

Module 2: Key Newsletter Infrastructure

[00:00:06] **Joseph Lichterman** Hey everyone, welcome back to week two of Newsletter's Strategies for Journalists. My name is Joseph Lichterman, I'm from the Lenfest Institute for Journalism in Philadelphia. I'm so thrilled that you can join us this week. We're going to be talking about some of the key tactics and strategies you need to implement to get your newsletter launched and successfully off the ground. So I'm going to pull up my slides and we are going to get right into it.

[00:00:31] **Joseph Lichterman** Again, by way of introduction, my name is Joseph Lichtman, I'm the communication and editorial director at the Lenfest Institute for Journalism, and I also write the Solution Set newsletter, a weekly newsletter focused on innovation in news.

[00:00:45] **Joseph Lichterman** A quick recap from last week, so in Module one, Emily covered why newsletters are important, how to conduct and synthesize audience research and how to choose the type of newsletter that's right for you.

[00:00:59] **Joseph Lichterman** This week, we're going to get into specific tactics and strategies you need to actually launch the newsletter first. In this video, we're going to focus on the key Tech Stack elements and identify some strategies for how to pick an email service provider. In video two, we're going to talk about data and privacy basics. Then our third video, we're going to talk about how to make data-informed decisions and what key analytics you need to know to make those decisions. Finally, in the Q&A, we're going to talk to Jacqué Palmer, who is a former Gannett senior content strategist. Gannett is the largest US newspaper chain. Jacqué worked at newsletter, I'm newsletters there. She recently just left Gannett and is now taking a new role at Vox Media.

[00:01:43] **Joseph Lichterman** So first, a quick definition. What is the tech stack? The tech stack is a suite of tools and technology you use to power your organization. Every organization's tech stack looks different. It's based on a lot of things, but especially your needs and your costs and things like that.

[00:01:58] **Joseph Lichterman** But no matter what type of organization you are or if you're an individual, the key part of your email tech stack will be the email service provider. We'll probably keep calling it an ESP from here on out. So that's what I'm referring to, if you hear me saying that. So the ESP is the piece of software you use to do a few things. You use it to design your newsletters, you use it to send newsletters. So that's where you actually hit the button to send it out. It's how you track and analyze email metrics, and also how you manage your email lists.

[00:02:29] **Joseph Lichterman** Here are some ESPs you may have heard of. We have a really great resource on the core site from Dan Oshinsky, Inbox Collective, that reviews a number of these ESPs and offers some considerations for what you should think about on how to choose one.

[00:02:46] **Joseph Lichterman** I'm not going to get into the details of that here, but what we will do is go over some of the top-line things you want to think about when considering an ESP, regardless if you're working in a newsroom or as an individual journalist. First, you'll want to think about cost. Some ESPs are free, some will charge you. Many of the ESPs that charge money, they base their charges on how big your list is. So, you'll want to think about how, if your newsletter list grows, the cost will likely increase with that. In terms

of design tools, most ESPs come with a standard template or a handful of templates. You'll want to, depending on your needs, maybe those templates are just fine for you. But if you want more personalization, more customization, more sophistication on that front, you'll want to choose an ESP that supports that. Similarly, the sign up process. Most ESPs have a built-in module or system for allowing people to sign up for your newsletter. If you have your own website and want more sophistication there, you might want an ESP that allows that. Same with list segmentation. You can use this in a couple of ways to be able to send emails to paying or non-paying subscribers or also just to be able to send emails to potentially your most loyal readers or to re-engage readers who haven't opened in a while. Some ESPs offer more functionality than others on that front. Finally, also with data and monetization. So data is the ability to what metrics they offer. They generally tend to offer the same top-line metrics, but if you want to get into more detail, your ESP may limit what you can do. And finally, monetization. We'll be talking next week about monetization when it comes to newsletters, but if you're going to want to be selling ads or subscriptions for your newsletter, or if your newsletter is part of a broader subscription package, you'll want to be thinking about how to monetize within your newsletter as well and different ESPs have different functionalities. So these are all some of the things you want to consider when choosing an email service provider.

[00:04:51] **Joseph Lichterman** Similarly, depending on your needs, you'll need a few other things that go along with your ESP in the tech stack. If you're a broader publication or you want to be posting your newsletters or the content that you're linking to in your newsletter somewhere, you'll probably want to host a website with a custom domain. And, you can then send the email from that custom domain potentially as well. We'll talk about some things to consider if you're going to be doing that in a minute. But many ESPs also have their own website templates, so you can just use that if you don't need to be so customizable. Similarly, content management system (CMS). If you're running your own website, you'll want to CMS to go with that, of course. And to power that, some CMSs will connect directly to ESPs, so you can just design your email once and transfer it automatically to your ESP and not have to do a whole lot of copying and pasting. So, that's how those interact. Could be something you want to consider as well. Similarly, a CRM, if you're running a broader subscription or membership program, you'll want to keep track of your paying members and the folks who are subscribing in some capacity. That's what a customer relationship management (CRM) system is for. Some CRMs will speak to your email service provider, so you're able to segment out based on who's paying, who's not paying, who's the donor, who's not an owner. Things like that. And so, you'll want to consider that as well. And finally, a payment processor. So, are you charging a subscription for your newsletter? You'll want to be able to accept that payment and let people know and have an ability to actually pay you, because that's important.

[00:06:33] **Joseph Lichterman** Finally, if you are hosting your own website, or if you are using a custom domain to send your email, these are a few essential concepts you'll want to keep track of to focus on deliverability. DKIM is an encryption framework that ensures that your email hasn't been tampered with in-transit. SPF specifies servers that can send an e-mail on your behalf. And then DMARC authenticates that domain to let the email clients know that it is safe. And so, we have a great resource on the course site as well that will get into much more detail on what each of these are, and also then how to update your DNS records on your website to be able to actually implement these and make sure that your emails are secure and they're avoiding your reader's spam filters.

[00:07:25] **Joseph Lichterman** So some key takeaways - you want to be sure to choose an ESP that fits your budget and editorial needs. Some other key elements of the

newsletter tech stack that you'll want to consider, make sure you speak with your ESP if you need them, your website, your CRM, your payment processor. And also, to get a little more sophisticated, you want to focus on deliverability to make sure that readers are actually getting your newsletter. Excellent, so that's it for this video. We'll be back in video number two to talk about privacy and data. So I will see you over there. Thanks so much.