

Top Seven Reasons Why Newsletters Are Important

1. Newsletters offer you a direct connection with your audiences.

Think about it this way: when a newsroom posts a new story on its website, it's up to the reader to 1) visit the website and see the story or 2) come across the story via social media. An email newsletter allows newsrooms to send new stories and coverage directly to readers – a notification and nudge that helps direct the reader's attention. [Take it from Tim Franklin](#), senior associate dean at Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism: "An email newsletter is like a friend who checks in every day like clockwork." With this direct connection comes great responsibility, including considering whether the content in your email [is worth landing in your audience members' virtual "living room."](#) (aka, their email inbox), and using the direct connection to responsibly engage with your audiences. Check out how [6AM City](#) (a hyperlocal media company in the U.S.) [uses newsletters](#) to give its audiences a chance to respond and react to the stories they're reading.

2. Email newsletters lead to a rich repository of audience data – data that your newsroom owns and can directly see and analyze.

Email analytics can lead to valuable insights about your audiences' behavior and preferences, which can in turn be used to both improve your newsletter and your newsroom's other products. The [Daily Maverick](#), a digital news site in South Africa, leveraged its newsletter list and newsletter analytics to [launch a new membership program](#), and VT Digger, a digital news site in Vermont [conducts simple audience research within its newsletters](#) to better understand how to tweak its existing newsletter products. (For more on audience research via newsletters and for newsletters, check out one of our favorite audience research guides for newsrooms from the German publisher Krautreporter, [here](#).)

3. They enable newsrooms to provide targeted coverage and content for specific audiences.

Newsrooms and newsletter authors can create newsletters about a specific topic (like the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), [local elections](#), or [what to do this weekend](#)), which allows newsrooms to build and serve specific audience segments. In addition to topic specificity, newsletters can also be designed to serve specific audience reader behaviors. Check out how NPR understands its [continuum of newsletter consumption behaviors](#). This approach allows U.S. public broadcasters to create different newsletter products based on specific user behaviors, like skimmers vs. slow readers.

4. **They build audience habit and loyalty.**

Email newsletters published on a regular schedule — whether daily, weekly, or monthly — create audience loyalty. Loyalty is a major indicator of both likelihood to stick around as a reader (or, “retention”), and likelihood to become a paying contributor, which we’ll discuss more in point 7 below. In the [Reuters Institute 2020 Digital News Report](#), the authors write that although “email news is no silver bullet solution...it does remain one of the most important tools available to publishers for building habit and attracting the type of customers that can help with monetisation (subscription or advertising).” A [2019 study out of Northwestern’s Medill Local News Initiative](#) found that email newsletters offered an effective way to get more readers into a daily habit. See also Membership Puzzle Project’s research on [paid acquisition for email list size growth](#), and how typically a larger email list means more people are reading an organization’s journalism, sharing stories with friends, engaging with surveys, and more.

5. **Newsletters are experimental and adaptable.**

You can change the format, tone, content, branding, of a newsletter to best fit the newsletter author and the audiences’ needs. Newsletters are the ideal experimental product. Many newsrooms go through many rounds of A/B testing with their newsletter products to test which newsletter subject lines or content blocks get the most open rates or click rates with their audiences. Because of their experimental and adaptable quality, newsletters are good vehicles for reporters, writers and audience engagement specialists to practice writing in a clear, distinct voice. In some newsrooms, email newsletters are the primary window into a reporter, editor, or newsroom leader’s voice and way of thinking (for example, see [this newsletter author’s writing on mental health](#).)

6. **They develop a product-thinking mindset in newsrooms.**

The processes of conducting audience research for a newsletter product, launching a newsletter with an audience in mind, and continuing to test and learn, are the backbone of a product-thinking mindset. Sunnie Huang, The Economist’s newsletter editor, urges newsrooms to view the newsletter [as a standalone product](#) (essentially, as a unique destination for the user rather than an avenue to merely drive traffic to the website). See also [how the Lenfest Local Lab leverages product-design](#) tactics to develop and improve newsletters.

7. **Last but certainly not least, email newsletters are powerful, money-making tools.**

An engaged email newsletter list enormously aids in newsroom fundraising appeals, membership appeals, sponsored content packages, classified ad opportunities, and more monetization potential for newsrooms and independent newsletter writers. Speaking of independent newsletter writers, take a look at how many talented journalists

are quitting their day jobs and going all-in on their own email products (see Axios' [Pandemic spurs journalists to go it alone via email](#); [Journalists Are Leaving the Noisy Internet for Your Email Inbox](#); [Journalists say Substack's email newsletters is a more financially secure career path as newsroom jobs become scarcer](#)). One such independent-writer, newsletter pioneer Ann Friedman, [runs a successful classified ads business](#) via her newsletter list. Within newsrooms, a newsletter list attracts and retains paying subscribers (see how [The Seattle Times](#) did it), creates attractive [sponsorship packages](#) with local businesses, and leads to [premium and paid-only newsletter](#) products.