

Module 1 - Choosing the right newsletter: What is important to your audiences and you?

Emily Roseman Hi all! Emily here, and I am one of the instructors for your newsletter course, Newsletter Strategies for Journalists. So welcome, thank you so much for joining. This video is the start of module one, which is where we'll kind of give you a lay of the land of the different types of newsletters and how you can start learning from your audiences to make sure that your newsletter kind of fits the needs of your audiences. So without further ado, I'm going to share my screen with you and we'll get started. OK, so here we go, Module one, choosing the right newsletter. What is important to your audiences and you? So just a bit about me, my name's Emily Roseman. I am currently the research director for the Institute for Nonprofit News, which is a network of over three hundred nonprofit newsrooms across North America. I'm also a newsletterer myself, I write the newsletter *unpacking* with fellow instructor Kerry, and you can check that out at unpacking.substack.com. I've done a bunch of different research projects on newsletters over the years. These are just kind of two outputs of that if you want to check out even more newsletter resources. So, a quick review of what this video will cover - I'm going to give a brief overview on why newsletters are important, and I'm also going to kind of review the different buckets of newsletters that I see in my work. So write do newsletters matter again, or why are we all here today? Well, newsletters are important for a few different reasons, both for publishers and if you're an independent writer. They allow you to connect with your audiences directly. They give you audience data and insight that is your own data to both own and to be able to look at and see insights and trends in your audiences. Newsletters let you provide really specific content for a specific audience base, whether that be a newsletter dedicated to dogs in a particular city, or what to do this weekend in Miami. So, they really kind of are the best tools if you want to build habit and loyalty with your audiences, because they're very regular products, which we'll get to in a moment. They also enable experimentation, there's a lot you can do with newsletter's - different tools you can use, different formats, tones, and they really inspire product thinking. I think the best newsletters are the ones that are thought of as independent products that come with their own audience growth and engagement strategies. And, they make money, which will cover more in a later module, but keep this in mind that newsletters are directly connected to many newsrooms' business models. Plus, there's just a lot going on here and newsletter land today. Many of you will know newsletter pioneer Ann Friedman. She has this very successful classifieds ad in her newsletter. We saw Axios launched their new local newsletters just this past September. Tech reporter Casey Newton left The Verge to create his own newsletter business, and we're seeing big platforms kind of starting to come in on the newsletter industry. So, there's something here and it's important to kind of know what newsletters are and what they can do for you so that you can jump in on this exciting terrain. So first up, I'm going to introduce three stages here for my recommendations of what to do if you're getting started with a newsletter. The first thing I think you should do, either if you're a publisher or an independent writer, is to really double check. So this means kind of asking yourself, what are your goals here and what are you trying to achieve with this newsletter? Does a newsletter make sense for the goal you're trying to accomplish? I'm going to review a few of the different goals for newsletters that I've seen previously, but I want to take a beat here and just put this up for everyone to see that newsletters aren't always the solution. There are many times when you'll conduct some audience research, or talk to your intended audience, and hear that maybe a regular, text-based format just isn't the right way to reach these people. We're seeing the rise of kind of text messaging and SMS as a way of connecting directly with audiences. Live blogs are still very alive and well. A lot of people don't check their email regularly, so it's really important to kind of keep in mind who the people are that are so

hooked to newsletters and what those people need and make sure that's all in sync with what you're doing. So, I'm going to review a few different newsletter types. The first type I want to introduce to you is the link aggregator. The link aggregator you'll typically see coming from a publisher, and, in this case, the link aggregator has links that all go back directly to the publisher's site. So, this model really works well for a newsletter. If the publisher has a successful paywall strategy and they're basically just using their newsletters to funnel their readers back to their website. Publisher goal: get your audiences to your web site. Audience goal: stay up-to-date on the stories of your favorite publisher. This is in contrast to a different kind of link aggregator newsletter that I see that has a lot of links in their content, and that's from the expert. This link aggregator has a kind of publisher goal of building the reputation of the outlet as the overseer or expert or leader in a particular subject. So in this case, this newsletter is from Nieman Lab, which I'm sure many of you are familiar with. Nieman Lab has this awesome newsletter that compiles and aggregates stories about the future of journalism. So, if you work in journalism or media, you can subscribe to this and stay up-to-date on what's going on. Then there's also this briefing newsletter type, which kind of just jumps right into a bunch of links, but they're all kind of geared towards a specific profession in many cases. It's not necessarily intended to direct people back to the publisher's site, but really to build this loyalty with the reader. These are very sticky products. They're usually sent daily. They're usually sent daily in the morning to catch people in their commutes, and they are really great if you are a person in a particular field and you need to know everything that's going on every day. Like in this case, in politics or whatever this course newsletter is about. Here's another type of newsletter that I like to call the briefing and link aggregator combo, so original. I see this kind of newsletter a lot across the publishers that I work with in the nonprofit journalism field. These are kind of smaller to midsize outlets where they have one or two newsletter products. The goal kind of here is joint one to build an affinity with the publisher. So usually a lot of these newsletters start out with a personal note from the editor or from the reporter writing, just saying like this is what we're up to today in this newsroom, this is how we're doing. And then the newsletter will also include some links both to their own content, but also to partner content or things that they think their readers might also find interesting. Finally, we have the essay long-read newsletter and we see this particularly with Substack writers a lot. These are very prose-heavy, prose-driven, long read newsletters. A lot of these are sent over the weekend, these kind of fun reads. The goal here is really to keep the reader within the newsletter. There aren't a ton of links, or there's one or two well-placed links. The goal for the reader is to enjoy a longer weekend read. So I just threw a lot of different newsletter types at you, and you probably noticed there's a lot of different variables across this set of newsletters. Some are link-heavy versus some are very prose-heavy. They all had a different number of content blocks that were ordered in different ways. Some had the paragraph at the top from the editor, whereas others just jumped right into a bunch of links. They're different in length. Some newsletters are super short, they're just a paragraph long whereas others can go on and on and be a 30-minute read. They had different voices and tones and points of view, some of those newsletters were written from the publishers objective, take-no-stance view, whereas others were written directly from the voice of the reporter or the personal independent writer. Different design choices, different frequencies, some are daily, some are weekly, some are biweekly. And sometimes, we see some newsletters consistently sent at 6 a.m. in the morning, and others at 10 a.m. others late at night. Before I close and go to video two, I just wanted to point out these variables and say that, this mixture of variables, the best way to kind of decide on which ones make sense for your newsletter, is to get to know your audience, get to know what their needs are, how they consume information, what kind of resonates with them, and also to get to know yourself and your publication and what your own bandwidth and capacity is. Between those two sides, you'll be able to start to put together the

newsletter that makes sense for you. So I'll see you and video two, where we'll dig into how you can get to know what your audience wants by reviewing a few audience research best practices to launch a newsletter. So I'll see you there.