

Creating a Nimble Newsletter Workflow Optimized for New Ideas

Jacqueline Boltik and Kim Bode

#ONA20

Meet your hosts:



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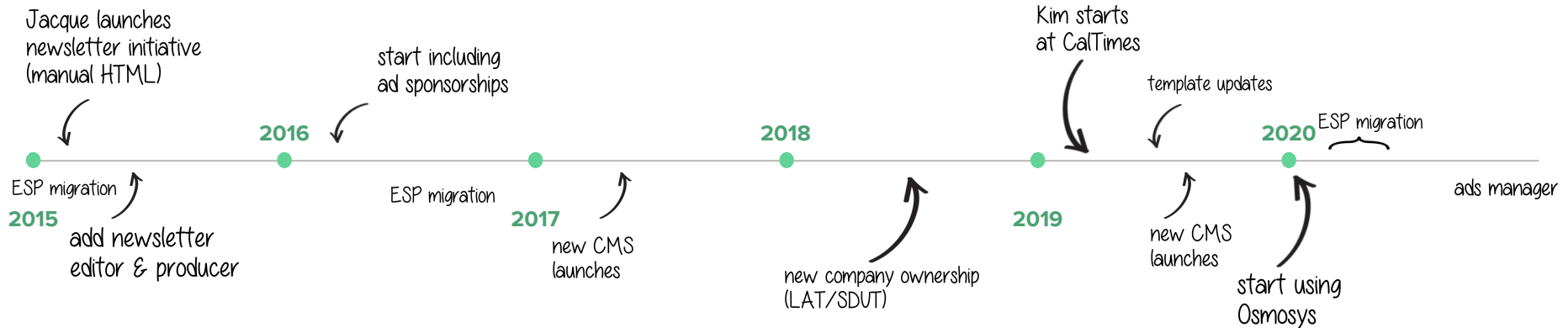
Ahead of this session, we shared a **survey** to better understand the current state of newsletter ideation and production workflows across the industry.

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?*

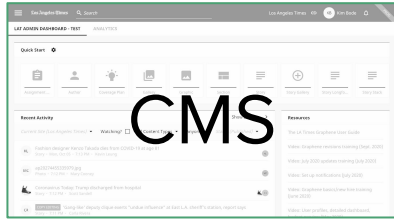
- Lack of resources, time, collaboration, and buy-in from around the organization
- Technical hurdles (templates, lists mgmt., ESP)
- Promotional support / list acquisition
- Lack of a structured launch plan/strategy/prioritization
- Motivation is missing
- Hiring challenges
- Data



A **timeline** of newsletters at the Los Angeles Times



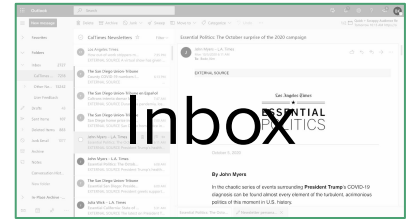
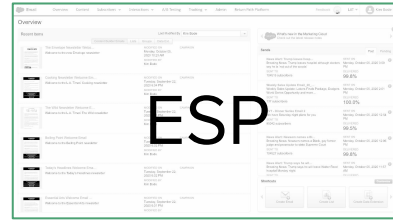
authors write
& editors edit



editors push content



schedule



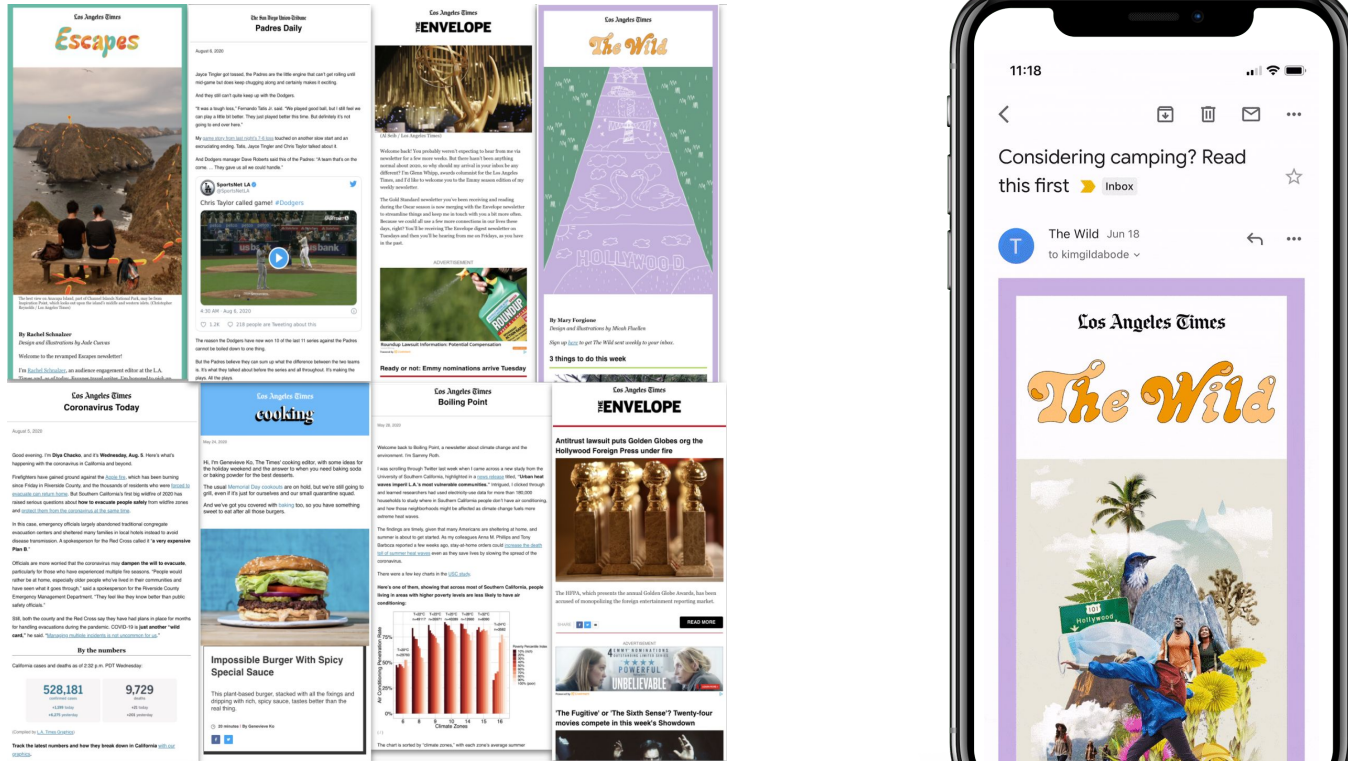
RSS feed



deploy

Newsletter production workflow at CaTimes 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

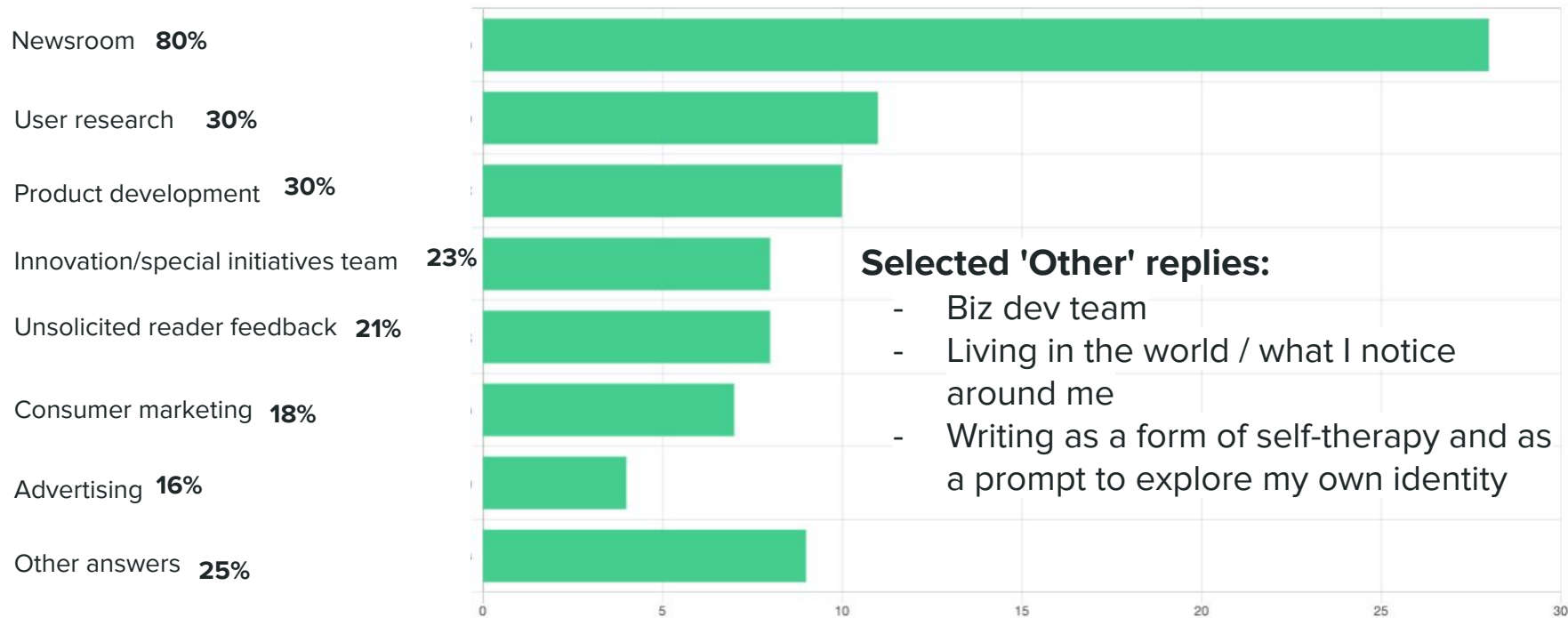
- Need to know your requirements
- Up front cost
- Non-trivial configuration between systems (CMS, ESP/CRM)

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?



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%**

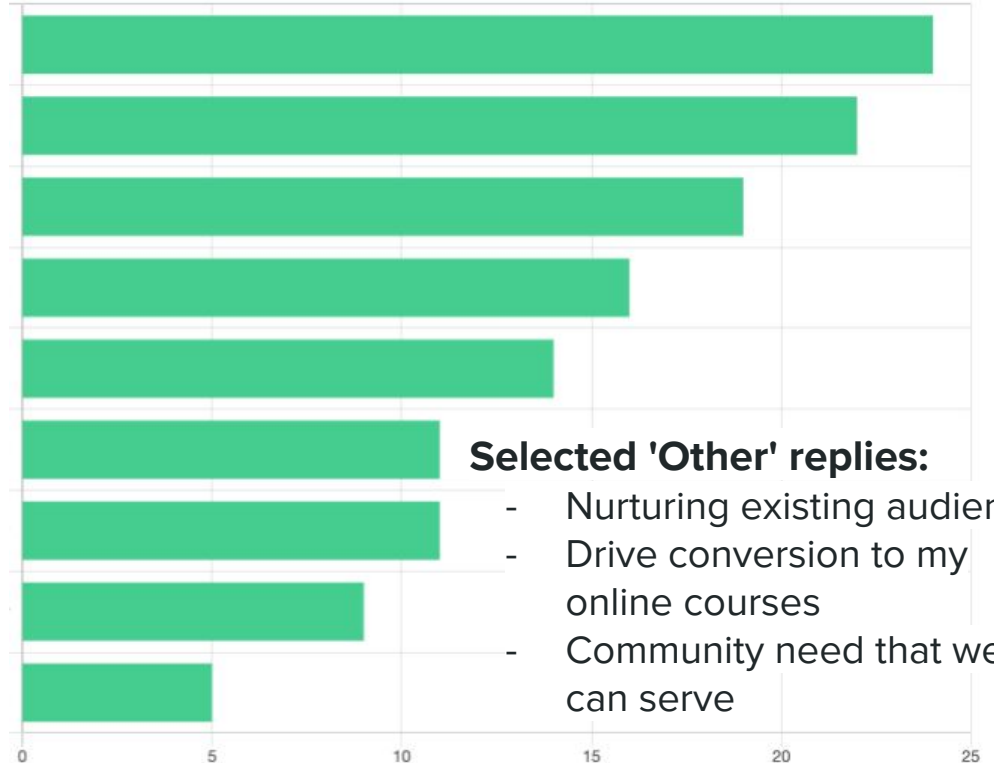
Executive whim **39%**

Advertising revenue opportunity **30%**

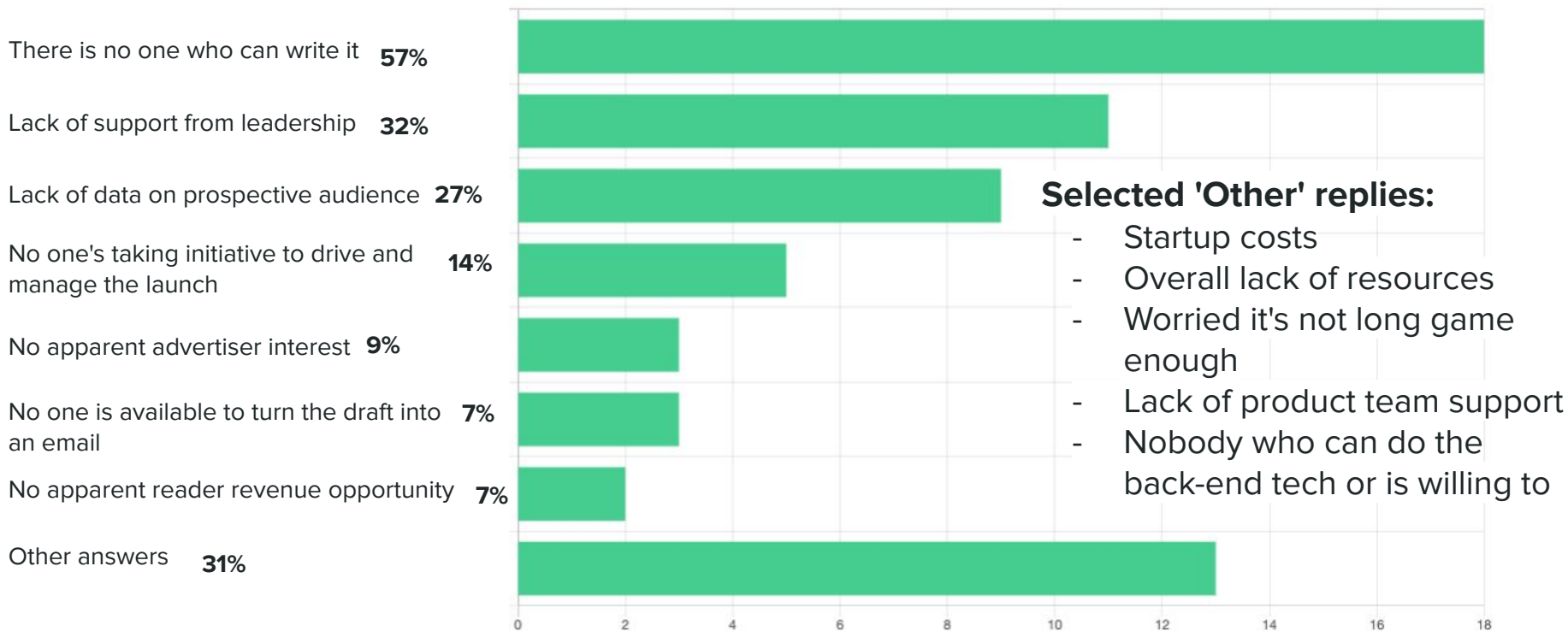
Membership/subscription benefit (gated access) **27%**

Tapping into the voice and following a prolific writer **25%**

Other answers **14%**



We asked: What are the most common reasons for why you or your organization **pass on a new newsletter idea**?



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%**

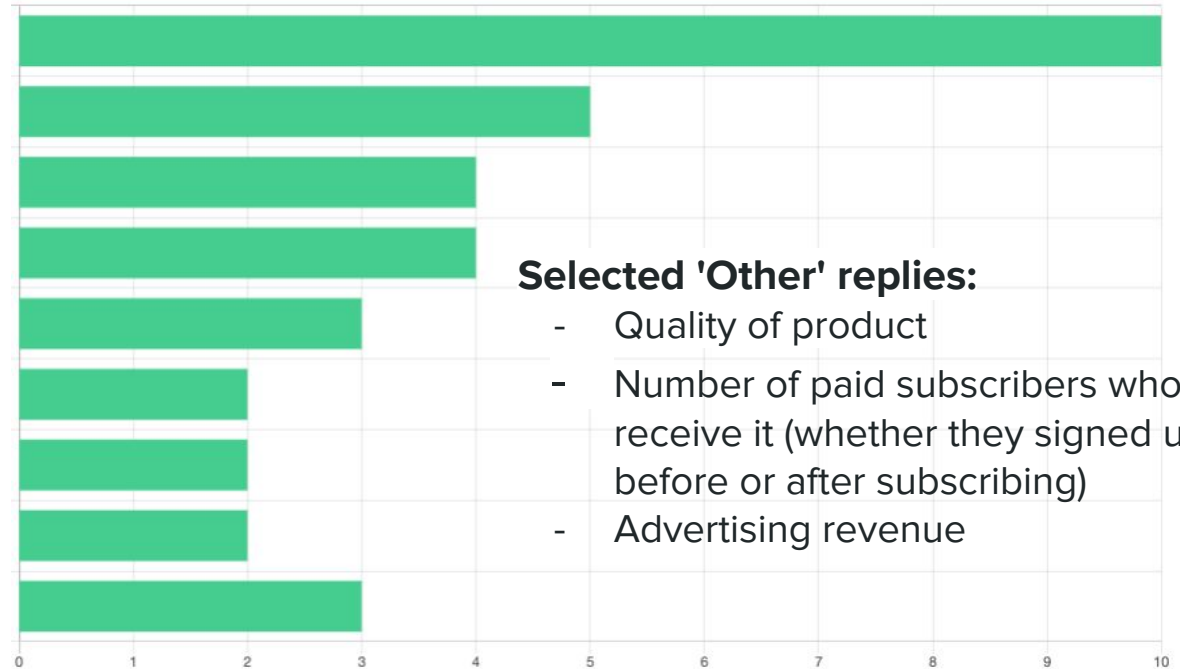
Quality of reader responses **7%**

The newsletter writer is happy :) **5%**

Click rate **5%**

Click-to-open-rate **5%**

Other answers **10%**



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?

Los Angeles Times

Tell Us About Your Newsletter Idea

This form is supposed to kick off the ideation and remind us to put our users first. Answer as much and well as possible. Don't hesitate to reach out to me via Slack or email (kim.bode@latimes.com) if anything is unclear and/or you need help. Don't forget to mention any supporting data or anecdotes if available.

* Required

Email address *

Your email

Who's behind this idea?

Name: *

Your answer

Department: *

Your answer

Email address: *

Your answer

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 [...]

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has a
podcast ...



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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](#).

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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?
-