenue, directly or indirectly?

- **Processes**
  - Who will write/edit/produce the newsletter? (And who will take over if this person is sick or on vacation?)
  - Who will check and monitor responses from subscribers? Do you plan to answer them, and if so, how?
Emerging **newsletter trends** to create new touchpoints that deepen relationships

**Audio and email**

Colorado voters will decide 11 statewide policy questions on the November ballot — a list of far-reaching measures that will help set the direction for the state’s future. The 2020 ballot asks voters whether Colorado should put limits on abortion and create a state program designed to provide paid time off to workers for medical […]

[Read More]

[SHARE][TWEET]

**Slack / walled community communication**

Regardless, Luna fits Amazon’s goal to own the home, and given the company’s willingness to experiment, the biggest surprise would be if it never existed.

This Daily Update will be available as a podcast later today. To receive it in your podcast player, visit Stratechery.

The Daily Update is intended for a single recipient, but occasional forwarding is totally fine! If you would like to order multiple subscriptions for your team with a group discount (minimum 5), please contact me directly.

Thanks for being a supporter, and have a great day!
Let’s discuss.

Do you have questions or insights to share?

- If all your workflow issues were solved, what would you love to do?
- Once you're no longer resource constrained, how do you choose what to prioritize?
- What didn't we cover?