DRAGONFLY

FIELD GUIDES

Tips and tools

FOR CONTENT & DESIGN

How to Get a Newsletter Off the Ground in 6 Steps

A well-written newsletter can reinforce your brand, drive traffic to your website, and give your thought leadership and recent work a place to shine. Are you ready to sign up? Start here.

STEP 1 PICK A PURPOSE

Establish a primary goal for your newsletter and stick to it. Be consistent and truthful about the purpose of your newsletter so subscribers know what to expect. (Consider adding a subscribe page to your website to set the stage and attract readers.)

STEP 2 SET A CADENCE

Create an editorial calendar you can hit without skimping on quality or repeating content. It doesn't matter whether it's weekly or monthly (or fortnightly, for Ann Handley/Total Anarchy readers), as long as you keep it up.

STEP 3 CREATE A TEMPLATE

Establish recurring sections or themes around which to organize your content. The New York Times' "The Morning" goes in-depth on one hot news topic, and then teases the rest of the paper. Jenny Rosenstrach sends a weekly dispatch called "Three Things." You never know whether the "things" will be recipes, travel tips, or book recommendations — but readers know the flow.

STEP 4 KEEP IT SHORT

Inbox space and eyeball time are precious. Be generous with your brevity. Keep content short, crisp, and easy to scan. Link to your website or other channels if you need to share in-depth information.

STEP 5 PICK A SENDER

Should your newsletter come from a person or a generic inbox? There's no right answer. Pick a sender that aligns with your brand, content, and style. If you're writing a personal-sounding dispatch, don't send it from "info@." Maybe more importantly, consider what happens when someone hits "reply." What do you want that experience to be like? (Peloton caught some wind for sending emails "from" its instructors that generated automated support messages.)

STEP 6 TEST IT OUT

Hit spellcheck or, better yet, ask someone fresh to give it a read. Proof the content before it goes into layout and again after it's been formatted for publication. Create a distribution list of test users who will open and read the newsletter on different platforms (e.g., desktop, mobile, tablet). Add alt text for images and check the design for accessibility. Test every link, including the teeny ones at the bottom of your template.

Once your newsletter gets off the ground, keep testing. Try different subject lines, preheaders, and images to learn what works.