Welcome to the March edition of Not a Newsletter, a monthly, semi-comprehensive, Google Doc-based guide to sending better emails! I'm Dan, the founder of Inbox Collective, an email consultancy, and the former Director of Newsletters at The New Yorker and BuzzFeed. Every month, I update this doc with email news, tips, and ideas. Sign up here to be notified when a new edition goes live!

Inside, you'll find: Thoughts on why you should think about creating different onboarding journeys for different types of readers; a fascinating new email role just posted by The New York Times; even more examples of ways to use AMP for Email; advice about the importance of finding your newsletter's niche; and more!

One of the advantages of a Google Doc is that it makes it easy to read and search through older editions of Not a Newsletter. You can find the full archive at this link.

-Dan
(Email / Twitter / LinkedIn)
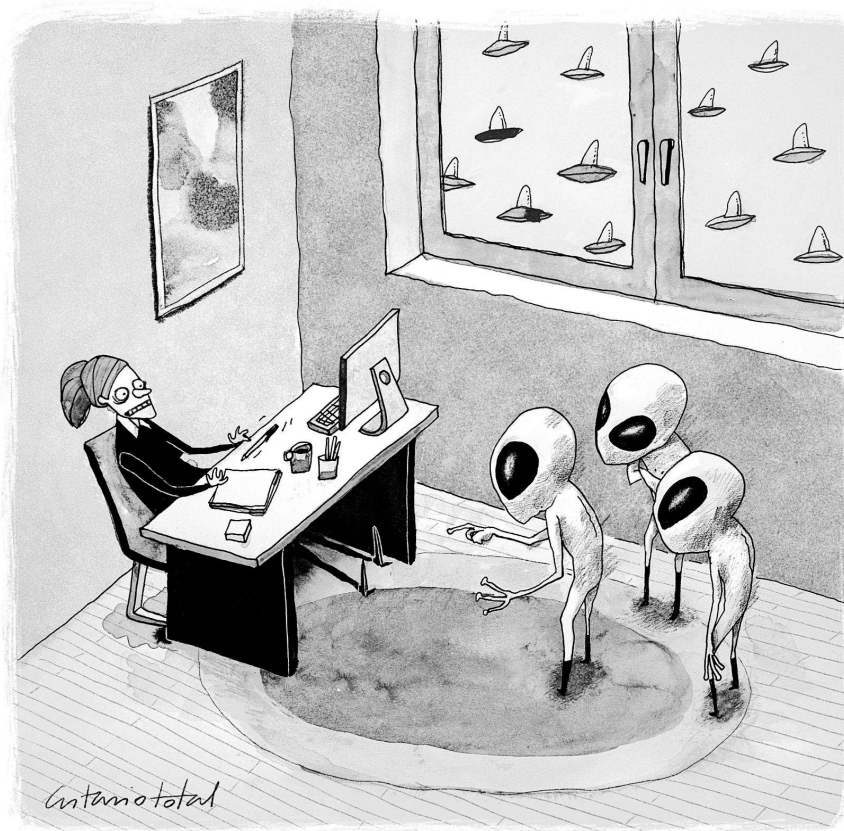
"Unsubscribe us or face annhilation."

Juan Astasio / The New Yorker

This Month in Email Headlines

- [Hey now lets users create blogs and newsletters right from their emails](#) (The Verge)
- [Oracle NetSuite to shutter Bronto](#) (MarTechToday)
- [How S. Mitra Kalita went from leading coverage of the world at CNN to connecting her neighbors in Queens](#) (Poynter)
- [Former Q editors join newsletter publishing boom](#) (The Guardian)
- [The Information Launches Newsletters to 'Super-Serve' Readers and Deeply Report on Niche Areas](#) (Adweek)
- [Front Office Sports rebrands to FOS, expects profitability](#) (Axios)
- [Mel Magazine to Launch Paid Newsletters](#) (Adweek)
- [Mailchimp Denies Bullying Claim By Engineer](#) (MediaPost)
  - Mailchimp's Ben Chestnut responded [here](#).
- [Passendo and OAO Launch Strategic Partnership in the US](#) (ExchangeWire)
- [The Marshall Project is experimenting with snail mail to reach incarcerated people](#) (Nieman Lab)
- [Zapier buys no-code-focused Makerpad in its first acquisition](#) (Makerpad)
  - As a user of both products, I think this is really, really exciting. Lots of opportunities for growth in the no-code space.
- [SparkPost Wins Skirmish In Legal Battle With 250ok](#) (MediaPost)
- [Google has finally added iOS's privacy labels to Gmail](#) (The Verge)
- [NFTs, the digital bits of anything that sell for millions of dollars, explained](#) (Vox)

The Email Backlash has Arrived. (Already.)

Last month in Not a Newsletter, [I wrote](#):

> You're going to read a lot about the death of email this year. "Why I left Substack" posts will be the new "Why I left New York." Some new technology will become a media darling…. Expect Twitter threads and LinkedIn poetry about why this time, truly, it's time to say goodbye to email.

When I made that prediction, I didn't expect to be publishing an entire section of the newsletter documenting that backlash. But a month later, here we are:

- [E-mail Is Making Us Miserable](#) (The New Yorker)
- ['A World Without Email' Review: The Battle With the Inbox](#) (The Wall Street Journal)
  - I agree with the general premise here — work-related email needs serious rethinking. In the meantime, all of us in the newsletter space need to continue to work to make sure we're sending things that make the inbox a better, more useful place.
- [Does Substack harm journalism? Q&A with UCLA Professor](#) (IndieHackers)
  - I disagree strongly with the argument here— but wanted to share anyway.
- ['Having a Substack feels dirty': Substack 'Pro' Announcement Leads to Departures from the Platform, Opportunities for Competitors](#) (Adweek)
- [Substack Is Not a Neutral Platform](#) (Medium)
  - Several Substack users announced that they were leaving the platform after writer Jude Ellison Sady Doyle raised concerns about Substack's Pro program.
  - Substack responded [here](#), and then again [here](#).

For Your Reading / To-Do List

- Last month, The New York Times posted an email job unlike any I've ever seen before.
  - It's what they're calling [an Optimization Editor](#) — someone who'll be tasked with running tests to improve their funnel, from site to newsletter to paid subscription.
  - But the really interesting thing from the job listing: "We are working to build a culture of constant experimentation, beginning with large flagship newsletters like The Morning, that will drive reader engagement and habituation with our journalism, and encouraging behaviors that lead to paid subscriptions."
  - Lots of teams are running interesting tests around habit or subscriptions. Among the interesting nuggets [from this year's INMA Subscriptions Summit](#): in 2020, Finland's largest paper, Helsingin Sanomat, ran 95 tests related to subscription sales. The idea of A/B testing isn't new, and outlets like the Times are already doing plenty of testing.

- But what caught my eye was the unusual focus of this job: Optimization specifically focused on newsletters — and even more specifically, on one newsletter, The Morning. When you're working with an audience as big as The Morning (a reported 1 billion emails opened per year), suddenly a small tweak to a CTA or an A/B test on an onboarding series represents a massive opportunity for growth.
  - In a few years, I'd expect that many major publishers will have someone focused entirely on newsletter—>subscription conversion. The role is potentially that important.
  - Newsletters work so well for publishers. But seeing a role like this go public is a reminder that even a massive newsroom like the Times still has plenty of room for growth when it comes to converting their audience to paying subscribers. There is still a lot more that nearly every newsroom can test, optimize, and learn.
- Kudos to the team at StackedMarketer, [which opened up the spreadsheets](#) and broke down revenue and growth numbers for their newsletter in 2020. This sort of transparency is really wonderful to see.
  - An aside: I'll be releasing a similar report about Not a Newsletter and Inbox Collective later this spring. I hope it's helpful in explaining what goes into a business like this!
- The AMP for Email bandwagon continues to pick up steam. Jordie van Rijn [detailed 150 ways you can use AMP](#) to engage with readers.
  - I've said it again: AMP for Email isn't available to many of you. You can get a list of compatible ESPs and email clients [here](#). And if you're interested in testing out AMP, try [Stripo](#), an email builder with AMP elements built in…
- Good stuff here, on the Newsletter Glue blog, about [one potential reason to consider building your own site](#) and then launching a newsletter from that (instead of just having the newsletter stand alone): Improving your SEO.
- Jake Singer of The Flywheel newsletter [wrote about Packy McCormick's Not Boring newsletter](#). McCormick's grown his newsletter to more than 30,000 readers, and he's stated that he hopes to build it into a million dollar product. I loved this quote, in particular:

> Yes, it's true that anyone can become a creator, but I think the lesson from cases like Packy is that not just anyone can turn it into a successful career. It reminds me of how my mom—a successful real estate broker—talks about how many millions of people get their real estate agent licenses. As she says, "anyone can get a real estate license. Not everyone can do something real with it."

- I've told many of you this in 1-to-1 conversations, but I'll say it here: When you're getting started with newsletters, don't focus too much on the revenue numbers. Focus on building the relationships with your readers — by sharing your voice, by asking great questions, by listening to your audience, by striving to serve them. Do that, and the opportunities to monetize will follow.

- Speaking of which: At The Open Notebook, Marina Philip interviewed several science writers [about how they've created and sustained a newsletter](#). Something that this piece emphasizes, and I think is absolutely spot-on: "Income is an obvious way to measure a newsletter's success, but it's by no means the only one, or even the most desirable one."

- Jeanne Jennings of Only Influencers [released a look at their 20201 Benchmark Report](#), which included a look at the diversity in the email space. Their findings? The email space is still nearly two-thirds white. There's a long way to go as we work to bring new voices into this space.

- Speaking of which: Lyz Lenz, of the Men Yell At Me Newsletter, [spotlighted Dana James](#), the reporter behind the new newsletter Black Iowa News, and explained how she hopes to use the newsletter to tell stories that aren't currently being told.

- On the ConvertKit blog, Kayla Voigt interviewed Ryan Holiday [about how he's built his newsletter](#). The most interesting thing here, I think: Holiday's created different onboarding journeys based on a reader's interests:

  > "When people come into Daily Stoic they have different interests, different levels of understanding. You want people to be put on a track that lets them go at their own speed," he says. "Let's say someone signs up on my piece on how to be a great leader, or the art of journaling, we want the first emails they get to match that interest. Otherwise, potential lifelong readers bounce out because you're not showing them what they want or need."
  >
  > Based on the location of signup, subscribers receive a different welcome flow—subscribers who come directly to the website, for example, are treated differently than referrals from social media.

- On the Ghost blog, David Ramos wrote about [the importance of finding your niche](#) — "the place," he writes, "where your experience, skills, interests, and the customers' needs all meet."

- I loved this piece, from John Adams and Alia Beard Rau of The Arizona Republic, about the realization that 42% of their paying subscribers weren't even visiting their site once a month, and [the efforts they took to bring those readers in](#). One thing not mentioned in depth here, but worth exploring: The value of a great

onboarding series. Taking the time to welcome readers through a series of emails — introducing them to your team, getting them to sign up for relevant products (newsletters, the app, your podcasts, social media feeds) is crucial to building habit early among readers and reducing churn.

- ○ And if you enjoyed that, make time for this blog post from Jason Jedlinski, of the Wall Street Journal's Digital Experience & Strategy Team, about how they've tested different strategies (including newsletter Courses!) to get less loyal readers to return more frequently to their site.

- Barbara Galiza, who's been building a new product called Job Dispatch, shared how she was able to improve the opt-in rate on her site's confirmation email (the email sent as part of the double opt-in process) just by changing the copy and CTA on her site.

- On the Chamaileon blog, Lucia Pascuttini wrote about ways to get more readers to respond to your surveys.

- Interesting thoughts here, from Terry Nguyen's gen yeet newsletter, about the intersection of the creator economy and collectivism.

- A few months ago, I promised Not a Newsletter readers a deal on this guide to newsletter strategy from The Hustle. Then… The Hustle got bought by HubSpot, and their team decided to change gears. Instead of releasing this as a paid product, they're releasing some of their findings for free. They were kind enough to share this deck on paid newsletters vs. free newsletters.

Tools To Help You Grow Your Newsletter

Build your own paid newsletter or subscription site through Ghost

- If you're not familiar with Ghost, you might want to take a closer look. It's a combination of a CMS and an ESP — you can publish a site and send emails all from one place. In the latest version of Ghost, their membership and subscription features are available to all. They offer built-in analytics (for site + email), integrations with Zapier, and free migration support for Ghost(Pro) users. They've also got a marketplace where you can grab a plug-and-play template, with both free and premium options to make your site look beautiful, or find an expert to customize the site for you.

- A big differentiator for Ghost(Pro) is pricing: You're paying for hosting, but they don't take any fees if you're a subscription newsletter or a member-driven site. (Like most platforms, Stripe still takes a 2.9% cut when they process a payment.) For a creator thinking about expanding into a site + newsletter, this tool is worth a closer look. Check out Ghost here.

Design beautiful emails with Chamaileon

- When I'm building emails for clients, they often ask me to create something that's really going to stand out. Instead of coding something from scratch, I start with Chamaileon, an email builder that allows me to easily design a responsive email with the styles that will wow a client — and really grab a reader's attention, too. It integrates directly with several big ESPs, like Mailchimp, Campaign Monitor, or SendGrid — or if you need to grab the HTML instead, you can do that, too. One more thing I love: It allows multiple people to be working on the same email at the same time, like you'd do in Google Docs. And just for Not a Newsletter readers, they're happy to offer a discount for non-profits and NGOs. Sign up here, and message them via the Intercom app on their site to tell them that I sent you.

To be as transparent as possible: These are Not a Newsletter partners, and I do receive a small commission when you sign up through the links in this Doc. Every tool listed in this "Tools" section is one I've personally tested or am using with Inbox Collective clients!

Stuff I Loved This Month

- A big shout-out to the team at The Open Notebook, who recently launched their first Course: How to Find an Angle for Any Science Story. It's the first of three Courses they're planning on launching. You can sign up for it here.
  - Full disclosure: I've worked with the TON team through Inbox Collective, and helped them plan and build this Course. (Also, and I'm super biased here: It's an exceptionally good Course!)
- I've mentioned them before, but I'll do it again, now that applications are officially open: If you're thinking of launching a digital news business, consider applying to the Tiny News Collective. This is a great team building out a suite of tools, resources, and mentorship to help new newsrooms grow.
- On a related note: Many of the folks behind Tiny News Collective also worked on this Google News Initiative startups playbook. This is a project that's been in the works for a year, and there's a lot in here you'll learn if you're thinking about building a digital news startup.
- A bunch of great speakers will be at Newsletter Fest, an online-only series of talks and workshops about email. (I'll be there, too!) It's free, and running from April 12-16. Register to attend at this link.

- Eddie Shleyner of VeryGoodCopy released a free Course on converting site users to newsletter subscribers. [You can subscribe here](#).

- I absolutely loved reading [about Block Club Chicago's COVID-19 reader hotline](#). I can't say this enough: Prioritize relationships, and do stuff that doesn't scale. These sorts of efforts truly make a difference.
    - On a related note, [do check out this guide](#), from INN, about ways newsrooms provided service journalism during the pandemic.

- Loved this story about Canadian outlet The Narwhal, and [how they've focused on short-run fundraising campaigns](#) to drive revenue. This quote is fantastic:

  > "Fundraising is all about the reader being the hero of the story," says Gilchrist. "While you may have some lofty internal goal to get X-many new members by Y date, I think it's much more effective to come up with what you could call mini campaigns throughout the year to appeal to your readers to become members or make donations to support a specific, tangible goal."

- You've probably read a little about classifieds + newsletters this year. But here's something a little different, from India's Lokal app: A classified-like product [where people can publicly congratulate their family or friends](#) on a recent achievement (a wedding, a graduation, etc.). Their CEO, Jani Pasha, says it drove $50,000 in revenue in February.

- Not email-specific, but I still found this headline from Nieman Lab super interesting: "[The New York Times' new Slack app aims to deliver (non-depressing) Times stories to you while you work.](#)"

Who's Hiring

- BuzzFeed is hiring an [Audience Development Strategist & Editor](#) for newsletters, in New York, NY.

- No Plans Inc., the company behind the Girls' Night In newsletter, is hiring [an Audience Development Strategist](#), in a remote role.

- The Los Angeles Times is hiring [a Multiplatform Editor](#), in El Segundo, CA..

- The New York Times is hiring [an Optimization Editor](#), in New York, NY

- POLITICO is hiring [a Senior Editor for Newsletters](#), in Arlington, VA.

- Investopedia and The Balance are hiring [a Newsletter Editor](#), in New York, NY.

- Morning Brew is hiring for several roles, including [a Writer](#) for their main newsletter, in New York, NY.

- TheSkimm is hiring for several roles, including [a Director of Growth Marketing](), in New York, NY.
- Kinship is hiring [an Email Marketing Manager](), in New York, NY.
- Sinclair Broadcast Group is hiring [a Newsletter Digital Producer](), in Arlington, VA, or a remote role.
  - Have a job opening you want featured in next month's Not a Newsletter? Submit them to [dan@inboxcollective.com]().

Resources for Editors + Designers

- [Newsletter Strategy Positioning Brief]() — a helpful doc for anyone who might want to launch a newsletter
  - This one's a worksheet that's been floating around the email world for a few years now. Bloomberg's Meagan Hess first shared it with Not a Newsletter, and I've adapted and added to it for your use
- ***EXCLUSIVE TO NOT A NEWSLETTER*** [Which ESP is right for you?](): A guide to picking the right email tool for your newsroom
- ***EXCLUSIVE*** [25 Ways to Sign Someone Up For Your Newsletter]() — a guide to ways you can grow your email lists using strategies both on and off your site
- [Newsletterguide.org]() — a great guide for any news organization who wants to launch, build, and monetize new newsletters
- ***EXCLUSIVE*** [Subject Line + Preheader Calculator]() — a tool to make sure your subject lines will fit on most devices, plus a list of subject line/preheader lengths that fit on various email clients
- [Good Email Copy]() — a searchable database of the copy that brands use in their emails to customers
- How to launch a Course
  - [Use Email Automation to Deliver Mini-Courses and Activate Your Archives]() — a talk from ONA 2019 featuring lessons from Pew Research Center, The Washington Post, BuzzFeed, and The New Yorker
  - [Best Practices and Tips for Email Courses]() — a one-sheeter with practical advice for launching a Course
  - [Newsletter Strategy Positioning Brief for Courses]()
- Tools for email designers
  - [The Ultimate Guide to CSS]() — a comprehensive guide from Campaign Monitor explaining which CSS styles work in certain email clients

- ○ [Can I Email…](#) — a guide to which CSS and HTML elements work in certain clients
- ○ [EmailComb](#) — a tool to strip out excess CSS and keep your emails as light as possible
- ○ [SendTest](#) — an app to send yourself a test email and test out AMP for Email elements
- ○ [Accessible Email](#) — a tool that analyzes your emails to make sure they're accessible to all readers
- ○ [Who Can Use](#) — a site to help you identify color combinations that might be difficult to read for readers with visual impairments
- ○ [emailpreview.io](#) — a tool from Stephanie Griffith to help you easily save your emails as a .jpg or .png
- ○ [Buttons.cm](#) — a tool for building buttons that work in every email client
- Tools for measuring the success of your newsletters
  - ○ ***EXCLUSIVE*** [Google Analytics dashboards for newsletters](#) — two dashboards you can implement to track newsletter success (one to track real-time data, one to track monthly data)
  - ○ [The Audience Explorer dashboard](#) — a set of 10 custom reports for Google Analytics, including a dashboard for newsletters
    - ■ The Audience Explorer dashboards [are also available in Spanish](#)
  - ○ [Google News Initiative Data Tools](#) — several free resources to help news organization measure success (for email and other channels)
- Resources for authenticating your emails
  - ○ Every ESP has different guidelines for setting up SPF + DKIM. Here are the instructions if you're on [MailChimp](#), [Campaign Monitor](#), [ConvertKit](#), or [Salesforce](#)
  - ○ How to generate [a DMARC record](#) and [a BIMI record](#).
  - ○ [DMARC Monitor](#) — a free tool from Valimail to see who might be trying to send emails from your domain
  - ○ [Inbox, Spam, or Promotions?](#) — a tool to see which part of the Gmail inbox your emails are landing in
  - ○ [rate my spam](#) — a tool from Taxi for Email to see if your emails might be marked as spam

The Google Docs Anonymous Animal of the Month

One of the quirks of publishing in a Google Doc is that when readers like you visit, Google identifies you as an animal in the top right corner of the doc. So to close out this edition of Not a Newsletter, I want to spotlight one of the Google Doc animals in a feature I call... the Google Docs Anonymous Animal of the Month! This month:

Anonymous Sheep

- A group of sheep is called a "flock" — unless, of course, it's called a herd, drove, down, drive, fold, or trip. The folks at Reference.com have put together a helpful guide to [explaining when you should use each phrase](#). (For instance: "Drift is a noun derivative of the verb 'drifan,' which is identical in meaning to the Dutch word "drift," which means herd or flock.")

- A sheep that rolls onto its back is known as a "cast" sheep. When a sheep is on its back, it may need help to get back up — and if it does not receive help, it could die. Here's why: When a sheep is on its back, gas builds up in its stomach, and if it doesn't get upright, it might become unable to breathe. If you're walking the countryside and find a cast sheep, [here's a surprisingly useful video from a British sheepdog trainer](#) that explains how to get them back upright. (When Not a Newsletter eventually pivots to becoming a blog exclusively with animal-related tips, remember this bullet point.)

- [Here's a video of a sheep being sheared](#) after its coat had grown to more than 80 lbs. I promise: You'll want to spend three minutes on this.

- TIL: Dolly the sheep, the world's first cloned sheep, [was named for Dolly Parton](#).

- The sheep is a relative of the goat, and yet, Google Docs does not include the goat as an animal in its list of anonymous animals. Why? I have no idea, because goats are delightful creatures! As a once (and future) goat yoga participant (big shout-out to the good people of [the Philly Goat Project](#)), and a former writer on the baby goat beat for BuzzFeed ([see here](#)), I pledge to do more to make sure that goats, alongside sheep, are properly represented here in the Google Docs Anonymous Animals universe!

Anyway, the Sheep! That's your Google Docs Anonymous Animal of the Month.

That's all for this edition! Want to be notified when next month's edition of Not a Newsletter is live? [Sign up here.](#)