

Module 1 - Audience research best practices: How to keep learning about your audiences to improve your newsletter(s)

[00:00:00] **Emily Roseman** Hi all! It's Emily again, and welcome to our third, and, very sadly final video of module one for our newsletter course, Newsletter Strategies for Journalists. Thanks so much for coming back.

[00:00:13] **Emily Roseman** The last video reviewed a few audience research tools and tactics when you're just getting started launching a newsletter. This one is better for if you already have a newsletter and you want to learn how you can keep improving it. So, I'm going to share my screen and we'll get started. All right, so audience research best practices, how to keep learning about your audiences to improve your newsletters. This video will cover a few of the routines and tips that I see across the field for how to do this well. Before we jump in to some more tactical advice here, I just want to introduce this as a mindset that newsletters should really be aspiring to change over time. And so, newsletters, as I said in the video one of this module, one of the reasons they're so great is that they're kind of a product that's easy to experiment with. You can mess around with the format and the tone and what information you provide. One really awesome example of this is Ann Friedman's newsletter. Ann Friedman is a newsletter pioneer, and she launched her newsletter back in 2013 that looked something like this. I pulled her edition just a few weeks ago on the right hand side. You can just see from looking at it how much has changed over the years, and this is a mega successful newsletter. The interesting thing I thought is how she's known so much now for her brilliant essay that she writes at the top of her newsletter. That wasn't in her very first edition, it kind of became that over time. The newsletter version that you first launched with, it's likely not going to be the winning newsletter format. You should really be continuously learning about your audience and what what they're clicking with and changing your format.

[00:02:06] **Emily Roseman** So what can you do to learn about your newsletter readers? Well, one thing is to kind of take a step back and think about the data and feedback that you already have without even doing anything else, and that's examining your newsletter metrics. We'll get into that more in module two, but it's important to realize that the data that your email service provider is collecting is valuable data and definitely counts in the realm of audience research here. Another kind of simple thing you can do is just make sure that the email address that you're sending your newsletters from is one that your readers can reply to. Kerry and I do this in our newsletter. We ask directly, what did you think about this newsletter? Do you have any thoughts on "X" topic? And some of our readers will reply to us in real time and give us feedback, which is really cool to see. A very common practice here is sending surveys to your newsletter list, and I would recommend doing this at least twice a year and making it a routine practice that your newsroom does. This survey can be relatively short. Actually, it's better if it's shorter so that your audience won't mind taking it too much. It can ask really direct questions like, what is your favorite part of this newsletter, and list out of the segments or the content blocks of your newsletter. Or you can say, what are we missing? What information should we be providing? Should we be sending this earlier in the day? Things like that.

[00:03:40] **Emily Roseman** One cool thing about surveys is a lot of people will ask their survey respondents to opt in to an interview with someone on their team so that they can really dig into that person's habits and get to know, like when when do you typically open our newsletter and why do you open it then? And, "oh, it's so interesting that you're reading our newsletter every day over your breakfast cereal," and getting to know your audience's habits is so important as your growing your list and kind of a quicker version of

a temperature check you can run with your newsletter audiences is setting up an NPS or Net Promoter Score survey at the bottom of each newsletter. A net promoter score is essentially just the question, how likely is it that you would recommend "X" to a friend or colleague? In this case, it would be recommend this newsletter. This is especially valuable I've seen if a publisher has multiple newsletters, because then you can compare this data point across your products. And again, that's not the whole story, but it's a quick temperature check that you can get on your audiences.

[00:04:47] **Emily Roseman** A final thing that you can do here is actually ask your email list of subscribers, why did you unsubscribe? This is so important because so much of audience research with newsletters will be engaging with your super fans or the people who have lasted on your list for however long you know, or the people who love your product so much that they're willing to give you 20 minutes of their time to fill out a survey. So, I'll give you an example of how you can kind of talk to your own subscribers. A local newsroom in Vermont called VT Digger set this up on their newsletter where whenever someone unsubscribed, they'd be prompted with this.

[00:05:27] **Emily Roseman** Just one question survey, "please let us know why you subscribed" and they'd provide this multiple response list here. They actually got some really interesting feedback and data from this really quick survey from their own subscribers. For more on this, there's a case study about VT Digger in your recommended reading. So if this is of interest to you, please check out that reading. Finally, I want to say that it's important to also get creative with thinking about who your surveys are reaching in this process.

[00:06:02] **Emily Roseman** So if you're about to send out a survey to your newsletter list, think about if you can send that survey out to a specific segment of your newsletter list, which is just yet another reason why newsletters are awesome, because you're able to do this. So you can pull the list of folks that are frequent openers of your newsletter and send them a survey to get to know what your most loyal mega fans think about your work. These are people whose opinion probably matters to you more than the people who are engaging every so often.

[00:06:34] **Emily Roseman** So, this is one example of a survey that Kerry and I actually put together for an education-based newsroom in North Carolina called EdNC. They wanted to make a few changes to their daily newsletter product, but they wanted to be sure that the changes they made would be in line with what their super fans, their most loyal readers wanted. So, we sent this survey and kind of really got to know what EdNC super fans wanted and were able to confidently make some changes knowing that it wouldn't upset this valuable base of readers. So, these videos are only supposed to be six minutes long, so I wasn't able to cover everything here today. Believe me, I do want to cover everything, but what I did not get to hear are a lot of the kind of in-the-weeds best practices around how to design your survey, what questions to ask, best practices for setting up your focus group. You can read about that and more in a really great guide that I had the pleasure of working on for the Membership Puzzle Project, and I linked out to their audience research chapter in suggested reading, so I'd encourage you to check that out if you want to get to know kind of research method best practices. I also did not discuss how to synthesize the data that you collect. You're going to get a lot of survey responses back if you go through this process, so it's important to know how to comb through that data and pull out the findings. Again, check out Membership Puzzle Project's Guide, specifically the audience research chapter, another kind of key component of learning about your readers is A/B testing. This is a very common newsletter practice. A/B testing is great if you want to

test things like subject lines and send times. Finally, I only briefly mentioned email metrics. Again, that's coming soon in the future module. But I hope you found this interesting and helpful. Next up in Module two, I'm going to pass the mic over to fellow instructor Joseph Letterman, who's going to talk about a few of the more technical aspects of what you need to know to get your newsletter off the ground. Thank you so much for joining, and I'll see you in the forum.