

News in the Age of Personalized Marketing

An Iterable User Engagement Report

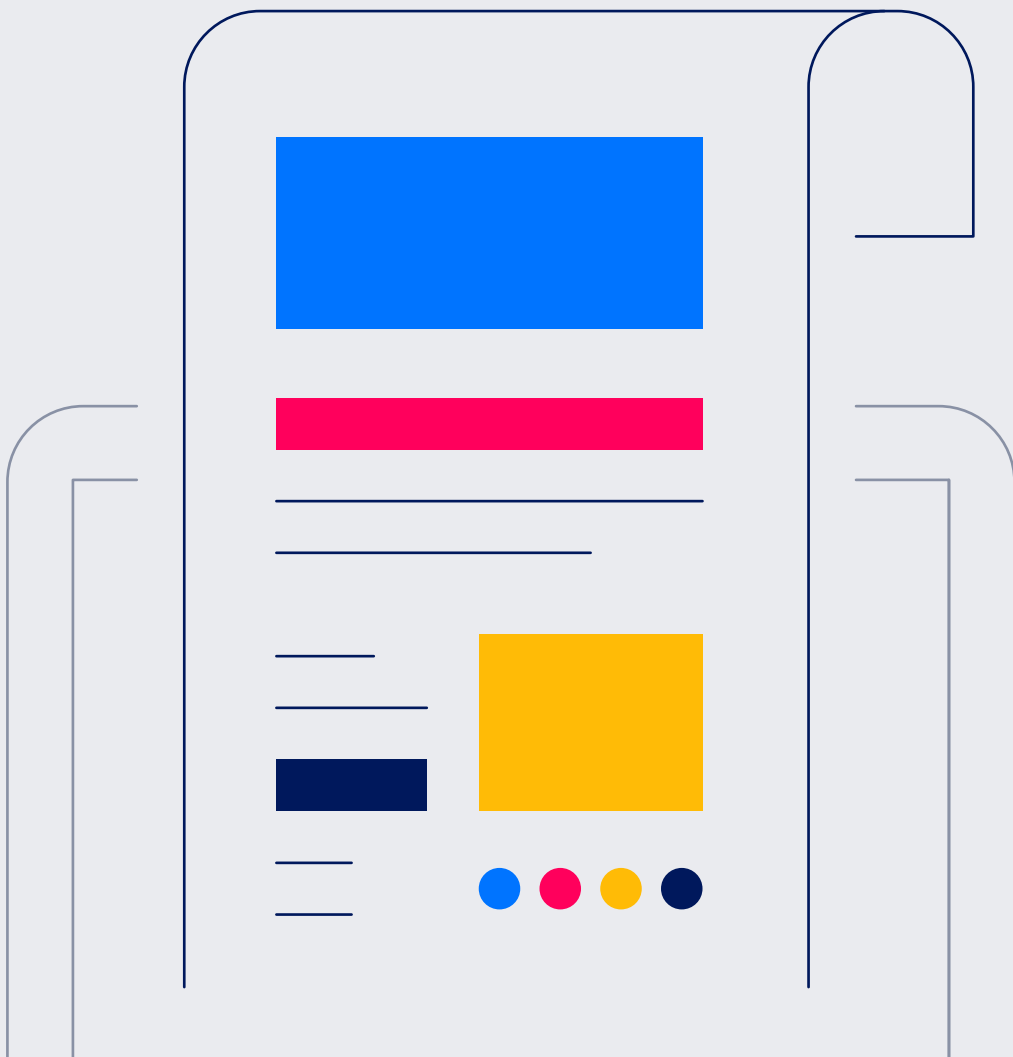


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Introduction

Everybody is worried about the [state of journalism today](#). Whether it's the myriad options available to news seekers or the advent and subsequent rise of "fake news," the old guard of journalism is being [attacked from all sides](#).

Journalism and the news, at its core, are meant to educate and inform. This can range from breaking news to politics to sports to entertainment to [niche topics](#), but the goal is to tell the audience a story in which they will learn something new and important.

We hold journalism to a fascinating, complex standard. We demand excellence in storytelling and pristine ethical reporting—all while staying fresh and relevant.

We don't want to read something we already knew—unless we're trying to win an argument.

We want trust. Trust that the journalist is telling us the truth.

With increasing claims of fake news, [trust in journalism](#) is waning. [Over 40% of the public](#) thinks the news veers too far into commentary and 35% have a negative view of news organizations.

There is work to be done to regain trust, but the good news is: it's possible.

The key is empowering the consumer. We want control over our own lives, including how we receive information.

With that in mind, publications have to achieve the following objectives:

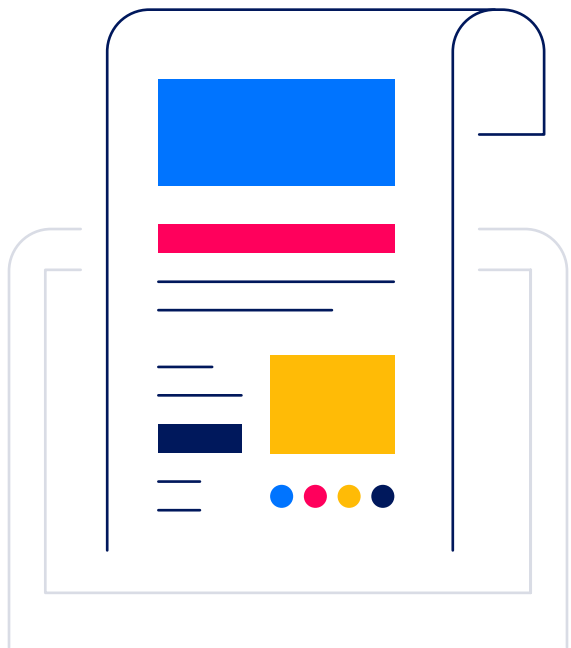
- 1 **Maintain journalistic ethics and integrity**
- 2 **Allow their audience to customize their content preferences**
- 3 **Increase reach and revenue**

As easy as writing [a pun-filled headline](#).

In the first research study of its kind, we took a look at how 30 leading publications are trying to marry these three principles into a seamless reader experience.

There is no secret sauce for guaranteed success, so in this report we walk you through the cross-channel strategies of these publications, analyzing tactics that stand out and diving into the publisher's perspective to identify what worked and what growth opportunities can create a mutually beneficial customer-publisher experience.





Industry Outlook

Report Overview

We examined the cross-channel experience of 30 leading publications from the engaged reader's perspective. For each publication—when applicable—we created an account, subscribed to three newsletters, downloaded the app, adjusted our preferences, opted-in for web push and mobile push notifications and filled out any forms for premium subscriptions before abandoning our cart.

Our research was conducted over the course of three weeks in June 2019, analyzing every message received for timing, design, content and function.

The featured publications are leaders in their respective categories: U.S. Newspapers, International News, Business, Technology, Online News and Broadcast News.



Day 0:

Create account; complete user profile; subscribe to 3 distinct newsletters: one daily, one weekly and one topical



Day 3:

Download and launch mobile apps; opt-in to mobile push notifications; set preferences; share location



Day 7:

Adjust in-app preferences selecting new categories to follow



Day 10:

Opt-in to web push notifications



Day 14:

Fill out premium subscription information; abandon before purchase



Day 18:

Opt-out of mobile push notifications



Day 20:

End research.

Key Areas of Focus

Welcome Campaigns

The foundation

Welcome campaigns are the introduction to a brand, its offerings and its messaging. What kind of first impressions are publications making?

Newsletters

The relationship-builder

For news publications, the newsletter is the core method to nurture subscriber relationships. How well do they disseminate information and stay relevant?

Cart Abandonment & Promotions

The revenue-generators

Cart abandonment and special promotions capitalize on the customer relationship to generate new revenue streams. Are publications making the most of opportunities?

By the Numbers

Overall

30

Total Publications

1,698

Total Messages

759

(44.7%)

Emails

863

(50.8%)

Mobile Push

76

(4.5%)

Web Push

Emails

11

(1.4%)

Welcome Messages

627

(82.6%)

Newsletters

56

(7.3%)

Promotions

48

(6.3%)

Transactional Messages

7

(0.9%)

Abandonment Reminders

10

(1.3%)

Spam

50% of publications used double opt-in to confirm email subscriptions

Cadence

2.4

Avg/day

All Message Types

1.2

Avg/day

Email

2.7

Avg/day

Mobile Push

Timing

223

(29.4%)

Midnight-6am

302

(39.8%)

6am-Noon

170

(22.4%)

Noon-6pm

64

(8.4%)

6pm-Midnight

The First Impression

Introductions are important for any brand—but they're table stakes. Over [70% of people](#) expect to receive an email after subscribing.

However, for news publications, especially the leaders in the industry, that initial customer interaction is a bit different.

In all likelihood, the reader has found themselves on the publication's website through organic search or social media. After all, [68% of Americans](#) at least occasionally get their news from social media, with 20% of that group frequently using social media as a newsfeed.

Publications have two things to consider to nail their first impressions:

- 1 If the user is willing to divulge personal information, such as their name, email and in some cases location, then they are highly interested in engaging with the brand. Publications can utilize this data in welcome campaigns to personalize the experience.**
- 2 News consumption does not differ greatly between brands. The user either reads, listens to or watches the content through one channel or another. Publications have to set themselves apart as early as possible.**

With these in mind, we noticed that publications had varied strategies for the first touch.

What We Saw

By the Numbers

1.4%

of all emails were welcome messages

50%

of publications used double opt-in

2.8%

of all emails were double opt-in messages

4/5

International publications used double opt-in

30%

of publications sent welcome campaigns

Welcome Campaigns

The subscriber has engaged with the publication's content and deemed it worthy of consuming on a (semi-) regular basis. It's an invaluable opportunity to keep your brand top-of-mind and drive greater loyalty.

It's time for the welcome campaign.

The reader is perhaps at their most engaged with your brand at this moment. Over 70% of people expect an email after subscribing and welcome emails generate [5 times more clicks and 4 times the open rate](#) than regular marketing campaigns.

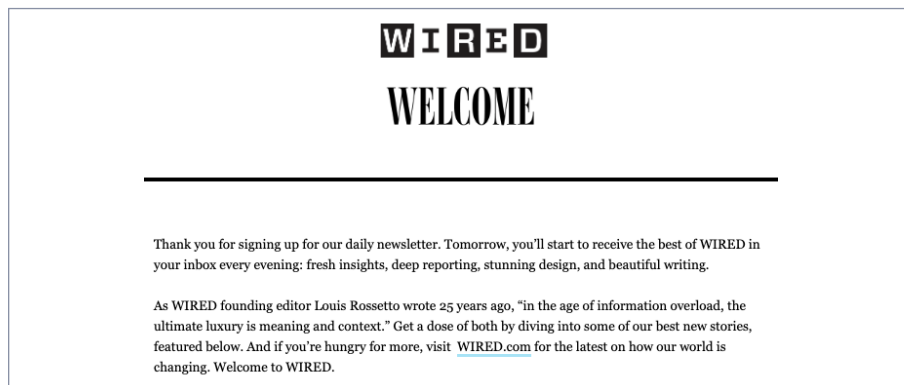
They are primed and ready to get started. So how did publications do at this crucial stage in the customer journey?



Over the course of our research, only 30% of publications included a welcome campaign in their strategies. And these messages varied in content from a simple “Hello!” to a more detailed guide of the offerings that come with making an account.

BuzzFeed News used their welcome campaign as a chance to educate subscribers about their community and what it takes to be an active participant.

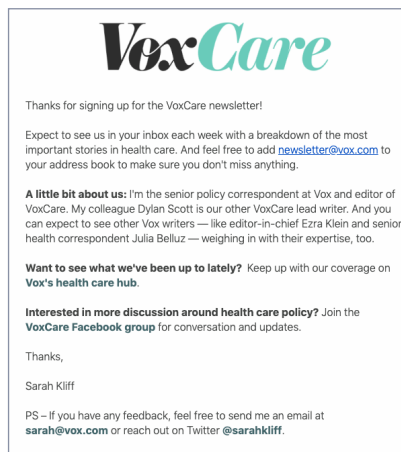
Since the BuzzFeed brand goes well beyond breaking news, the welcome campaign is a key moment to showcase what else is in store for subscribers.



Wired keeps it simple by defining your expected message frequency.

Wired opens their engagement with a description of when and how frequently you can expect communications from them and a reason as to why they have chosen this cadence with a quote from a Wired founding editor.

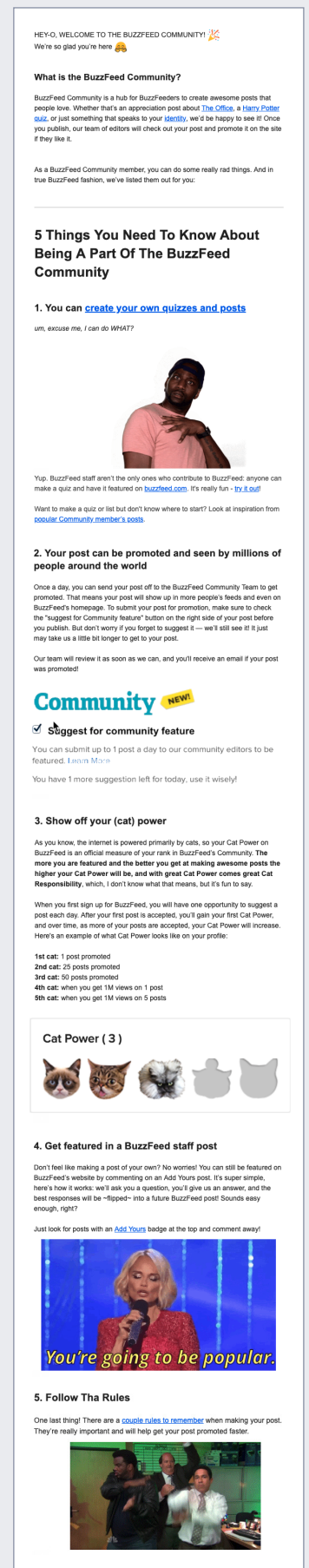
These messages invite the user in as a valued guest. The content is an ancillary factor at this stage, as it's clear that is what prompted this interaction in the first place.



Vox humanizes the welcome campaign by introducing the editor.

Vox achieves this by providing a small paragraph introducing the newsletter's editor and providing a direct, personal email address to contact her with feedback.

The key goal from a welcome campaign is to promote the brand beyond the content, to humanize the brand as a partner in the user's thirst for information. It's the first impression and it's invaluable to make it a good one.

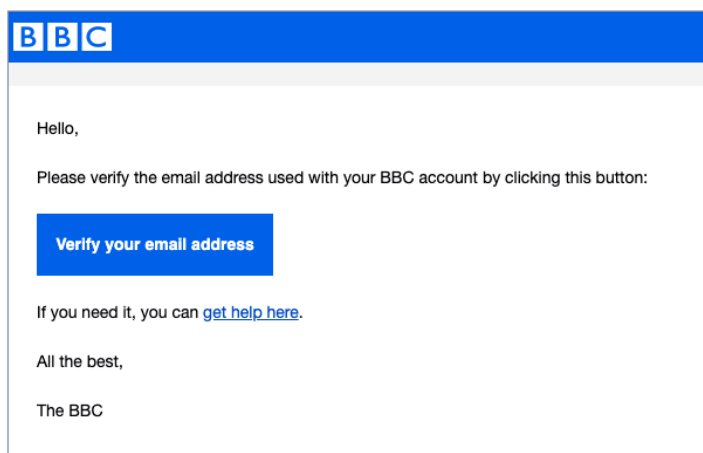


BuzzFeed welcomes you to the community with a list of their guidelines.

Double Opt-In

At the onset of the customer journey, many organizations have chosen to ensure they have received consent from the subscriber and also acquired a legitimate email address.

Although not specifically required by [GDPR](#) and other data privacy regulations, the double opt-in is commonly used to ensure email lists are clean for improved deliverability.



To refresh, the double opt-in process goes as follows:

- **The user submits their information for a newsletter subscription**
- **The publisher sends an opt-in confirmation email asking the user to verify their address and desire to subscribe**
- **A confirmation email or webpage completes the transaction and begins the subscription**

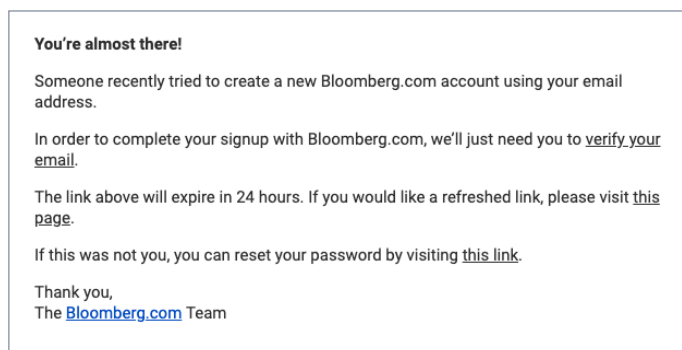
BBC requested address verification before engaging in its welcome campaign.

In lieu of a welcome campaign, 50% of the publications used double opt-in and 4 of the 5 international publications used it.

Unlike promotions, newsletters, or other marketing messages, the double opt-in messages we received rarely—if ever—contained branded design. These messages were transactional in nature and often came from a separate sender address.

When considering deliverability and action required of the subscriber, double opt-in can have an impact on audience reach as confirmation emails can find their way into the spam folder or be ignored entirely.

The double opt-in achieves the bare minimum in confirming subscription, but does not adequately replace the welcome campaign in crafting a lasting customer relationship from the beginning.



Double opt-in removes humanization from the start of the customer journey.

Summary and Observations

Welcome campaigns proved to be a relative after-thought to leading publications upon account creation. With fewer brands using welcome campaigns than double opt-in (10 vs. 15), it is clear that greater importance is placed on list hygiene than relationship building.

Welcome campaigns enhance the customer journey and increase brand engagement.

At the very least, publications should be considering melding the two. Only four publications out of the 30 sent both a welcome message and a double opt-in message.

A high-quality welcome campaign achieves the same goals as those of an effective journalist. They educate about what it means to have an account with the brand, inform the subscriber as to how best to take advantage of these special offerings and build trust to show that the brand will ensure a positive experience throughout.

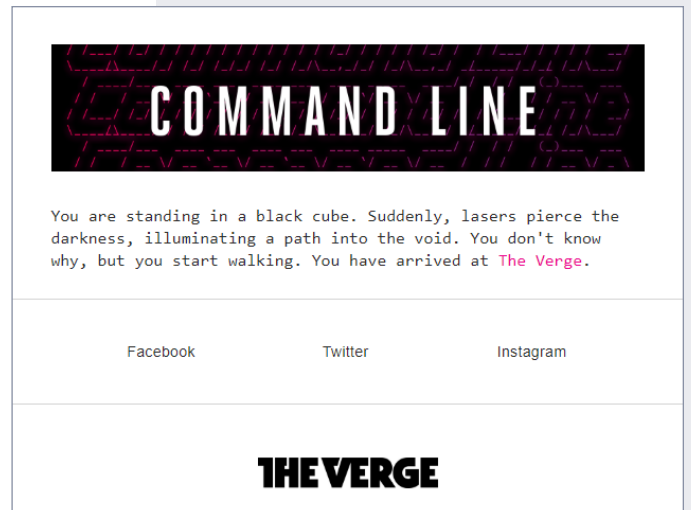
You don't have to accomplish this in a single message, either.

A [modern email service provider \(ESP\)](#) will enhance the capability to send a multi-touch campaign based on user actions and profile information. For example, since 90% of publications researched have a mobile app, the welcome series could also promote app downloads.

Once a subscriber is set up on mobile, the ESP could trigger a welcome push to introduce mobile content and features.

Alternatively—and similarly to BuzzFeed—publications can focus more heavily on the brand community, premium content or new user promotions.

As long as the new user feels comfortable, appreciated and informed, the welcome campaign kicks off the customer experience in a personal way.



Specificity is ideal, but welcome campaigns can be vague if that is more fitting with the brand voice.

Newsletters



The newsletter holds a special importance for the news publication. It's in the name!

In this instance, it's literally a letter about the news.

As such, the form and function of a curated newsletter from a news provider takes a slightly different shape from, say, an e-commerce newsletter.

Whereas e-commerce newsletters may cover more general product offerings, publications send newsletters either to inform and educate (breaking news, today's headlines, etc.) or to cater to the interests of the user (science, entertainment, health, etc.).

With this in mind, we will break down the newsletter experience based on what we observed and what these insights mean for the industry.

What We Saw

By the Numbers

82.6%
of all emails were newsletters

50%
of publications have third-party ads in newsletters

13/30
publications named the email sender after the newsletter

43%
did not offer premium subscriptions

Most Newsletters Sent
Business (19%)

Least Newsletters Sent
Internet (11.6%)

Fox News
sent the most with 8.9% of all newsletters

How We Saw It

Inbox Trends

Throughout our research, we noticed an interesting combination of strategies across all publications with regards to sender names and addresses.



Some included the specific newsletter title as the sender name. Some did so in the sender address, but applied the editor name as the sender name to humanize the experience.

CNET Deals & Promot.	Pre July 4th Deals Walmart Huge 4K TV Blowout - Featured: Big TV Blowout at Walmart - Huge discounts on 32-inch to 75-inch 4K TVs from So...
CNET Now	Laptop killer: iPad Pro vs. Surface Pro 6 - Plus, how Sony's Aibo becomes a robot overlord, one home at a time, and insane 5G speeds mean you ...
CNET How To	Delete yourself from Google when you die - Plus, how to install iOS 13 and iPadOS public beta right now, and best places to buy prescription glas...

Identifying the newsletter upfront makes it easier on the reader to find in the inbox.

Nat Ives, WSJ	CMO Today: Cannes Arrives; WPP CEO Doesn't Want to Break Up Big Tech; 'Ugly' Advertising Rising - Today's most important media and marketing ...
Lisa Bannon, WSJ	Grapevine: Colorful stories and diversions from WSJ - Why novelists are getting into the franchise business, summer vacations for overachievers ...
Christopher Carduff.	Books: Nations Torn Apart - Plus the genius of Vasily Grossman.

The Wall Street Journal adds the editor as the sender name for their newsletters.

Alternatively, others kept the sender name and address generic to the brand, but included the newsletter title in the subject of the email.

The Washington Post	Must Reads: Americans call the White House to talk to Trump. They get Louise instead. - Compelling, ambitious stories you can't afford to miss t...
The Washington Post	Saturday's Headlines: 'I stopped it': Inside Trump's last-minute reversal on striking Iran - Trump's account of planning, then canceling Iran strikes ...
The Washington Post	Book Club: The best thrillers to read this summer and Stephen King's chilling anniversary - Greetings, book lovers. With vacation season upon us,...

The Washington Post kept its brand front and center as the sender name while identifying the newsletter in the subject line.

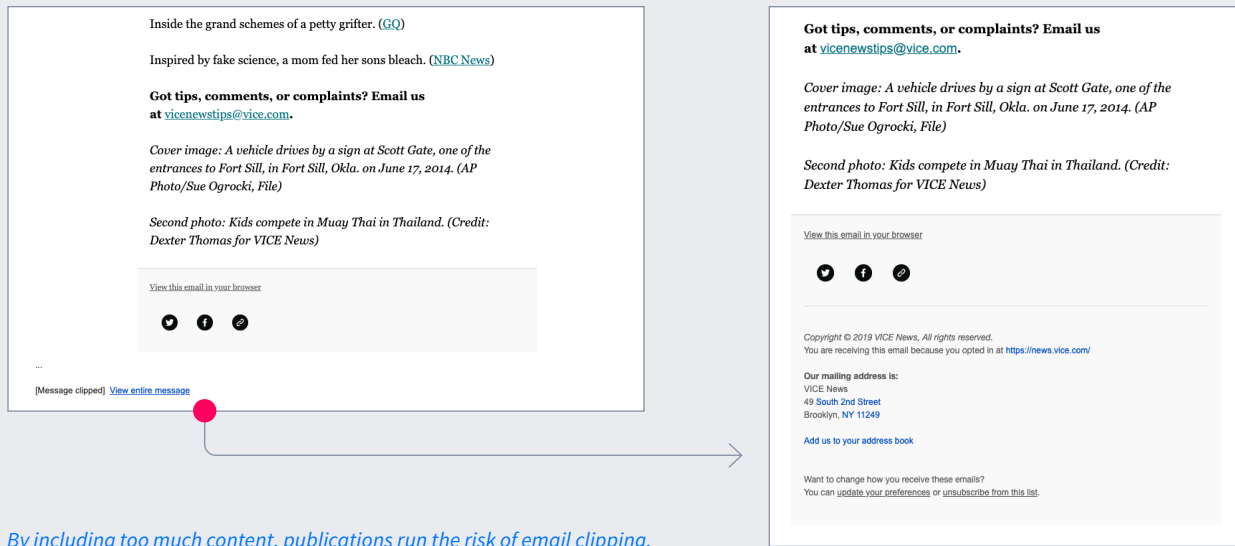
Curiously, the San Francisco Chronicle changed its naming convention roughly halfway through our research—the only publication to do so.

San Francisco Chron.	It's time to take the next step. - Get Unlimited Digital Access so you can enjoy The Chronicle anytime, anywhere. view in browser San Francisco C...
Morning Fix SFChr.	Navigation Center showdown BART crime spikes Stanford's big investment - Your Daily Headlines from SFChronicle.com. Trouble reading this ...
Morning Fix SFChr.	BART's end of the line surges with homeless as misery plays out each night - Your Daily Headlines from SFChronicle.com. Trouble reading this m...
Morning Fix SFChr.	Trump postpones immigration raids, calls for quick bipartisan solution - Your Daily Headlines from SFChronicle.com. Trouble reading this messa...
Morning Fix SFChr.	ICE to target migrant families in nationwide raid that may include San Francisco - Your Daily Headlines from SFChronicle.com. Trouble reading th...
Morning Fix SFChr.	Sacramento police officer from Bay Area killed, allegedly by man with domestic violence record - Your Daily Headlines from SFChronicle.com. Tr...
Datebook San Fran.	Summer Guide 2019 Datebook - Datebook is the San Francisco Chronicle's definitive guide to Arts & Entertainment for the Bay Area. DATEBOO...
San Francisco Chron.	Morning Fix After safety check, PG&E replacing Marin County power towers, shutting down Camp Fire line - Your Daily Headlines from SFChroni...
San Francisco Chron.	Morning Fix San Francisco has moved to ban e-cigarettes. Juul has a backup plan - Your Daily Headlines from SFChronicle.com. Trouble readin...
San Francisco Chron.	There's more than just newsletters... - Follow us on your favorite social media sites. view in browser San Francisco Chronicle SFGATE Follow th...
San Francisco Chron.	Morning Fix Humpback whale takes flight in front of SF skyline in amazing photo - Your Daily Headlines from SFChronicle.com. Trouble reading ...
San Francisco Chron.	Morning Fix PG&E shareholders to meet in SF, but focus remains on Sacramento - Your Daily Headlines from SFChronicle.com. Trouble reading ...
San Francisco Chron.	Morning Fix SF Mayor London Breed struggles to build consensus with supervisors on housing plan - Your Daily Headlines from SFChronicle.co...
San Francisco Chron.	Last minute gift idea for Dad! - 95¢ for three months of digital access view in browser Subscribe to the San Francisco Chronicle and enjoy our a...

A change in naming style can cause some confusion for longer-term subscribers.

Another factor impacting the email experience is the actual size of the newsletter. A few publications—most notably Mashable and Vice—sent newsletters that were too large for Gmail to handle and were thusly clipped.

When this happens, a significant portion of the newsletter is missing from the initial inbox view and needs an entirely new window to consume. Most importantly, the unsubscribe link/button is hidden when this happens.



The key to driving brand loyalty is building a trusted relationship. From the outset, publications must establish a trusted sender name and address, not only to avoid the spam folder but also to maintain cohesion in the inbox.

If the brand association is not clear, there's a good chance your readers won't recognize and open your emails.

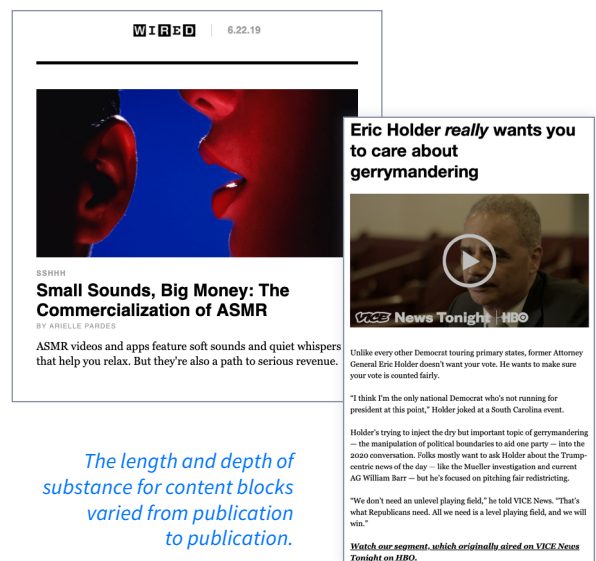
Email Design

More so than any other aspect of the newsletter experience, design and style differed the most greatly—even within a publication's own program.

Generally speaking, the newsletters we saw were one or two columns in nature with design elements that explicitly showed the brand.

Most newsletters displayed content blocks by using an image, a headline and a paragraph description of the article.

Some, like Wired, kept it to an image, headline, and tagline for each article, rather than an extended description, like Vice.

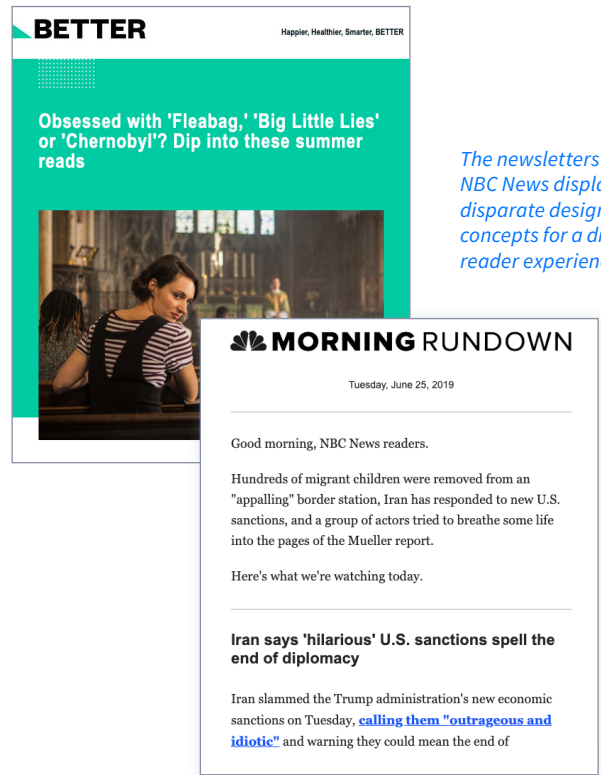


Others, like CNN's 5 Things newsletter, relied less on imagery, and focused more on a clean, single-column design optimized for mobile viewing.



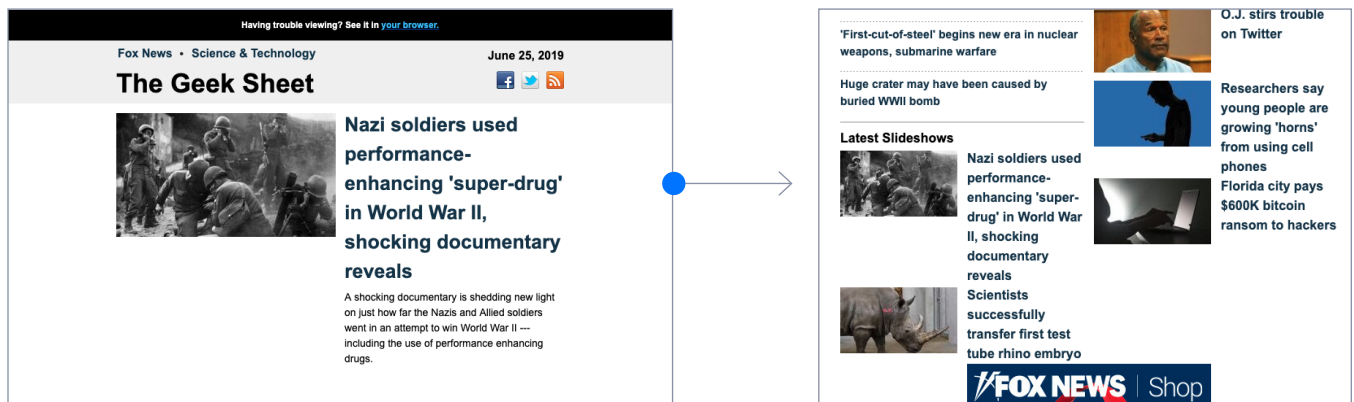
CNN optimized its newsletters for mobile audiences.

NBC News presented a varied branding style choice by having completely different design choices between their BETTER and Morning Rundown newsletters.



The newsletters from NBC News displayed disparate design concepts for a different reader experience.

The Fox News Geek Sheet posed an interesting dilemma with a combination of single and double column content blocks, repetitive content, and a difficult-to-navigate mobile experience.



An asymmetrical design and repetitive content made The Geek Sheet difficult to consume on mobile.

We frequently saw publications filling their preheader text with variations of, “Having trouble viewing? View in browser.” This note occupied valuable real estate in the inbox and above the fold where a more attention-grabbing message could sit.

Al Jazeera English	Turkish F-35 pilots no longer flying at US base amid S-400 row - View in browser Al Jazeera En...
HuffPost Insider	The corner of the internet you need to know about - No Images? Click here HuffPost Insider W...
Mashable Newsletters	The very best apps of 2019 (so far) and 14 More - Not displaying correctly? View this newslett...
NBC News BETTER New.	A no-sweat, full body workout for busy days - To ensure delivery to your inbox add email@mail...

Many publications did not make use of the valuable preheader text space in their emails.

Ideally, the preheader text introduces more content in the newsletter to entice the reader to open and engage.

WIRED	Let's build a global skyscraper network to save the planet - PLUS: Robot programming softwar...
VICE News	"Lock him up?" - 2020 Democrats weigh in on prosecuting Trump, MS-13 wants to go legit, col...
Christopher Carduff.	Books: In Praise of Forgetting - Plus new fiction from Denise Mina and Kate Atkinson. ...
CNET Now	What's the best music streaming service? - Plus, is 5G safe? Those new phones have some pe...

A relevant, attention-grabbing preheader text can make or break the decision to open an email.

Due to shrinking newsrooms and marketing teams at publishers, design and stylistic elements can often take a backseat to content curation—the real star of a newsletter.

Modern ESPs simplify this process by allowing for [complex templates to be created at scale](#) and with ease. In doing so, newsletter design and style can be optimized to fit mobile email consumption trends, leaving more time to personalize and adapt curated content to user behavior.

Send Time

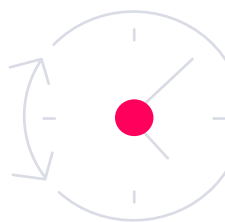
A key function of the newsletter is to deliver the news to subscribers in a neat, tidy package exactly how they want it.

Whether that's as broad as breaking news or as specific as the technology section of The New York Times, the reader has the option to peruse the content whenever they please.

Iterable is located in San Francisco, California, so our potential viewing hours are in the Pacific Standard time zone.

Across the 30 publications, nearly 70% of all email messages (69.2%) arrived between 12 a.m. and 12 p.m., with 29.4% of those messages arriving between 12 a.m. and 6 a.m.

Send time optimization becomes a little tricky when discussing news content so let's address the considerations.



Breaking News & Today's Headlines

For newsletters covering breaking news, timing is everything. A publication's highest priority—apart from being right—is to be first.

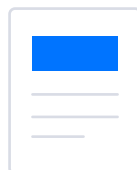
Nobody is looking for stale news from a newsletter titled Morning Headlines. That's why 68% of Americans at least occasionally [get news from social media](#) for immediate updates.

Now, modern ESPs can account for this through dynamic content powered by real-time data.

For example, a publication could send their daily headlines newsletter with an image hyperlinked to their home page, where the top story resides front and center. This image could then update dynamically to show the headline and a picture relevant to that same story as new stories take precedent.

Breaking news is too important to a publication to not update in real-time.

With a modern ESP, the top headlines newsletters can be updated post-send to reflect any breaking news that occurs throughout the day.



Niche Newsletters

Niche, topic-driven newsletters aren't held to similar time constraints, thereby opening the door for send-time personalization.

At the moment, publications like CNET are sending a balanced email messaging cadence with a perfect split between 6 a.m. to noon messages and noon to 6 p.m. messages. We signed up for the CNET Now, CNET How To, and CNET Deals & Promotions newsletters.

Since none of these deal with pressing news, why not match newsletter send times to subscriber behavior? In selecting the customer journey for the reader, publications run the risk of being buried in the inbox.

Instead, with send time optimization, your ESP automatically determines the best time to send newsletters to each reader based on their individual open behavior.

In particular, the importance of send time grows for the global audience.

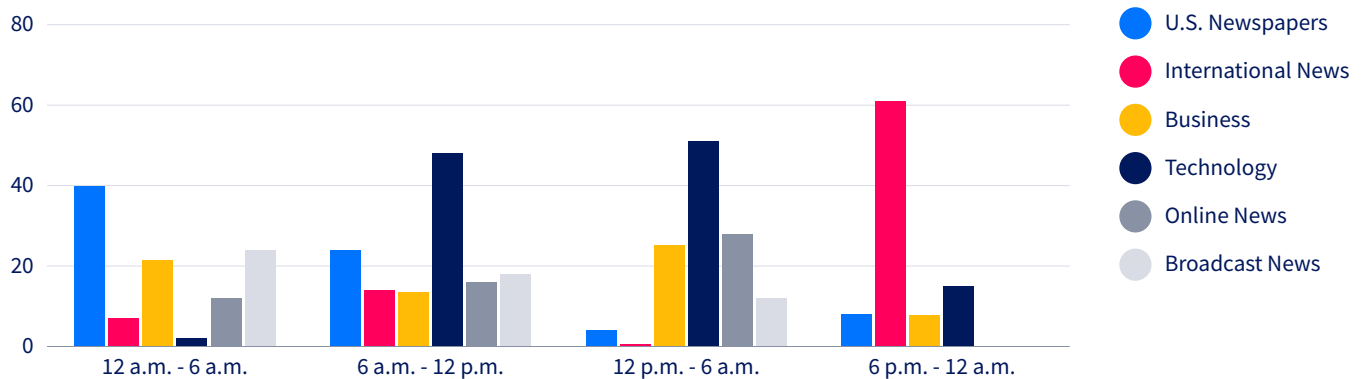
We analyzed many publications with a worldwide reach, which leads to incongruous situations. For example, we regularly received the "Evening Briefing" from Bloomberg at 2:30 p.m.

Readers are looking for content that fits their lifestyle. They want topics that match their interests. And they want to be able to consume the news when and where they want.

Utilizing an ESP with send time optimization puts the power back in the hands of the reader, facilitating higher engagement.



Send Time by Segment



Crafting the Newsletter of the Future

When looking at inbox trends, design and send time together, one thing becomes clear: email newsletters are optimized for production with minimal effort.

After all, creating a newsletter for each niche topic in addition to breaking news is no easy feat.

And considering the amount of work thrust upon smaller teams, it's no wonder that **61% of editors** are concerned or extremely concerned about staff burnout. It's a real problem.

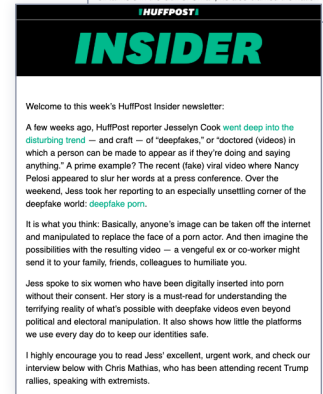
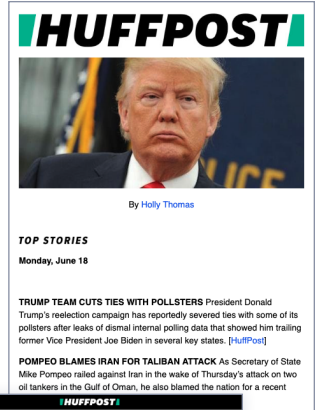
Take into account that **73% of editors see increased personalization as crucial** to the future of journalism and there's potentially even more work to be done to curate.

But this process doesn't have to be as difficult.

Take branding for example.

Only eight publications maintained a similar brand identity throughout all or most of their newsletters. These brands, such as Fortune, The Wall Street Journal, and HuffPost, created newsletters that clearly fell within their brand guidelines.

Other publications, such as Fox News and Bloomberg, kept their name present, but the design and content structure differed greatly.



Consistent branding throughout newsletters helps foster a stronger identity among readers.

For the rest, however, this could indicate siloed production where each newsletter is created in a different ESP with no connection to the making of other newsletters. The NBC News examples on page 13 show this discrepancy.

A modern ESP brings the production together with an easy-to-use and scalable template builder. Further, in this system all data is collected into one source of truth for increased personalization.

All event and behavioral data can be harnessed to even more closely curate newsletters at the individual level rather than the newsletter level.

Add in personalized send time features and the reader is now receiving the most relevant news to their interests at the most relevant time for their schedule.

Automate these features and content curation becomes the core responsibility for the editor, as it should be. After all, content is the number one asset of a publication.

Design differences can create a disassociation between newsletter and brand.

Promotions, Cart Abandonment & Monetization

What makes a reader subscribe? Ultimately, people are drawn to subscribe for three main reasons:

- 1 The publication excels at coverage of a specific topic of interest.
- 2 Friends and family members subscribe.
- 3 A discount or promotion prompted it.



For 74% of readers, a subscription comes after engaging with the publication for a few months. It's about finding the trigger point. For 45% of subscribers, that trigger point is a promotion or free trial.

Digital readers, in particular, are more motivated by coverage of a specific topic than print readers (38% to 25%).

And 52% of editors believe subscription and premium memberships are the revenue driver of the future (versus 27% who believe the same for display ads). Then why are more editors emphasizing display ads as the main revenue focus in 2019 (81% versus 78% for subscriptions)?

Our research showed this lack of emphasis on subscriptions and promotions. While 57% of publications in our study had a premium subscription, of those publications, 35% did not send a promotion or cart abandonment message of any kind.

Journalism is fighting to drive revenue and subscriptions are soon to be the survival guide. Here we take a look at how publications are currently promoting their premium subscriptions, content and brand offerings and how these opportunities can be capitalized on moving forward.

What We Saw

By the Numbers

7.3%

of all emails were promotional in nature

13%

of publications had a cart abandonment campaign

35.3%

of publications with subscriptions sent promotions or cart abandonment messages

56.7%

of publications have premium subscriptions

32%

of all promotions came from The Los Angeles Times

50%

of publications had ads in their newsletters



Promotions

“Apply for Most Innovative Companies” (Fast Company)


“Don’t just read the story. Experience it.” (The New York Times)

“>>13 WEEKS FOR JUST 99¢” (The Los Angeles Times)

Much like a welcome campaign, a promotional campaign does not have to focus on one type of message. As there are many ways to introduce someone to your brand, so too are there many ways to incentivize a paid subscription.

In our research we received promotions for subscriptions—to be certain—but these frequently came indirectly via promotions for alternative content offerings and not strictly a subscription.

Take the Fast Company example below. The organization isn’t necessarily promoting subscription. Rather, the Most Innovative Companies list is a different revenue driver for them.



FASTCOMPANY
MOST INNOVATIVE COMPANIES
CALL FOR ENTRIES

[APPLY NOW →](#)

Apply now for Fast Company's Most Innovative Companies. Finally open to the public, this prestigious list is your opportunity to be featured in the pages of Fast Company magazine and on fastcompany.com.

You've read about Fast Company's Most Innovative Companies in our magazine, on our website, and in our newsletters. You know that every year we scour the globe, looking for businesses big and small to recognize the importance of risk-taking, of resilience, and of solving tomorrow's problems.



Now it's time for you to join them. Apply now and join the ranks of past honorees like Spotify, Zume Pizza, and Netflix. Tell your story, share your impact, and apply now.

[APPLY NOW →](#)


Early rate deadline: August 16

A premium subscription doesn't have to be the only revenue driver promoted by publications.

REASONS TO APPLY

- **Brand Exposure**
Be seen and evaluated by Fast Company's editorial staff
- **Recognition**
Speaking opportunities at Fast Company events and exclusive invitations to influencer-only events
- **Credibility**
Appear in the March 2020 issue of Fast Company and appear on FastCompany.com

WHO WINS?

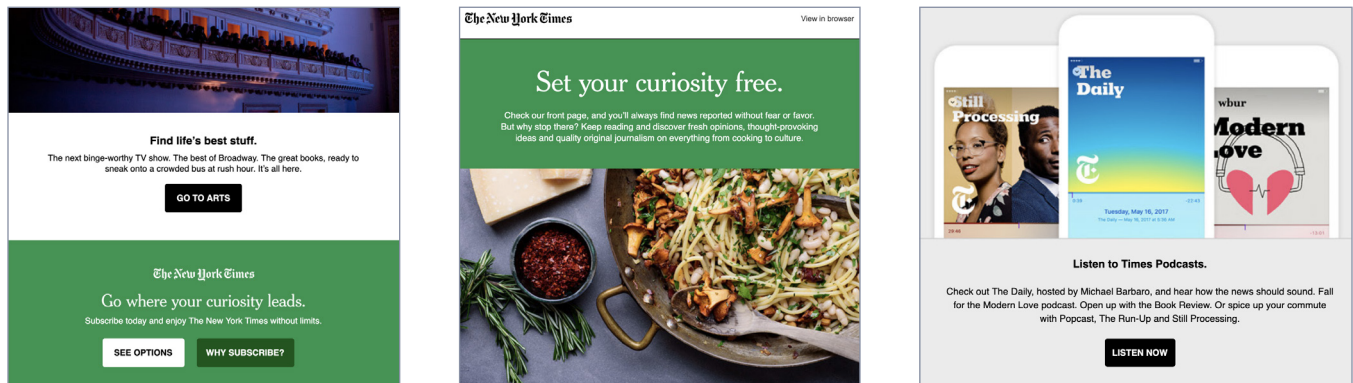


[APPLY NOW](#) [VIEW ALL 2019 WINNERS](#)

Similarly, The New York Times sent three promotional emails over the course of our research. None of the messages explicitly prompted a subscription beyond a “Why Subscribe” call-to-action button at the end of the message.

Instead, they covered different sections—Arts, Wellness, Cooking—that premium members can get access to with their subscription. In doing so, The New York Times promotes their content without blatantly pushing the reader to purchase a subscription. This goes back to the benefits of a well-rounded welcome campaign.

Publications must define the various offerings that come with following the brand and prove the value of a subscription.



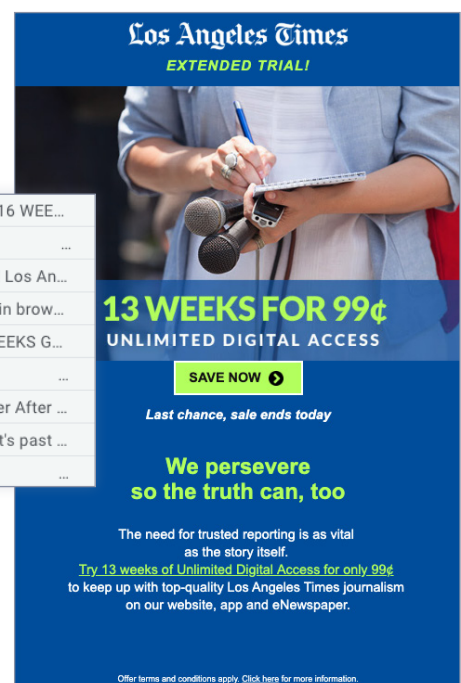
The New York Times promotes itself and its various offerings without overtly asking for purchase.

Consumers are savvier when it comes to ads. Hard sells are likely to be ignored if they are not relevant to the user.

And message frequency matters.

Out of 39 emails over three weeks, The Los Angeles Times sent 18 email promotions (a 46% rate). These promotions also strongly pushed for subscription with subject lines like the ones below.

Los Angeles Times	16 weeks free, just for you! - Get 16 weeks free Los Angeles Times TRY US FREE FOR 16 WEE...
Los Angeles Times	🕒 ENDS TODAY! 99¢ for 13 weeks of access - Hours left in the sale
Los Angeles Times	Mark your calendars, The Taste is back! - Join us this Labor Day Weekend. Get tickets! Los An...
L.A. Times Headlines	Today: The Asterisk on 'ICE Out of the Jails' - Today's Headlines Send to friend Open in brow...
Los Angeles Times	Forget something? - [OPEN] to claim offer Los Angeles Times TRY US FREE FOR 16 WEEKS G...
Los Angeles Times	HURRY! Get 13 Weeks for 99¢ - Don't miss out!
L.A. Times Headlines	Today: Trump Is Open to Iran Talks - Today's Headlines Send to friend Open in browser After ...
David Lazarus - L.A.	California Inc.: Tech giants aim not to repeat Microsoft's antitrust mistakes - Microsoft's past ...
Los Angeles Times	>> 13 WEEKS FOR JUST 99¢ - Save now with our special deal



Frequency is a huge factor in promotions. Overdoing it can do more harm than good in the long run.

In this instance, the publication is more focused on its revenue stream than creating a valuable customer experience.

Personalization, a key facet to any promotional campaign, was entirely absent from any publication we researched.

A high-quality promotional campaign incorporates real-time user data. If an account holder clicks on a certain topic repeatedly, this data should be filtered into the publication's ESP for a more targeted promotion.

There are stores of data throughout an organization that could be filtered into a promotional campaign to segment and hyper-personalize the content. Incorporating data, such as name, location, and topic preferences, into a promotional campaign humanizes the experience to ensure the member is receiving relevant information.

By breaking down these data silos, customer profiles are more complete, allowing for preferences and behaviors to be better understood, to be humanized.

If done properly, the chances of a transaction rise exponentially.

Cart Abandonment

Let's say your promotion worked: A user clicks to fill out their information to sign up for a premium subscription. But then they have second thoughts or get distracted and leave your site.

This is exactly what we imitated in our research, in the hopes of triggering a cart abandonment campaign.

The cart abandonment campaign reactivates subscribers to remind them of previous engagement. For the publication, this campaign is vital to recovering lost revenue and driving more impactful interactions. According to the Iterable Cross-Channel Benchmark Report, over [80% of marketers](#) achieved a conversion rate up to 40% from their abandoned cart campaigns.

Proper utilization of this campaign directly affects the bottom line. And yet, of the 17 publications with premium memberships, only four employed one.

Take this example from The New York Times.

NYTimes.com Can we help you with your order? - Your cart is expiring soon Monday, June 24, 2019 NYTimes...

Identifying the exact item left in the cart goes a long way in personalizing the experience.

We received the abandoned cart message within the same day as our action. In the message, The New York Times directly referenced the type of subscription we had abandoned and provided a simple note prompting completion of the purchase.

The screenshot shows an email from The New York Times. The header features the logo 'The New York Times'. The main body of the email contains the following text: 'We noticed that you didn't finish subscribing to The New York Times, and we don't want you to miss out.' This is followed by 'You've selected the following subscription:' and a box containing 'Basic Digital Access' with the subtext 'Enjoy unlimited articles, podcasts, videos and more on NYTimes.com and the NYTimes app.' Below this, it says 'Act now to become a New York Times subscriber.' and includes a dark blue button with the text 'Complete Your Purchase >'. At the bottom, there are several lines of smaller text: 'You may cancel your subscription at any time.', 'Not ready to subscribe? [Please tell us why](#)', 'Have questions or need help with your purchase? Call Customer Service at (855) 698-8543.', and 'Hours of Operation: Mon - Fri 6 a.m. - midnight E.T. Sat - Sun 6 a.m. - 5 p.m. E.T.'

Our cart abandonment triggered a same-day response from The Los Angeles Times as well. Their campaign consisted of two messages, however, and provided a discount offer for the first 16 weeks free.

Los Angeles Times

TRY US FREE FOR 16 WEEKS

GET 16 WEEKS FREE

Act now before this offer upgrade is gone

Get 16 weeks of 24/7 access to the topics that matter most.

BREAKING NEWS
Keep up with the latest stories, as they unfold.

SPORTS ACTION
Follow your favorite teams, stats and scores.

POLITICAL MATTERS
Discover the issues that impact your world.

GET 16 WEEKS FREE

Terms and conditions apply. Click the "GET 16 WEEKS FREE" button for more information. Unsubscribe | Privacy Policy | Copyright © 2019 Los Angeles Times | 2300 E Imperial Highway, El Segundo, CA 90245 | 213-283-2274

[View this email online](#)

Los Angeles Times

TRY US FREE FOR 16 WEEKS

GET 16 WEEKS FREE

This offer upgrade ends soon - act now

Get 24/7 access to your favorite topics. Anytime. Anywhere.

BREAKING NEWS
Keep up with the latest stories, as they unfold.

SPORTS ACTION
Follow your favorite teams, stats and scores.

POLITICAL MATTERS
Discover the issues that impact your world.

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[View this email online](#)

Los Angeles Times

Multi-touch cart abandonment campaigns are a good way to keep the items top of mind for the subscriber.

Fortune also utilized a multi-touch cart abandonment campaign. However, their campaign differed in that it was executed by a third party, Magazine Store. When subscribing to Fortune, you are sent away from fortune.com and brought to the Magazine Store site.

magazine store

Come back and score this deal, it's still available!

Fortune

\$29.98

complete your order

We think you might like these...

subscribe

subscribe

subscribe

subscribe

magazine store

Come Back And Get **50% OFF!***
Use Coupon Code: **HAPPY**

PEOPLE

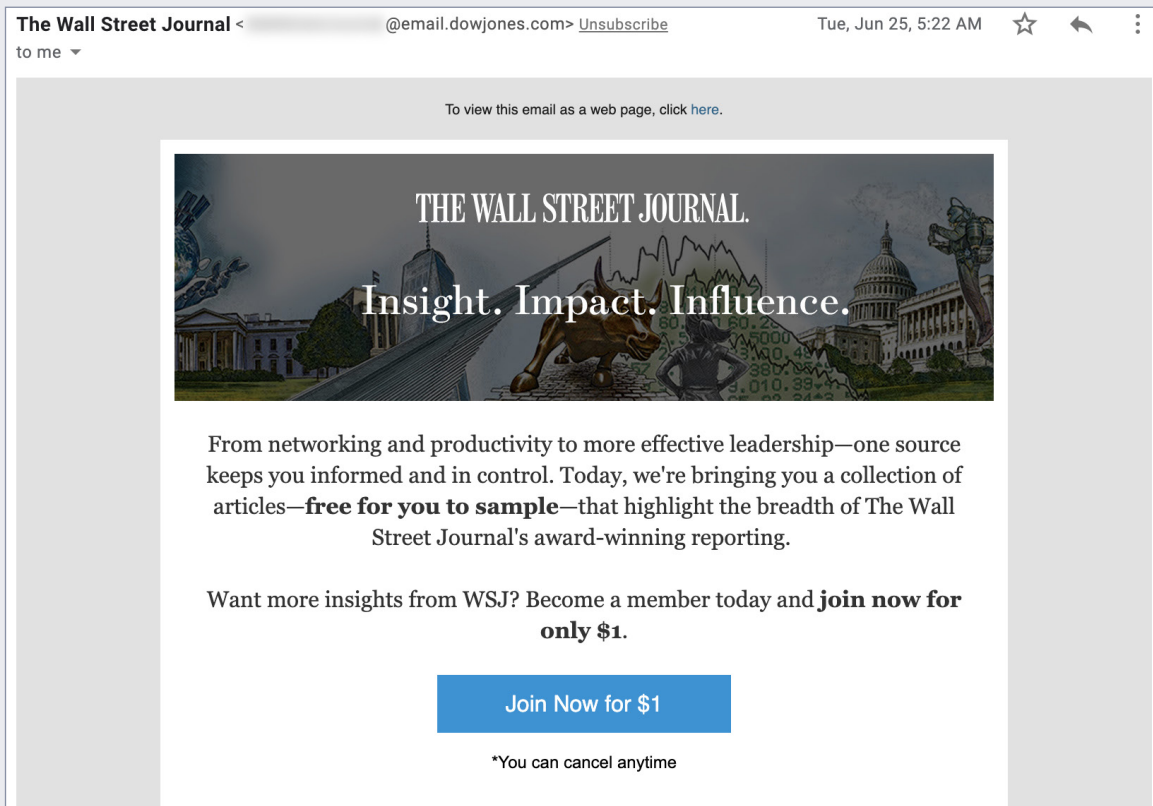
\$45.50

complete your order

Cart abandonment campaigns with unrelated product recommendations undermine the potentially individualized experience.

As a result, the first two messages promoted Fortune, but the third message promoted People magazine—a different Magazine Store offering that we had not shown interest in prior to this message.

Publications often have to toe the line of brand identity and parent company. Case in point: The Wall Street Journal sends promotional emails from a Dow Jones sender address.



Emails from a different sender address indicate a separate—often siloed—system.

For a cart abandonment campaign to work, two key factors have to be addressed.

Firstly, what was being purchased? Insight into the actual cart is crucial to personalizing the campaign. Including a picture and price to remind the buyer goes a long way in reminding them of the state of mind they were in previously.

This goes back to our conversation earlier about data silos. If the ESP in place does not integrate well with the rest of the marketing technology stack, there is no way to utilize valuable user information—like what they're trying to buy.

Secondly, cadence is important. All four publications that sent a cart abandonment email triggered the first—sometimes only—email on the same day as our action. For multi-touch campaigns, the cadence kept emails coming on consecutive days—the outlier being Fortune's third message promoting a completely different product which came two days after the prior message.

Driving revenue is not a one-click, one-touch process. Promotions only go so far in eliciting a response from users. If they've gotten as far as filling out the form, then there is a high level of interest.

The cart abandonment campaign is the best way to re-engage an interested consumer. Without it, organizations are leaving money on the table.

Newsletter Monetization

The final revenue driver we encountered was the monetization of newsletters in the form of advertising.

Half of the publications studied incorporated ads in their newsletters in one way or another.

Some, like Fox News, took control of these ads and promoted Fox-branded apparel and other items. The majority—13 of the 15—however, utilized third-party advertising partners to provide dynamically changing ads.

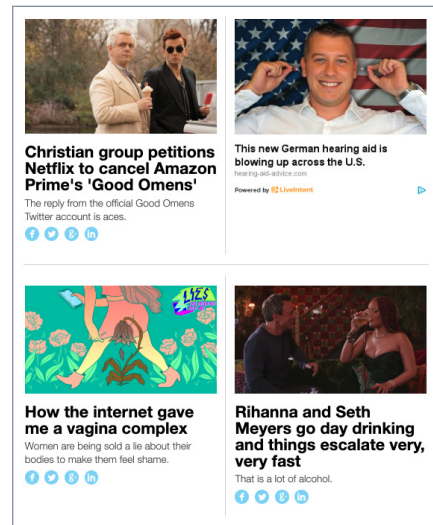
While not entirely unexpected, the use of ads in newsletters provided an interesting look into how the different publications incorporated them into the content blocks of their emails.

Mashable's second content block included 4 articles in a two-column format with a small thumbnail and headline. In the upper right hand position of this section, subscribers can find an ad of roughly the same size as the Mashable content.

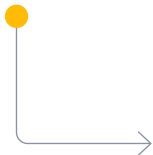
On the other side of the spectrum, HuffPost intersperses ads throughout the newsletter. However these blocks are designed and formatted differently, making it readily apparent that they are not HuffPost content pieces.



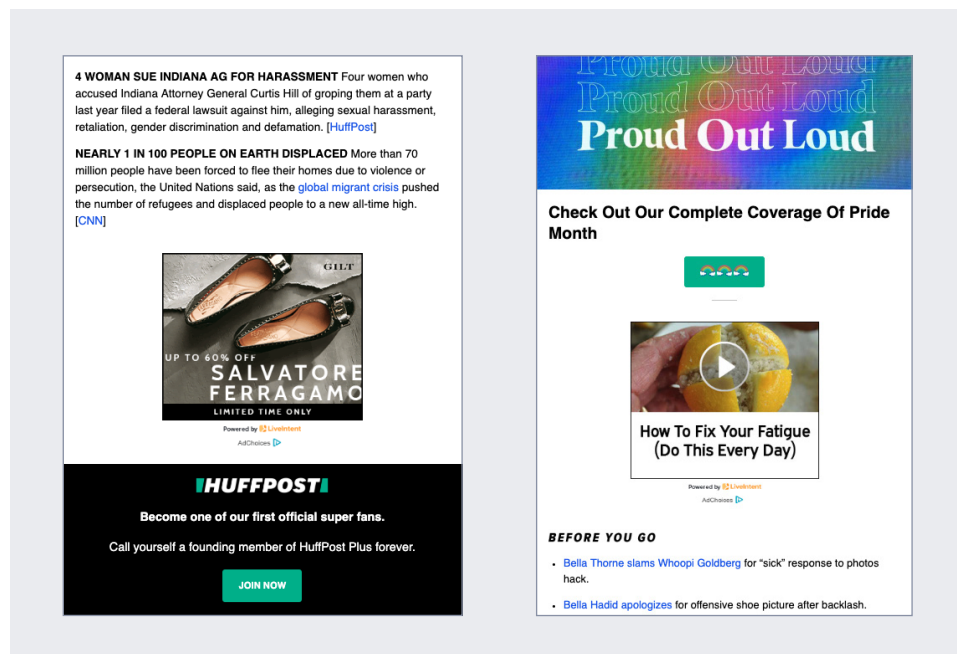
Fox used the newsletter as an opportunity to push branded merchandise.



Many monetized newsletters made an effort to still provide a seamless reader experience.



Some publications took a more transparent approach to showcasing advertisements.



The monetization of newsletters is a practice not unique to journalism and will likely continue as a steady form of ancillary revenue to subscriptions. The question for publications becomes how to feed ads into newsletters in a way that doesn't impinge upon the reader experience.

Modern ESPs provide an extra level of flexibility in template creation that can allow for highly targeted A/B testing to see which style is preferred by subscribers.

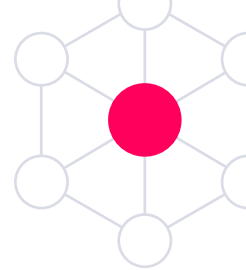
The Bottom Line

Revenue growth is important for any industry, and journalism is no exception. Our research shows that there is still apprehension to focus too heavily on the promotion of subscriptions.

Opportunities are being lost when the focus is too heavily on newsletter creation and curation. The customer journey is just that: a journey. And journeys often need guides.

The publication has to utilize their ESP strengths, such as personalization and data integration, to guide the customer towards subscriptions by showcasing value and relevance.





The Cross-Channel Experience

We have discussed email at length, but the cross-channel experience is vital to the success of a publication's marketing program. If the 24-hour news cycle is any indication, people want access to the news at any time.

Nowadays, that can be extended to any place as well, particularly on the go via mobile devices. [Nearly 60%](#) of adults frequently check the news on their mobile device.

For publications, this means they have to spread their content across devices in a cohesive manner. The same has to be said for their marketing programs.

As part of our research we opted-in to mobile and web push notifications to analyze the effectiveness and extent of the publications' cross-channel marketing.

By the Numbers

80%
of publications had
cross-channel messaging

863
(50.8%)
Total mobile push
notifications received

76
(4.5%)
Total web push
notifications received

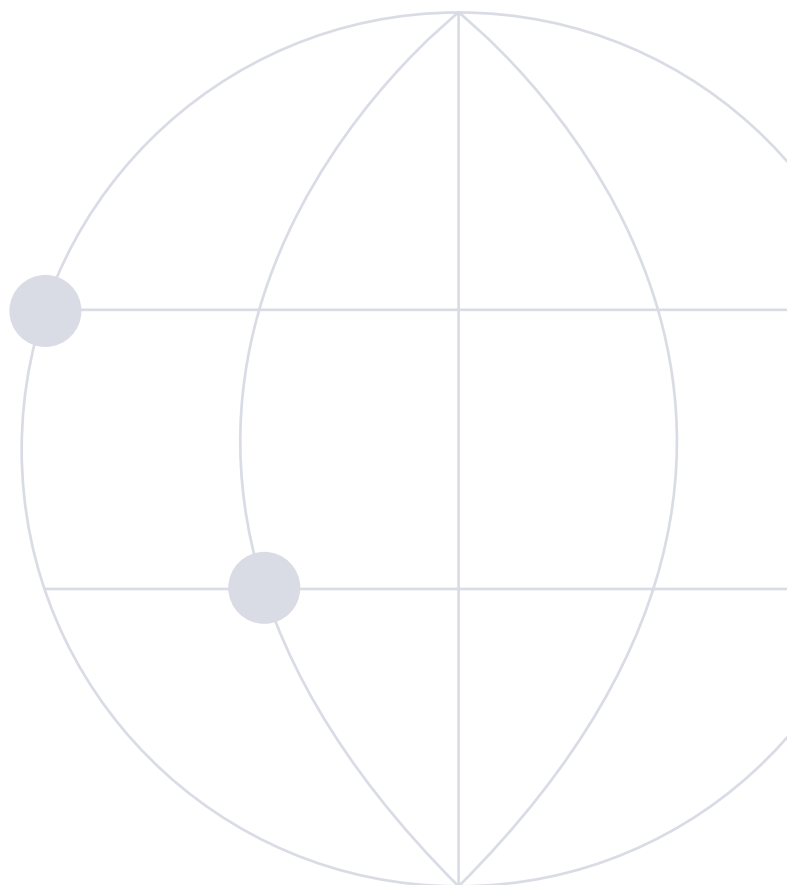
13%
(4/30)
of publications
used web push

**USA Today,
CNET, & CNN**
sent mobile and web push

2.4
Avg. mobile
push per day

7.93
(CBS)
Highest avg./day

0.00
(TechCrunch)
Lowest avg./day
(signed up but never
received a message)



Mobile Push

Millennials are spending much less time [consuming news media](#) (roughly two hours less) than those who are 34 years and older. And millennials 18 to 29 years old are [far more likely to get news on mobile](#) than adults 65 years and older—71% compared to 37%, respectively.

News consumption is becoming faster and more efficient. Publications are taking notice of the growing [dominance of mobile news viewing](#). Mobile push notifications accounted for 50.8% of all messages we received.

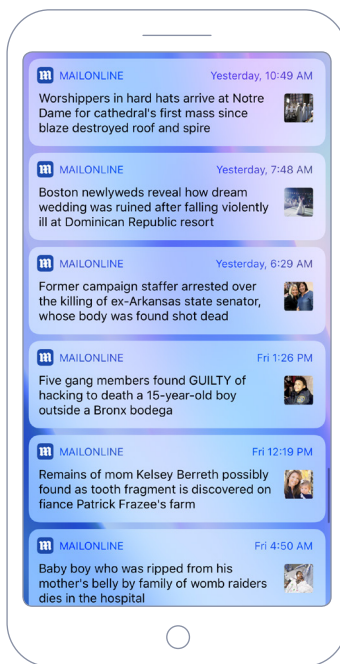
The grid shows six examples of mobile push notifications:

- NBC NEWS** (now): BREAKING: Raptors make history, beat Warriors to win Canada's first NBA championship. Includes a small image of a basketball player.
- FOX NEWS** (1m ago): **Breaking News** Toronto Raptors win first NBA Championship in franchise history.
- HUFFPOST** (now): **Toronto Raptors are NBA champs** The Raptors have upended the Golden State Warriors' dynasty — and won Canada's first ever NBA title.
- ABC NEWS** (2m ago): Toronto Raptors defeat Golden State Warriors in Game 6, becoming the first Canadian franchise to win an NBA title. Includes a small image of the Raptors.
- FOX NEWS** (now): **Breaking News** Toronto Raptors win first NBA Championship in franchise history.
- ABC NEWS** (3m ago): Toronto Raptors defeat Golden State Warriors in Game 6, becoming the first Canadian franchise to win an NBA title. Includes a small image of the Raptors.
- NYTIMES** (now): The Raptors defeated the Warriors in Game 6 to clinch the first N.B.A. championship for Canada.

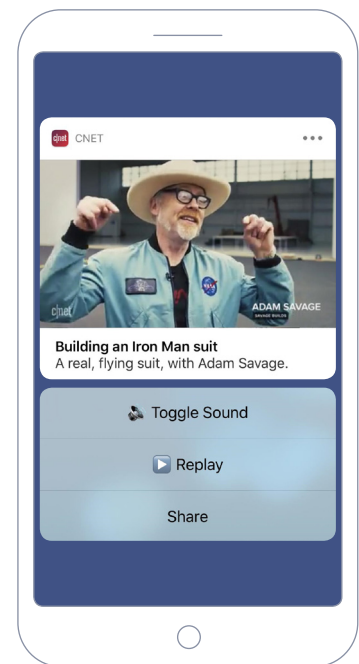
From emojis to images to bolded headlines, publications took many approaches in designing their mobile push notifications.



Push notification style and cadence varied greatly between brands. Some, like CBS News, focused on high frequency (7.93 messages per day) and minimal design—only including the article tagline and occasionally including a headline.



Others, like NBC News and The Daily Mail, included thumbnails in addition to the article headline and tagline.



Only one publication, CNET, included a video within the push notification—an enticing use of messaging unseen elsewhere in the industry.

As part of our research, we changed our mobile preferences about halfway through to identify the brands' ability to adapt to our changes in interests. Many didn't explicitly identify topic or category within the push notification itself.

The New York Times, which did identify the topic through a bolded headline, succeeded in updating along with our preferences.

The common thread throughout all mobile push notifications across all publications was a lack of continuity between mobile and email campaigns.

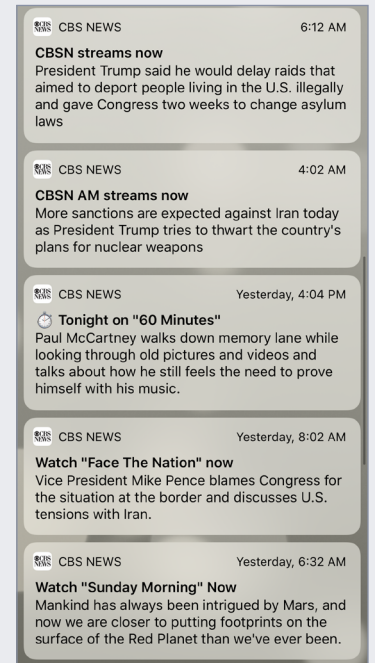
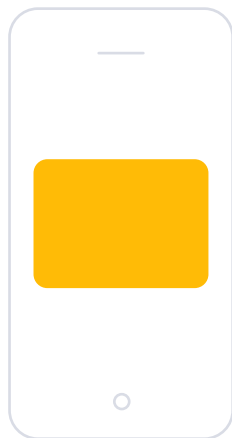
While we didn't receive promotions from CBS News via email, we did via mobile push.

Similarly, we didn't receive any welcome or cart abandonment push notifications to react to our online or in-app behavior.

The cross-channel experience cannot be ignored in journalism. And our research shows a hearty embrace of mobile push from the industry as a way to disseminate news—breaking or otherwise. After all, mobile outpaced email 863 messages to 759.

The opportunities for cross-channel, synchronized communications are not being realized, especially when it comes to revenue streams. Cart abandonment, in particular, could be hugely effective in a cross-channel capacity. Rather than continuing to follow up via email—to no avail—publications could send a mobile push reminder as well.

This shows the subscriber they are on the publication's radar and will be taken care of whenever and however they would like.

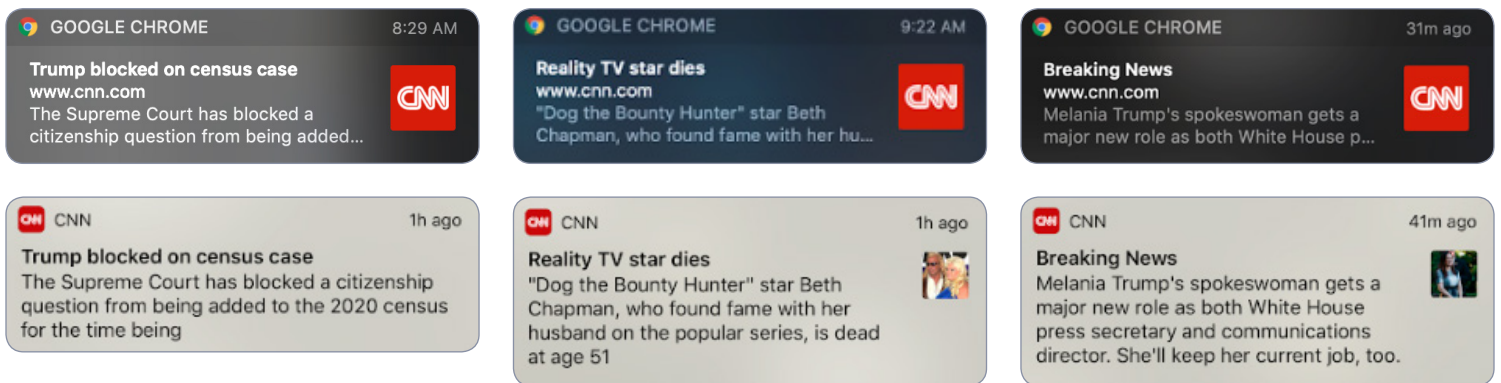
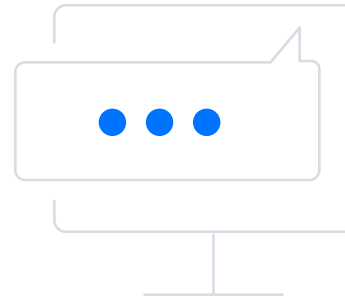


Web Push

Our experience with web push notifications (also known as browser push) differed greatly from those with email and mobile.

Most obviously, a lot fewer companies offered web push as an option—only 13% of the publications. Part of this might be attributed to the fact that publication websites make a single request asking permission from the reader to allow web push notifications.

Many sites request permission during the first visit but never again. To properly establish web push as an alternative channel for engagement, publications could continue sending requests for permission to return visitors—as long as they haven't opted out by selecting "Block" in their browser.



When considering cross-channel content, it is important for publications to understand which channels users have chosen as preferred.

In any event, the web push notifications we did receive mirrored the mobile push notifications we received, providing the same content in two locations.

While this is not necessarily a bad practice—as it ensures content is interacted with on at least two devices—for more engaged users (like us) this provides an unneeded repetition of content.

Here, an ESP that monitors which channels users are subscribing to will help alleviate duplicative efforts. For example, if USA Today took notice that we had signed up for web and mobile push notifications, we could be placed in a separate segment that sends alternative content to each channel.

A unified, cross-channel experience keeps the user engaged throughout their lifecycle.

Closing Thoughts

Journalism is not going anywhere.

If anything, the industry is at an inflection point of rebirth, a rising embrace of quality storytelling and reporting. The embattled journalist has taken a stand by not shying away when in the face of blustering criticism and relying on accuracy and ethics to tell the truth.

But to successfully navigate this inflection point, changes have to be made; opportunities have to be seized.

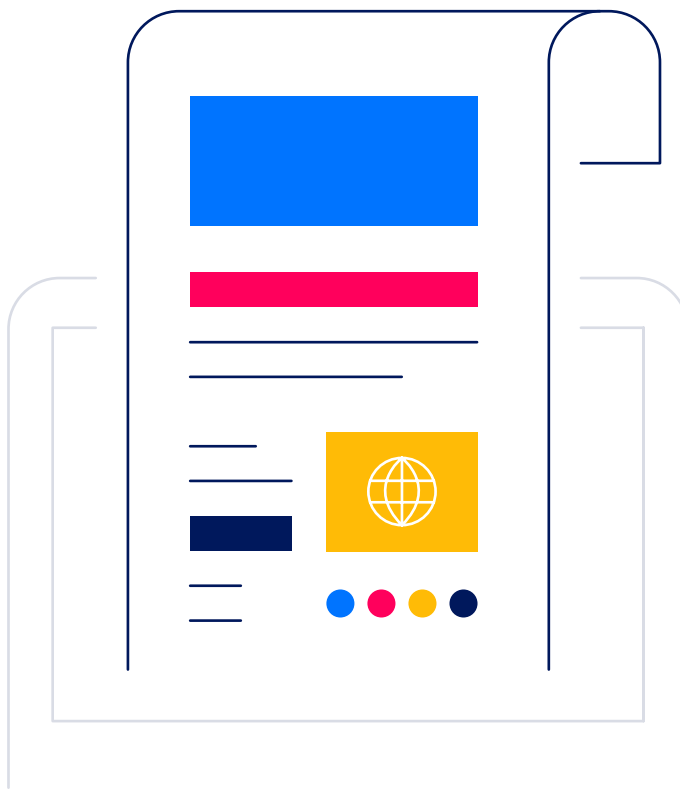
The mediums and methods to consume news are highly personalized with an abundance of options. Whether it's digitally, televised, or through social media, people are consuming news through their preferred channels.

Email. Mobile. Web push. Many of the publications in our research are already industry leaders by incorporating the cross-channel experience in their campaigns. Many have also fallen behind.

Harnessing this data requires a growth marketing platform that can adapt to the needs of a growing audience, to changes in news consumption and to demographic behavioral shifts.

A publication's marketing has to follow suit. Content may be king, but the average news seeker now has the veto power to find a new kingdom if they so choose.

By tapping into the power of behavioral data, publications can make each and every user feel like they are getting the royal treatment.



About Iterable



Iterable is the growth marketing platform that enables brands to create, execute and optimize cross-channel campaigns with unparalleled data flexibility. Leading brands, like Zillow, SeatGeek, DoorDash, and Box, choose Iterable to power world-class customer engagement throughout the entire lifecycle.



Data Flexibility at Your Fingertips

Access real-time user, behavioral and event data to trigger personalized messaging at virtually unlimited scale. Support an audience of millions while appealing to each subscriber's unique preferences.



Unified Brand Experience

Orchestrate seamless customer engagement across email, mobile push, SMS, in-app, web push, direct mail and more throughout every lifecycle stage, from activation to re-engagement.



Agile Iteration & Optimization

Launch, measure and fine-tune campaigns with ease to deliver more relevant messaging faster than the competition. Experiment and iterate on-demand to determine the right content, channel and cadence for each user.



Customer Journey Mapping

Visualize the entire customer journey and build sophisticated, cross-channel segments and campaigns with Iterable's intuitive, drag-and-drop Workflow Studio.

If you want to learn more about Iterable, please [request a demo](#).

[REQUEST A DEMO](#)

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Appendix

Full list of the top news publications analyzed in this report, in categorical and alphabetical order:

U.S. Newspapers

Los Angeles Times

The New York Times

San Francisco Chronicle

 USA TODAY

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The Washington Post

International News

 ALJAZEERA

BBC

Daily Mail.com

euronews.

The Guardian

Business

Bloomberg

FASTCOMPANY

Forbes

FORTUNE

 REUTERS

Technology



TE

THE VERGE

WIRED

Online News

BuzzFeed News

HUFFPOST

Mashable

VICE

Vox

Broadcast News

abc NEWS

CBS NEWS

CNN



