Quick + Scrappy
Audience Research

Leveraging Newsletters to Learn About Your Audience

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A 201 guide for taking your newsletters to the next level — growing the lists, making money, and more.
Agenda for today’s session

- Presentation
  - Why audience research matters
  - Methods and tools for newsletter-specific research

- Questions and Answers
  - What else do you want to know?
Audience Research

Why does it matter?

- Audience research is important to influence key product decisions.
- It helps you make informed choices about how a newsletter serves your audience and advances your business goals.
- It then serves as a baseline to continue to assess the product over time.
- Make way for the Quick & Scrappy approach...
Pivot + Iterate
Refine your goal:
- Diversify audience
- Deepen relationships
- Drive demand

Study + Set Goals
- Identify potential audiences
- Discover what they want
- Set benchmarks

Launch + Learn
- Put a product in the world
- Analyze results
- Learn from your audience

The Audience Research Cycle
Design Your Own Survey + Interview Protocol

1. Identify audiences to survey
   a. Example: Segment by engagement level
   b. Remove duplicates

2. Send each group a link to a survey
   a. Write individual emails to users
      i. Draft an email to copy and paste to expedite and standardize

3. Identify participants for more in-depth conversation by telephone
   a. Develop list of questions to ask during interview
   b. Build a database to compare and sort responses
Info Needs Assessment

Here are 4 strategies from a guide produced by Listening Post Collective and Lenfest Institute:

1. Connect with community influencers who can help build trust
2. Identify places where communities congregate online — or offline
3. Safely visit places where communities are still gathering
4. Ask questions — and then listen.
During the COVID-19 pandemic, news organizations have a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to provide their communities with indispensable news and information using engagement strategies to connect with audiences in a meaningful way.

To try and help newsrooms meet information needs for targeted communities, The Lenfest Institute and The Listening Post Collective partnered to highlight a four-step strategy for how newsrooms can identify and create coverage for their audiences. We’ve also created a printable worksheet, which you can use to begin to craft your own approach to socially distant audience and community engagement. We’ve also included links to other resources and case studies that can help illustrate successful approaches to engagement at lenfestinstitute.org/coronavirus.

These strategies are just a jumping off point, and we hope that they lead to meaningful journalism that provides valuable insights and information to your communities:

For more: lenfestinstitute.org/coronavirus
Act One:
Study + Set Goals
Pivot + Iterate
Refine your goal:
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The Audience Research Cycle
Example: Launching Solution Set
A weekly-ish newsletter on innovation in journalism

1. Simple survey
2. Comparative analysis
3. Publish and get feedback
Lenfest Institute - Solutions Journalism Network Collaborative Research Initiative

We're starting a new collaborative research effort to highlight best practices in news. We've identified some areas that we're interested in covering, but we'd like your help to determine which topics to report on initially.

* Required

Here are a few topics we identified as potential focus areas. Over the next few questions, please rank which topics would be most useful for you. Which of these topics would be most relevant to your work? *

Choose

Which of the following would you be interested in?

Choose

Are there other ways that you might like to engage with our work? *

☐ Facebook group
☐ Slack group
☐ Email newsletter
☐ Email listserv
☐ Podcast
☐ In-person training or events
☐ Video
☐ Other: ____________________________

We're planning on publishing these text-based case studies online, but are there other ways that you might like to engage with our work? *

Choose

Can we potentially follow up with you to learn more about your work and what type of resources would be most useful for you?

☐ Yes
☐ No
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<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Compiled for the Knight Institute for Journalism. Questions? Email <a href="mailto:jowsh@extensionismo.org">jowsh@extensionismo.org</a></strong></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td><strong>An incomplete list of newsletters about journalism</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Newsletter</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Sign Up</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
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<td>API Need to Know</td>
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<td>Weekly</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Aces Media Trends</td>
<td>Newsletter from Aces' Sara Facher</td>
<td><a href="mailto:newsletter@aces.com">newsletter@aces.com</a></td>
<td>Daily</td>
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<td>Box of Amazing</td>
<td>A weekly digest covering emerging technology, trends and extraordinary articles, hand-picked to broaden your mind and challenge your thinking.</td>
<td>boxofamazing.com</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Change Your Life</td>
<td>A collection of media news from around the web.</td>
<td>changeyourlife@com</td>
<td>Daily</td>
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<td>CBR The Media Today</td>
<td>A collection of media news from around the web.</td>
<td>cbertext@com</td>
<td>Daily</td>
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<td>CBR Top Stories</td>
<td>A collection of media news from around the web.</td>
<td>cbertext@com</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
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<td>CNN Reliable Sources</td>
<td>A collection of media news from CNN's Brian Stelter and the network's media reporters</td>
<td>cnncollection@com</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Colorado Local News &amp; Media</td>
<td>Updates on the local news in Colorado from Casey Hadolin</td>
<td>coloradolocalnews@com</td>
<td>Daily</td>
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<td>Coral Reefs Refracting the Conversation</td>
<td>The latest news and links from Coral by Vox Media</td>
<td><a href="mailto:coralreefs@voxmedia.com">coralreefs@voxmedia.com</a></td>
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<td>Current.org</td>
<td>News and views from the media</td>
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<td>Monthly</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Date to Know</td>
<td>&quot;well/surces database&quot;</td>
<td>datetoknow@com</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
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<td>Data Journalism Newsletter</td>
<td>A weekly roundup of data journalism news by Quinn journalist Lennie de Jong.</td>
<td>datajournalism@com</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
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<td>Digitby Daily newsletter</td>
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<td>Discourse Media</td>
<td>Monthly updates from the Canadian news org.</td>
<td>discourse@com</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>European Journalists Centre</td>
<td>Regular updates from the EJC on tracking, events, and more</td>
<td>ejc@com</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Fair Warning</td>
<td>A round-up of all-female journalists, data visualization and data stories from Sophie Warran</td>
<td>fairwarning@com</td>
<td>On-Hatuse</td>
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<td>First for a Reason</td>
<td>A newsletter covering first Amendment Law from North Carolina-based law firmSwaine, Blalock, Vaughn &amp; Bodey, PLLC</td>
<td>firstforareason@com</td>
<td>On-Hatuse</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Flyer Podcasts</td>
<td>Weekly flyer highlights for non-traditional podcasts and public drives</td>
<td>flyerpodcasts@com</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Updates from the publisher covering</td>
<td></td>
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Solution Set

The nonprofit inews source mobilized its board members to match reader donations

News Technology & Innovation · Solution Set
How “members getting members” brought Zetland to financial sustainability

Content Creation · Solution Set
How one Iowa newspaper is providing fun and educational COVID-19 coverage for kids

Fundraising strategies for newsrooms

Sign up for Solution Set
Get Solution Set delivered to your inbox.

Subscribe!!!: www.solutionset.org
Example: Lenfest Local Lab

The Lenfest Local Lab is a multidisciplinary product and user experience innovation team supported by The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

- The has Lab conducted user experience research to launch its hyperlocal neighborhood newsletter project.
- Much more: lenfestinstitute.org/lenfest-local-lab
Fishtown Neighborhood Survey

Thank you for your feedback! This is an updated version of a survey we sent back in December.

We want to understand how you've been discovering news and information about Fishtown over the past few months, if it's been easy or difficult to access and if you're satisfied with your experience.

We appreciate your time,
The Lenfest Local Lab

* Required

1/10. What is your age? *

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

2/10. How many years have you lived in or near Fishtown? *

- Less than a year
- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-20 years
- 20+ years

3/10. How have you been spending time in the neighborhood during the past few months? (Choose all that apply) *

- Going out to eat or drink
- Spending time at a park/walking
- Exercising
- Attending community meetings

4/10. Have you supported local businesses during the past few months? (Choose all that apply) *

- Yes, I've ordered food from local restaurants
- Yes, I've purchased gift cards from local businesses
- Yes, I've donated to local businesses
- Yes, I've used a local vendor for an essential service
- Yes, I've shopped online from a local business
- No, I haven't been able to support a local business

5/10. How do you see yourself spending time in the neighborhood in the fall while following public health guidelines? (Choose all that apply) *

- Going out to eat or drink
- Spending time at a park/walking
- Exercising
- Attending community meetings

More: lenfestinstitute.org/lenfest-local-lab
It’s okay if a newsletter isn’t for you!
Act Two: Launch + Learn
Pivot + Iterate
Refine your goal:
- Diversify audience
- Deepen relationships
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The Audience Research Cycle
Launch!

1. Just do it.
2. Seriously.
3. Put something out there — it doesn’t need to be perfect.
Example: Deez Links

“I started Deez Links as a way to highlight one link a day ... about interesting industry news or just cool stuff from the internet to my friends who also worked in media. The litmus test is essentially just “do I want to text this link to everyone I know right now.”

“The audience has expanded way beyond just personal friends and colleagues at this point, but I still try to write it as if I’m just composing a slightly more formal text for the group chat.”

More details: https://deezlinks.substack.com/
The Personal is Professional: How Delia Cai Adapted Deez Links to Serve Her Audience in a Pandemic

Delia Cai shares why and how she changed her newsletter tone and added in a new "Signal Boost" section for journalists looking for work.

This is the fourth post in the Sign Me Up series, a project that talks directly with newsletter-makers about their newsletters, and these days, specifically COVID-19 newsletters. This interview has been lightly edited for brevity. You can read the most recent post about covering local education via newsletters, featuring EducationNC’s Nation Hahn and Mary Willson, here.

If you’re reading this, odds are you’re in the same future-of-news or newsletter-obsessed field as we are. And if that’s true, you’re likely subscribed to, or have heard of, Deez Links, a daily media newsletter by Delia Cai.

Introducing: The Media Classifieds

Delia Cai  Jun 16

Some cool news for today: Deez Links is partnering with our pals at Study Hall to form a classified ads network! So if you’ve got something you want to get in front of the most plugged-in audience on the internet (AKA all the readers of this newsletter + Study Hall’s phalanx of subscribers) this is your chance!!!!

FYI, this is **separate** from my Signal Boost section, which is for media workers who’ve been laid off/furloughed and are looking for work. That will always be free. But I’ve been wanting to extend this newsletter as a broader platform for brands, job listings, etc. for a while, and of course, to make Deez Links a more sustainable endeavor in general.

Here are the details; use the google form if you have any questions!

Want to promote your job opening / pitch call / new project / ecommerce brand? Consider a classified ad. Deez Links and Study Hall are working together to distribute weekly listinasa to 10,000

More: https://medium.com/the-newsletter-wizards-project
Example:
The Philadelphia Inquirer
COVID-19 Newsletter

1. Launched as a simple RSS feed of COVID-19 stories.
2. Began testing right away: Morning or evening? What types of stories to include?
3. Product has evolved as the coronavirus story has changed.

Coronavirus makes nearly all public events and even private gatherings risky, experts say

Posted by on 11 March, 2020

As the coronavirus crisis grows, health officials are struggling to strike the right tone between false reassurance and OMG we’re doomed.

On Tuesday, Philadelphia’s leaders announced the city’s first coronavirus case and advised residents to “consider not attending public gatherings with more than 5,000” people.

On Wednesday, a city health official acknowledged the randomness of that number, which would affect only massive events such as parades, and games or concerts in stadiums. (The Philadelphia Flyers and 76ers both have games scheduled this week; each normally attracts 18,000 to 20,000 fans.)

Read more →

Philly St. Patrick's parade organizer is '100% at peace' with cancellation (even though he thinks people are overreacting)

Posted by on 11 March, 2020

The decision to cancel Philadelphia’s St. Patrick’s Day Parade was made Tuesday night by organizers who were swayed after public health officials announced they had confirmed the city’s first case of the new coronavirus.

Michael J. Bradley Jr., the grand marshal of the parade who has also served as its director for nearly two decades, said Wednesday that he’s “100% at peace” with the decision, which to his
Act Three: Pivot + Iterate
**Pivot + Iterate**

Refine your goal:
- Diversify audience
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**The Audience Research Cycle**
Super Readers = Open rate of 80 percent or more
Example: EdNC’s Daily Newsletter

Revisiting a core newsletter’s purpose and reach with “super readers”

1. Identify newsletter’s “super readers” → open rate of 80% or more, or five-stars on MailChimp.
2. Send targeted survey → develop specific user personas for “super readers.”
3. Better understand how to reach, support and monetize audience.
EdNC survey snapshots for its daily newsletter, https://www.ednc.org/newsletters/
Example: The Single Subject News Study
Example: The Trace & The Marshall Project

Problem: How can topically focused newsrooms grow a group of “insider” readers, while also expanding readership to the general public?
Thanks for subscribing to our daily newsletter, Opening Statement.

Hello, I’m Carroll Bogert, President of The Marshall Project.

**I know you care deeply about criminal justice reform; you wouldn’t be a reader of The Marshall Project if you weren’t passionate about change.** I joined The Marshall Project because I believe hard-hitting reporting can contribute to reform. Here are a few ways our journalism has made the system more fair, humane, and

Hello,

I’m Neil Barsky, founder of The Marshall Project. The seeds of our organization were planted a few years back when I read Michelle Alexander’s “The New Jim Crow,” and Gilbert King’s Pulitzer-winning “Devil in the Grove.”

Hello,

This is Bill Keller, Editor-in-Chief at The Marshall Project. **Thank you for taking the time to read our work.**

When Neil Barsky invited me, back in early 2014, to help him launch The Marshall Project several things made the offer irresistible. There was, of course, the excitement of building something from scratch after 30 years writing for The New York Times.

The grotesque state of our nation’s justice system was going underreported by a financially beleaguered news media. And Neil approached me with a shared conviction that journalism – fair and fact-based, not preachy or polemical – could be a critical key to reform.

Our newsroom was founded on a single mission – to sustain a sense of urgency about the U.S. criminal justice system, from policing to courts to prisons and parole.

**I hope over the next few weeks, you’ll see how our journalism has impact on the real world. We believe people like you can be a powerful force for change when you’re armed with reliable facts.**

Many thanks again for your interest and support,

Bill
Subscribe to receive The Trace's roundup of the most important news and analysis on gun violence.

[Submit]

- **THE CANON**
  Sent every Saturday. Our guide to the week's most revealing, must-read reporting on gun issues.

- **THE DAILY BULLETIN**
  Sent weekday mornings. Get up to speed with The Trace's latest articles and other important news of the day.
Quick + Scrappy

Audience Research

*Resources*

- Survey providers (Google Forms, Typeform, SurveyMonkey, etc.)
- Your preferred method for tracking and comparing data (Google Sheets, Excel)
- Telephone
- Data you likely already have (Web traffic, newsletter stats, etc.)
Questions?
Thank you!

Joseph Lichterman
@ylichterman
The Lenfest Institute for Journalism

Carrie Porter
@carolineporter
Ralstin Agency
AUDIENCE QUESTION TIME!
What’s your experience with audience research?

- When have you used audience research in your newsroom?
- What were you hoping to learn about your audiences?
- What strategies or tactics did you use?
AUDIENCE QUESTION TIME!
Have you launched an MVP newsletter?

- What was the newsletter?
- What was the response from your audience?
- Was it a challenge to get buy-in from your newsroom?
AUDIENCE QUESTION TIME!
Have you pivoted a newsletter?

- How did you change, and why did you make that choice?
- What success did you have with making the change(s)?
- What plans do you have for your COVID-19 newsletters?