

## How to Create an Email Newsletter That Converts



### Introduction

For every \$1 spent on email marketing, \$38 is returned.

That ROI is unbeatable across any other marketing channel. And it's why B2B and B2C brands are putting more money into email campaigns.

An email newsletter is often the starting point for marketers looking to form a stronger connection with their audience and nurture prospects through the sales funnel.

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Containing custom-curated content, personalized names, branded incentives and high-quality images, newsletters are a powerful, templated mechanism for generating ROI at scale.

So how do you create an email newsletter that converts? For starters, think of your email service provider as its own marketing engine.

Let's look at the newsletter-creation process – from scratch – as well as examples to help you visualize each step along the way.



#### TABLE OF CONTENTS

### How to create an email newsletter

A quick rundown of how to create an email newsletter:



1. Grow your newsletter email list



**2.** Understand opt-in form dos and don'ts



3. Set baseline conversion goals



Brainstorm optimized newsletter content based on audience needs



**5.** Experiment with default newsletter templates within your email platform



**6.** Custom design your own template, if needed



**7.** Plug in content formats of choice



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**8.** Drop in clickable CTAs and proper hyperlinks



**9.** Add personalization tokens or variable tags



**10.** Write your subject line (redo it a few times)



**11.** Preview your newsletter template as your audience will see it



**12.** Verify responsive design and rendering across various email clients



**13.** Select the email list to send to



**14.** Decide completion action (conversion) to measure



**15.** Have a welcome email ready to go for those who do sign up



16. Measure performance for ideal send frequency and engagement

## **Grow your newsletter email list**

You may be asking, "Wait, how do I even get a mailing list to send a newsletter to?" There are a number of ways to go about this. Some of our favorites include:

#### Put a temporary pop-up form on your blog page.

Pop-up CTAs generate 300-500% more subscriptions than regular CTAs that appear at the top or bottom of a page. When we tested this out ourselves, we were able to increase newsletter subscriptions by 532%.

#### Embed a subscribe CTA into your normal email comms,

both internally and externally.

The real estate around your email signature, sign-off and company disclosure can be leveraged for newsletter subscriptions, too.

#### Use native embed forms rather than signup pages.

If a user has to click a link and be directed to a unique signup page, it's less likely they will follow through. But if you can put the form — a simple "enter email address here" — directly on a web page, users can give you their contact info in fewer steps.

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#### • Put a subscribe form in your top nav.

Make sure your navigation is sticky, meaning it doesn't disappear when users scroll down the page.

#### Host a webinar.

Every single person who enrolls as an attendee hands over their email address, which can be cycled into your newsletter mailing list as well (provided you've made this clear to the user).



### Understand opt-in form dos and don'ts

Just because you're in email contact with someone doesn't mean you can automatically put them into your mailing list. Users have to opt in under their own free will.

That's why you need some sort of disclosure informing readers that by filling in their email address, they are making themselves eligible to receive future email communications.

This is a regulatory requirement.

It's also best practice for your company because a form fill weeds out spam and bot submissions.

By doing so, your final mailing list will be more intent-driven – not just some robot address that will cause a bounceback.

Our standard boilerplate is usually something along the lines of:

By filling out this form, you'll also be subscribed to Brafton's weekly newsletter and be alerted when we share new content like this.

You may unsubscribe from these communications at any time.

### Set baseline conversion goals

You know you need a newsletter, but do you know how to measure its success (or failure)? Your conversion goals are your benchmarks. They help guide your newsletter campaign, informing you on whether future adjustments are needed or if you're on the right track.

The core metrics to be mindful of are:

## Open rate (percentage of recipients who open your email)

**EMAILS OPENED** 

(EMAILS SENT -BOUNCEBACKS)

#### Click-through rate

(percentage of recipients who clicked on a link within your email)

**UNIQUE CLICKS** 

(DELIVERED EMAILS x 100)

#### **Conversion rate**

(percentage of recipients who completed a desired action)

**CONVERSIONS** 

(DELIVERED EMAILS x 100)

You can use industry averages to start out. Here's what you might expect numbers-wise from your newsletter:

• Open rate: **20-30**%

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• Click-through rate: **15-20**%

• Conversion rate: 1-3%

## Brainstorm optimized newsletter content based on audience needs

You know your industry. You know your readers. What do they actually want to learn more about? What would they gain from having another email (yours) in their inbox?

Your newsletter content is the crux here. Traditional newsletters may contain a mix of text-based links and images that direct readers to a blog page. Other newsletter styles may be heavy on authentic photography or design. Here's a rough sketch of one of our newsletters where we first listed out the content that would go into the email, before we began formatting:

#### **Newsletter Lineup**

#### Headliner:

HERE'S PROOF THAT PROMOTIONAL VIDEOS FOR BUSINESS DON'T HAVE TO BE BORING

#### Additional articles:

AVOID THESE 5 CRIMES WHEN BLOGGING FOR BUSINESS (INFOGRAPHIC)

6 INTRODUCTORY TYPES OF LINK BUILDING THAT ACTUALLY WORK (AND WHY YOUR CONTENT IS NOTHING WITHOUT LINKS)

4 EXPERT CONTENT STRATEGISTS GIVE THEIR TIPS FOR CONTENT MARKETING SUCCESS A GUIDE TO EVERY 2018 GOOGLE SERP FEATURE



Choose what best represents your audience. For the B2B professional with no time to read long-form content, perhaps shorter industry opinion pieces or an infographic could work best to grab their attention without forcing them to commit too much of their time.

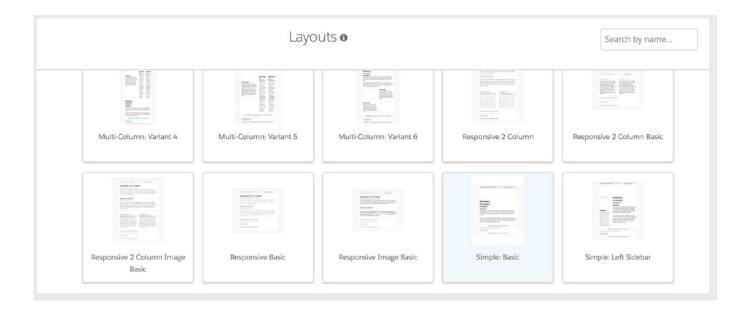
Conversely, a newsletter is often the platform for giving readers indepth content they need but may not find immediately around the web: You're sending them high-quality, authoritative content that resonates, that's data-driven, that's waiting right in their inbox.

Also, your newsletter subscribers are deeper in the funnel than an average blog reader. They, at some point, filled out an opt-in form and chose to receive your emails. So follow through on that conversion by matching their newsletter expectations.

# **Experiment with default newsletter templates within your email platform**

Email automation platforms often come pre-set with several email templates you can choose from.

Pre-made templates may be your best, most convenient option starting out. They default to today's accessibility and responsive design standards so you can be sure your emails are adapted to a desktop and mobile audience. Templated newsletters can also make it easier to sync your content with its HTML version, so that some variation of your email is properly rendered and accessible to all readers and their email clients.





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If you don't expect to dive into interactive content or animations that require advanced coding and custom design, start with a template and **brand** it to your company's specifications.

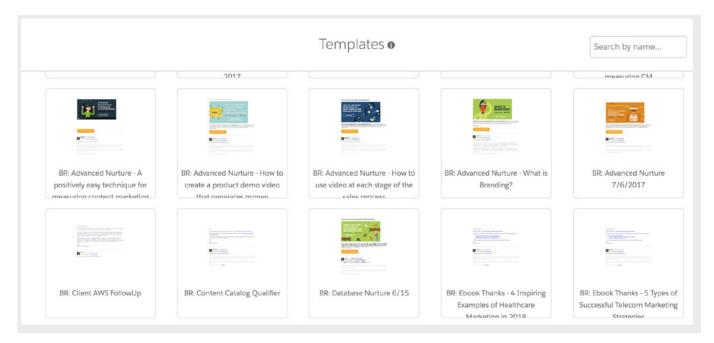
## Custom-design your template, if needed

You can use several different types of newsletter formats depending on your audience, time of week, stage of the funnel, campaign, etc. This is to say, that subscriber A may not prefer the same layout or content mix as subscriber B even though they both fall under the umbrella of "newsletter subscriber."

That's why your web dev team can assist in creating an email newsletter that goes beyond what a default email platform can provide. Here are several types of newsletters that we had custom-designed and templated for future use:









When creating a newsletter for an upcoming email marketing campaign, having this inventory of templates to choose from makes your job **way easier.** Nothing has to be built from scratch and you likely already have some idea of which templates previously performed well.

### Plug in content formats of choice

Once you've settled on high-level content types that your readers are likelier to enjoy and the template your content will go in, you might need to play around with where each feature lives within the email and why.

Do you just link to five blog posts and embed one image? Do you include a CTA after each embedded feature? What's the optimal mix?

For one style of our newsletter, we like to follow a pattern of columns. At the top we have our title, a snippet of text and then our first embedded blog post with a header image.



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Then after a CTA, we switch to two columns of content, each with a custom illustration and CTA:



This is just one option we use. What form your newsletter takes is up to you. Just keep in mind that the more types of content you include, the more diligent you'll need to be in ensuring **each link works, all graphics and text properly render and that any imagery or video is accessible.** 



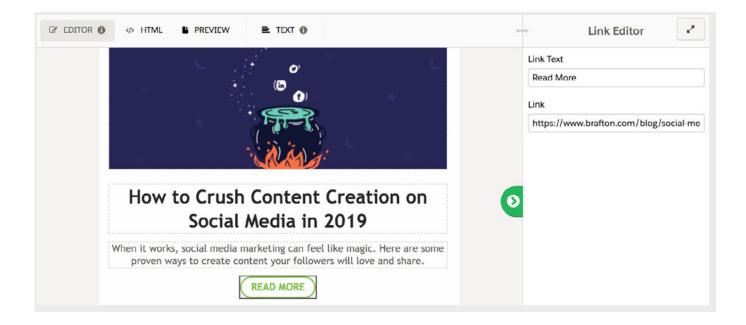
## Drop in clickable CTAs and proper hyperlinks

**READ MORE** 

This step may seem intuitive in thought, but, depending on your email automation platform, your newsletter may not automatically include things like metadata, links that open in new windows, CTAs that direct readers to a gated page, etc. These are often tasks you need to manually insert, double check and test for.

Here's how Pardot enables users to easily adjust text, graphics and links:





With CTAs, opt for **clickable buttons** that follow your branding guidelines, rather than a simple blue hyperlink. For clickable images and article titles, ensure that you're plugging in the **right links**, which can be done within your platform's text editor.

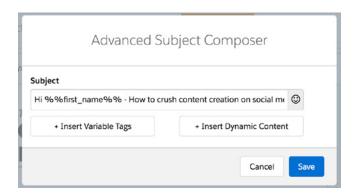
There's nothing worse than putting together a top-notch newsletter with beautiful visuals only to find out that it's practically useless to readers because there are dead links and incomplete conversion pathways.

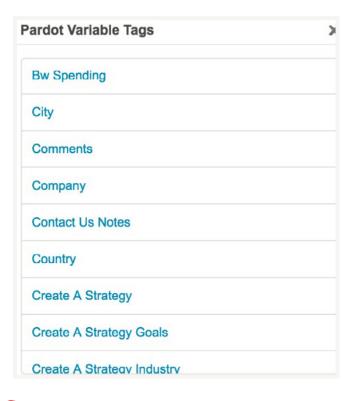


### Add personalization tokens or variable tags

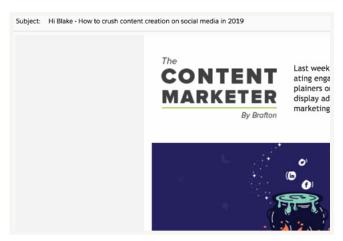
These features are what make your newsletters feel authentic and individualized to each recipient, rather than another spammy email blast.

Personalization tokens are a mechanism for making each email customized by filling in





a specific property with pre-set information. For instance, in the example below, we personalized the recipient's name in the email so that it actually says their real name, not a generic "Hi reader" or "Hi valued customer."



Pardot refers to these as **variable tags.** You decide the variable, in this case, the subject, or recipient. Then the system crawls your email list to autopopulate your email with each recipient's first name.

You can customize by different tags, too, like industry, country or whatever information you have on record about a subscriber.

Personalization tokens are incredibly important, as studies repeatedly prove. Consider that:



Personalized emails drive **14**% higher click-through rates.



Personalized subject lines are **26%** more likely to be opened.



**51%** of digital marketers say personalization is their No. 1 priority.

# Write your subject line (now redo it a few times)

Subject lines are very much a zero-sum game. They're either very good, or they're entirely unclickworthy. And in the realm of email marketing, **subject lines cash your checks.** 

Here are a few quick guideposts when coming up with your subject lines:



**35**% of emails are opened due solely to the subject line.



The average subject line is **7 words** long.



Numbers and Title case typically perform best; symbols and spam words perform worst.

In general, make sure your subject lines are truly representative of what the email contains; no bait and switch. Below are a few of our more recent newsletter subject lines, which, as you can see, are often how-to, best practices or list-based formats:



5 of the best types of content to post on LinkedIn in 2019 D Indox x

How the evolution of handheld technology affected content marketers (infographic)  $\,\,^{\triangleright}$ 

How BuzzFeed mastered content creation ▷ Inbox ×

When you think you have a great subject line, spend five more minutes tweaking it. **It's worth it.** 

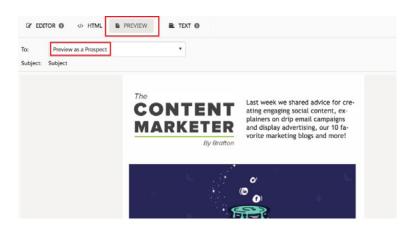
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## Preview your newsletter template as your audience will see it

As you round out your newsletter and begin putting the finishing touches on it, put yourself in someone else's shoes. You may actually be too close to the content and unaware of how it's perceived by others, especially your prospects.

Use the "Preview" function in your email platform to accomplish this. In Pardot, you'll see:

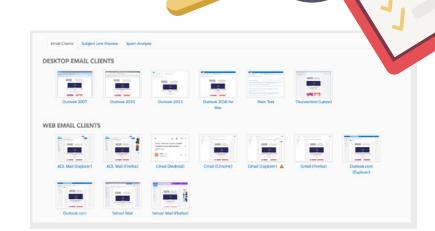


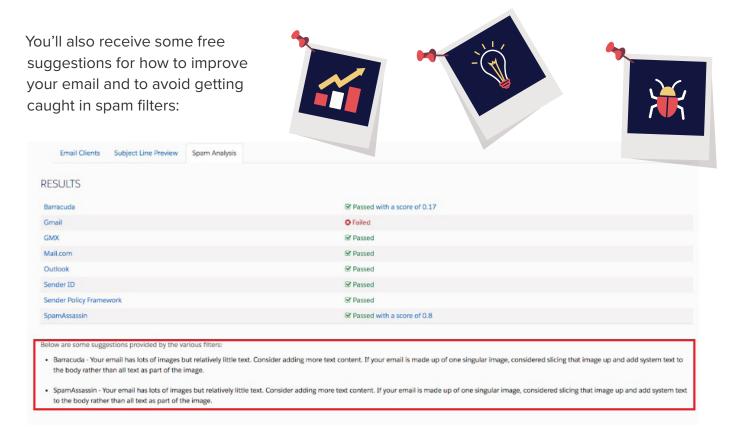
What's cool is that you can click on the dropdown menu and view your newsletter from the vantage point of various subscribers, such as an official prospect tied to your Salesforce database. With this view, you virtually become your reader. This should help you catch any lingering but previously invisible personalization issues, text formatting issues or typos.

Verify responsive design and rendering across various email clients

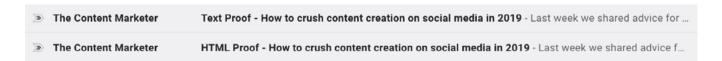
In addition to a preview, you should also send a **test email to yourself** to see the final product before it becomes truly final.

Your subscribers will be using many different types of email clients, and not all of them will feature your newsletter exactly as it appears on your screen. Running a "new render" test shows you how each email client in your email list will display your newsletter, as seen to the right:



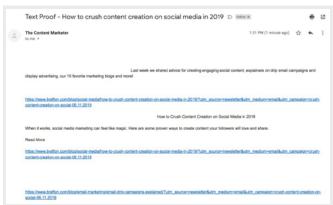


This is also the stage where you'll want to "sync" your HTML and plain text proofs. Send yourself a copy of each version, open them and take a look to see that they're conveying the same information, even if one is more visualized than the other:



Within your text editor, you should have some variation of "sync," which keeps your proofs aligned. For context, here's the difference between our HTML and plain text newsletters, despite them being created the same way within Pardot:





13

### Select the email list to send to

Now it's time to decide which group of people should be so lucky to receive your newsletter. This ties back to your original marketing strategy and larger business goals.

Your email marketing mailing list, unfiltered, might be an unhelpful, unanalytical behemoth. But by segmenting your email list out by **who**, specifically, you want to target, you can increase your chances for hitting your conversion benchmarks while refraining from unnecessarily spamming low-quality leads with content that's not relevant to them.



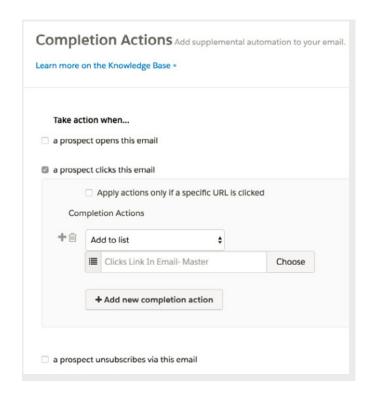
### Decide completion action (conversion) to measure

When we first started this eBook, we spoke of the importance of knowing which metrics to track. Before officially launching your newsletter, you'll need to select, within your email platform, the metrics you want it to measure and report on.

These are referred to as **completion actions** in Pardot.

Depending on what action a subscriber takes once receiving your email in their inbox, it could subsequently trigger a different event, such as a sales rep reaching out to them via email, or maybe an unsolicited web demo.

Carefully curating these actions and events automates much of the manual back and forth between you and subscribers, which is a good thing when you're sending to tens of thousands of people at once.





## Have a welcome email ready to go for those who do sign up

This is often overlooked yet completely underrated. We've found that the trusty welcome email is one of the best-performing emails you will ever send.

Once someone signs up for your newsletter, they should quickly receive a short note from you. It should be appreciative, inviting and forward-looking. After all, they signed up; now tell them what they should expect.

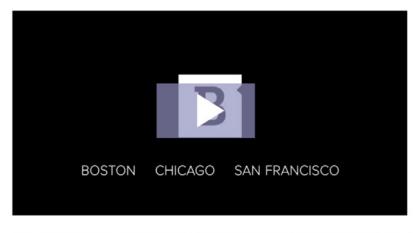


#### Hey!

Jeff Baker from Brafton here, I wanted to thank you for joining our community of 50k content marketers. Here's what happens next:

- Newsletters: Didn't have time to check out the blog this week? No problem, we curate the top content from each week and deliver it every Tuesday morning at 8am ET.
- How to contribute: We have a very active community that likes to ask questions and contribute content ideas. Got something you want to learn more about? <u>Submit your ideas here.</u>
- Podcast: Are you more of an audio person? Check out our podcast <u>Above</u> the Fold, updated weekly.

Want to get to know us a little better? Check out this quick video:



If you have any questions or want to chat content marketing, feel free to reply back anytime!

Cheers,

Jeff

Welcome emails often have **60%** open rates.

These welcome emails often have **60% open rates** (2-3 times higher than any other email you send in the future). This means subscribers are expecting this email, and they're eager to know your brand better.

Here's a version of ours to the left:

Do not skip this step. This email should be triggered by each newsletter signup. From here on out, your subscribers will receive their recurring newsletter, as promised.



## Measure performance for ideal send frequency and engagement

Continue to track metrics that matter to your marketing campaigns over time. Investigate what's working based on engagement rates and decide whether it makes sense to double-down on your email comms. Or, if your newsletter isn't garnering the lift you were

expecting, what's the root cause?

In our experience, subscribers aren't hesitant to provide their very candid feedback to emails. Even if that's "nope, get me off this list" or "Yes, this is awesome."



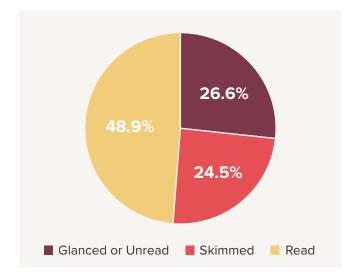


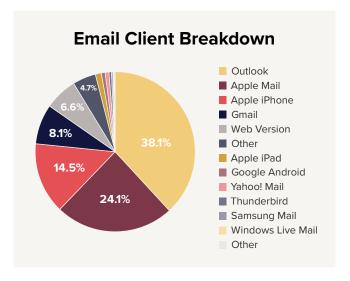






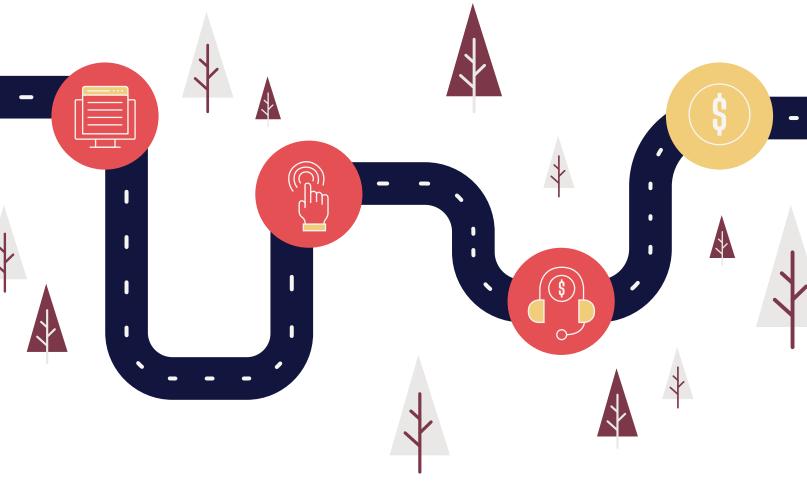






You'll also learn which times of the week draw the most attention and which industry verticals want more content from you. These types of factors will empower you to constantly revise your benchmarks and set new performance goals so that your email campaigns are delivering every ounce of ROI possible.





### **Conclusion**

We're huge fans of newsletters. They are foundational marketing tools that create an end-to-end digital experience for prospects.

We see it happen every day. A searcher lands on our blog. They click on our newsletter subscription CTA. They engage with content a few times. They request gated assets and sales calls. They are nurtured further until becoming a closed sale. Sure, it can take months or years for this lifecycle to come to fruition, but it's ROI that can't be as easily and organically captured through other marketing channels.

With that said, here are several email marketing platforms that will make your life easier through drag-and-drop functionality, pre-designed newsletter templates and real-time metrics-tracking synced with your CRM:

- Constant Contact.
- MailChimp.
- GetResponse.
- Drip.
- HubSpot.
- Campaign Monitor.

Now send us your best newsletter!





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