

How to produce a more effective email newsletter

How many emails do you receive each day?

Probably enough that you delete any that don't quickly capture your attention and offer something of interest.

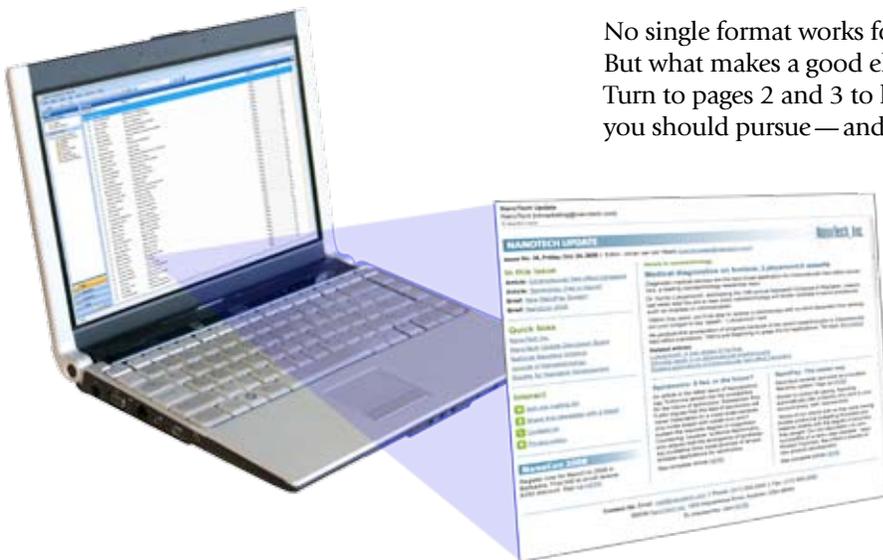
A well-crafted email newsletter scores on both fronts, while also helping to build trust, credibility and respect with your customers. Customers opt-in for newsletters — meaning they often want interaction. In a survey, the Nielsen Norman Group usability research firm found 69% of respondents said they looked forward to receiving at least one email newsletter.¹

Why?

The Nielsen Norman Group says a newsletter — in contrast to a webpage — establishes an ongoing relationship by:

- **Feeling personal.** The newsletter arrives in your inbox, sometimes with a personal salutation.¹
- **Including a social aspect.** Many users pass them along to friends and colleagues.¹
- **Connecting with the audience.** Users can associate emotions with email newsletters (unlike websites, where functionality reigns).¹

No single format works for every newsletter. But what makes a good electronic newsletter? Turn to pages 2 and 3 to learn a few practices you should pursue — and a few you should avoid — when creating an email newsletter.



How do you make your email newsletter stand out from the inbox crowd? Start with a businesslike subject line. Turn to pages 2 and 3 for more tips.

Executive Summary

- A survey found 69% of respondents said they looked forward to receiving at least one email newsletter.¹
- By feeling personal and including a social component, email newsletters better connect with an audience than a website.¹
- To achieve the best open rates, keep the email subject line simple and straightforward.²

E-newsletter elements: what to avoid

Don't be vague about frequency

Publishing weekly, monthly or quarterly lets users know when to look for the newsletter and decreases the likelihood they'll confuse it with spam.¹ Yet, a 2007 study found fewer than 7% of major online retailers give subscribers any idea of how many emails to expect.⁴

Don't distract with design

For B2B newsletters, a simple design can deliver results.⁶ Typography, logos and visuals should follow established brand guidelines.

Don't force the artwork

Research has found that graphics may not have a substantial effect on response rates.⁶ In fact, for B2B marketers, text newsletters actually achieved higher click rates (5.4% vs. 3.5%) than those that were equal parts text and images.⁶

Skip the introduction

The Nielsen Norman Group found that people generally skip introductory "blah blah text" in newsletters. In fact, 2 out of 3 readers don't even look at it.³

Don't hide

Who is this newsletter from, a vice president or an intern? How does the reader contact you to offer feedback or suggestions? A newsletter serves as an ambassador for your company. Give it an identity.

As Dr. Phil says, "It ain't about you"

Keep the content about your readers, not you and your products. About 80% should focus on industry trends, reports, white papers, customer issues and links to third-party content.

Watch those incentives

A 2007 study recommends avoiding incentives that attract freebie-seekers—people who sign up only for a shot at a prize.⁵



E-newsletter elements: what to emulate

When to send

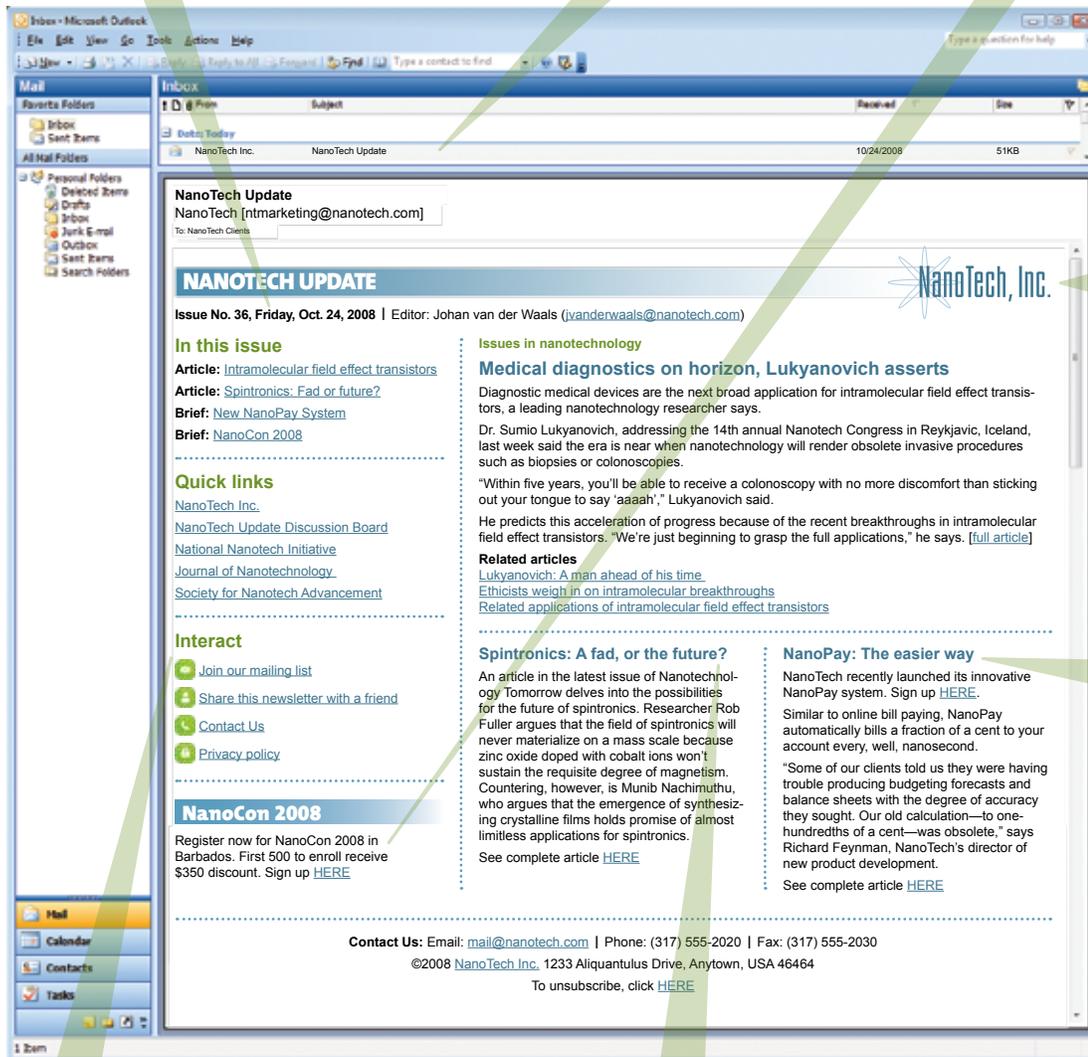
A study of 2.7 billion emails by a software solutions firm found that while there's no best day to send email, Fridays demonstrated the highest open rate (39.6%).⁷

Keep the subject line businesslike

A 2007 study found the most opened emails were those with simple and straightforward subject lines.² Remember, the best subject lines *tell* the reader what's inside. The worst subject lines *sell* what's inside. (Tip: Avoid using *help*, *percent off* or *reminder*.)²

Keep incentives relevant

Incentives can work, but be careful. The Email Experience Council suggests offering product discounts or free shipping—incentives that spur interaction with your brand.⁵



Logo location

Place your logo high on the page. One study found that placing the logo toward the bottom of the page "generates even less interest among a target audience than not including any logo at all."⁶

Use design to aid navigation

Create a hierarchy of information using font sizes, colors and styles to help readers easily navigate through the information in your newsletter.

Pursue subscribers & encourage communication

Make communication easy. After all, people leave jobs and change email addresses. Some get burnt out by email fatigue.⁷ Organizations that routinely trim their lists experience better click-through rates.⁷ And by keeping your list current, you can try to re-engage those who opt out.

Facilitate scanning & vary story length

"Newsletters must be designed to facilitate scanning," the Nielsen Norman Group advises, noting that users spend an average of 51 seconds on each newsletter.¹ If you want a lot of readers, focus on short, scannable content.⁸ If you want people who really need a solution, focus on comprehensive coverage (this is especially beneficial to companies selling targeted solutions to complicated problems).⁸ The Nielsen Norman Group suggests mixing briefs and in-depth coverage, mirroring the users' interests.

- ¹ Nielsen Norman Group Report. Email Newsletter Usability: Executive Summary. Accessed 9/22/08 at <http://nngroup.com/reports/newsletters/summary.html>.
- ² Best Practices in Writing Email Subject Lines. Accessed 9/23/08 at <http://www.mailchimp.com/resources/best-practices-in-writing-email-subject-lines.phtml>.
- ³ Nielsen, J. Email Newsletters: Surviving Inbox Congestion. Accessed 5/2/2008 at <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/newsletters.html>.
- ⁴ Email Experience Council. Retail Email Subscription Benchmark Study: Executive Summary. Accessed 9/22/08 at http://blog.emailexperience.org/2007/07/retail_email_subscription_benc.html.
- ⁵ Bailor, C. Best Practices: Subscribing to Smooth Email Marketing. Accessed 9/22/08 at <http://www.destinationcrm.com/Articles/PrintArticle.aspx?ArticleID=41769>.
- ⁶ Email Creative That Works: An Evaluation of Opens and Click Rates Associated With Various Creative Elements. Accessed 9/22/08 at http://www.silverpop.com/practices/studies/email_creative/index.html.
- ⁷ Stewart, M. ExactTarget 2005 Email Marketing Response Rate Study. Accessed 9/22/08 at <http://email.exacttarget.com/resources/whitepapers/2005responseratestudy.html>.
- ⁸ Nielsen, J. Long vs. Short Articles as Content Strategy. Accessed 9/22/08 at <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/content-strategy.html>.