## Module 1 - Audience research for launch: How to conduct audience research when you're getting started

[00:00:00] **Emily Roseman** Hi all! Emily here, and welcome back to our newsletter course. You are currently watching video two out of three in our first module. In this video, I'm going to review a few audience research tips and tactics for learning about your audiences prior to launching a newsletter. If you've already launched a newsletter, then I might recommend you skip this one and go to video of three, or you can stick around and watch this one to learn about some things you could do differently next time around. So without further ado, I'm going to share my screen and we'll get started. All right. So audience research for launch.

[00:00:44] **Emily Roseman** This video will cover what I said previously; how to get started and how to conduct an internal and external assessment, so that your newsletter will be set up for success.

[00:01:00] **Emily Roseman** So what to do before jumping right into newsletter land? Well, in the last video, we reviewed this stage one, which is defining your goals of your newsletter. As I mentioned last time, your newsletter goal can be things like, do you want to direct your readers to your website? Are you trying to keep readers within your newsletter to build their habit and loyalty there? Are you trying to kind of direct them to your event? There's all different kinds of goals, but it's important to define your goal and to double check that newsletters are the right tool to get you to your goal. In this video, we're going to pivot and think about stages two and three here of things to do before jumping into newsletter land, which is conducting both an external kind of audience assessment of who your target audiences is for this newsletter are and what they want, and also looking internally at your own capacity and bandwidth. So, for this external audience assessment, I recommend starting with this macro-level question, which is really a question based in a product mindset, which is what problem or problems can you solve for your audiences? How could a newsletter fill a gap for your audience right now? Then the second more micro question is how and when do your audiences prefer to consume information? The macro-level question will really help you determine the scope and the content of your newsletter, and the micro one will help you narrow in on things like the frequency of your newsletter and the send time and some of those other more nitty-gritty variables we reviewed in the first video. So, there's a few different methods at your disposal in this external audience assessment process. I'm going to review just a few of them here. The first is, especially if you're a publisher, you probably have existing data or metrics on your audience. For example, what are the stories that are most popular for your publisher or are you seeing some niche topics that just gets a ton of traffic every week? Is there an opportunity to create a newsletter that really digs deep in that topic that you're seeing some early interest in? Another thing you can do, which might seem fairly obvious to some, is to look at third-party data. Even in the US, we have our census data to get to know what your market looks like. If you live in a community that has an overwhelmingly young population, for instance, that's a clue to help guide you into how a newsletter can maybe take off in a certain audience segment. A few other kind of methods are you could conduct a survey with your current or future newsletter audiences, you could ask them to take an interview with you where you really dig deep into their information needs and what they want. If you're really intense about it, you can hold a focus group conversation of a few different people in your target audience and see how they kind of play off of each other. So these are just a few methods that you should consider at this phase.

[00:04:28] **Emily Roseman** I just mentioned a few different ways of talking to your potential audiences, and this is no small task. To get someone to hold perhaps like a 20 to 30 minute conversation with you about their information needs can be sometimes difficult. So, you need to think creatively about how you can reach people who are willing to do this. Again, if you're a publisher, you have a website and you can add a call-to-action on your website or a pop-up box advertising a survey that your audience members could take. Social media channels, same thing. I see a lot of groups buy Facebook ads trying to advertise a survey or an interview opportunity.

[00:05:13] **Emily Roseman** Think about your other newsletter lists, and also the newsletter lists of your partner organizations or other civic organizations in your neighborhood. Is there an opportunity where you could draft a really short survey and send it over your your library's mailing list? There might be a small fee involved, but it could really be worth the investment at this point to get to know your audience members.

[00:05:39] **Emily Roseman** And of course, not so much a thing that's relevant today, but a great method is kind of just showing up at an event in your community or in the area where you're hoping to serve with a newsletter and just ask people at an event to answer a few quick questions. Get creative.

[00:05:58] **Emily Roseman** So here's an example. I'm going to dig deep on one method here, which is sending a survey to your intended newsletter audiences, to get to know that macro-level question and the micro-level one that we reviewed. So, this is something the Lenfest Local Lab did out of Philadelphia. They were considering launching a newsletter to serve the Fishtown neighborhood. They drew up this Google form and they did two things, which is super interesting. They both collected responses to this in-person at bus stops in their community. They'd ask passerby's a few questions and they'd fill out this Google form for them. Then they'd also partnered with the Philadelphia Inquirer newsletter list to send this survey out to an existing newsletter list to collect a few more responses. Between those two, they got enough responses to be able to get to know basic demographic information of these folks and also how a newsletter could serve an unmet need that they have. So a second step here in this process is to conduct an external assessment, and that's just a really quick look at what your peers or competitors might be doing, just to be sure that you're not launching something that already exists in some form. Here is an example of an exercise fellow instructor Kerry actually did for a education nonprofit newsroom, where she looked at all of the other education-based newsletters in the United States and  tracked what they were called, and their frequency and their spend time and could really get a sense on when this other nonprofit, education-based publication could plug into this landscape. This can be a fairly intense process, and so if you don't have the time to conduct this kind of assessment, just a few quick phone calls to people to check that they're not already subscribed to something that you're imagining, a Google search or some search. And then again, post-COVID, perhaps just a few quick conversations with folks in your community to see what they're already subscribed to. Finally, for the stage three internal assessment, I recommend asking yourself and your relevant team members these questions to really start mapping out roles and responsibilities across producing this newsletter. So, things like how much time do you and your team have to produce this newsletter? If you only have a few hours a week, I might recommend just an RSS-generated link newsletter, or some kind of short and sweet link-based publication. If you have a lot of time, you can kind of consider more prose-heavy newsletters. It's worth determining early on who's actually responsible for writing it. I recommend an editor who's collecting and aggregating links, that can take a lot of time and sometimes you can involve your whole team on something like that. Who's adding images, if your newsletter has images, and formatting those within your email service provider. Who's in charge of hitting send? That can be a big thing, too. If your newsletter goes out at 6 a.m., the person who has to wake up and hit send should probably get their sign-off sooner rather than later in this process.

[00:09:33] **Emily Roseman** Once you have your list of things that you've learned from your external assessment, from talking with your audiences and your future audiences, and you've kind of gotten a sense of what you and your team can handle from your internal assessment, it's important to start mapping out the requests you heard from your audiences across something like this urgent, important matrix. So essentially, at some point you're going to need to prioritize what you heard from your audiences. So, for example, if there's some pressing information need that emerge from your surveys with your audience members, I would put that in the top left, "urgent and important" category. If there is some nice-to-have feature that maybe just one or two people mentioned, I would maybe put that in, "important, but not urgent, let's come back to that later."

[00:10:25] **Emily Roseman** If you're starting to ever feel kind of overwhelmed in this research process, I just want to bring you to this kind of guiding principle, which is that all of the information that you're collecting here on your audiences is in service of taking actions. You're not just conducting research for the sake of research itself, collect enough information so that you can start taking some informed actions. Once you take those actions, you'll open yourself up to a whole other series of opportunities to continue learning about your audiences. So just keep that in mind, and we'll actually get into this more in the next video in video three, how you can set yourself up for success to continuously learn about your readers over time. So with that, that was the end of video two, thank you again for joining us. I will next see you in video three to introduce just a few more audience research, best practices and tips for newsletters. I'll see you there.