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# The Anatomy of a Great Email Newsletter

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# Introduction

One of the biggest problems with email newsletters is that they are often cluttered and unfocused because they are supporting every aspect of your business. Product news goes right next to PR stories, blog posts go next to a random event week ... it's kind of a mess. Email — whether it's a newsletter or not — needs one common thread to hold it together.

A way to help reduce the randomness of an email newsletter is by keeping it to one very specific topic. So instead of it being about your company in general, maybe it's dedicated to one vertical.

For example, if we were to send out a newsletter, we could do one solely on social media for business. In it, we could gather together recent blog posts on social media marketing, events that all social media marketers should go to, and maybe even a quiz of the best social media tools you use. By tying together those pieces of content all under the umbrella of social media for business, the email newsletter would be much more focused and engaging.

## Tip #1: Balance the content of your newsletter to be 90% educational and 10% promotional.

Chances are, your email newsletter subscribers aren't down to hear about your products and services 100% of the time. While they may love you and want to hear from you, there's only so much shilling you can do before they tune out.

Case in point: I have a thing for shoes, and I especially love this one shoe site. I willingly opted in to the company's email list, but it now sends me emails 2-3 times a day to buy, buy, buy ... and when I see its sender name pop up in my inbox, I want to scream. Now, if they sent me educational content — maybe about the latest styles of shoes, or how to pair certain styles with certain outfits — I might be more inclined to buy from them, or at least start opening their emails again.

Don't be that company. In your email newsletters, get rid of the self promotion (most of the time) and focus on sending your subscribers educational, relevant, timely information. Unless you actually have an exciting, big piece of news about your product, service, or company, leave out the promotional parts.

## Tip #2: Set Expectations on Your Subscribe Page

Once you've figured out your newsletter's focus and content balance, make sure you're properly communicating about them on your subscribe landing page.

Get specific: Tell potential subscribers exactly what will be in the newsletter as well as how often they should expect to hear from you. As a subscriber, wouldn't that be awesome? You'd go in with open eyes knowing exactly who you will be receiving email from, what they will be sending you, and how often they'll be sending it to you. As a marketer, having this information up front will help diminish your unsubscribe and spam rates as well. Here's an example of this from Gilt City:

*Gilt City Reminders*

Daily       Weekly       Unsubscribe

Select Cities

<input type="checkbox"/> Atlanta	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Boston	<input type="checkbox"/> Chicago	<input type="checkbox"/> Dallas
<input type="checkbox"/> Houston	<input type="checkbox"/> Los Angeles	<input type="checkbox"/> Miami	<input type="checkbox"/> National
<input type="checkbox"/> New York	<input type="checkbox"/> Philadelphia	<input type="checkbox"/> San Diego	<input type="checkbox"/> San Francisco
<input type="checkbox"/> Seattle	<input type="checkbox"/> Washington DC		

## Tip #3: Get Creative with the Subject Line

Even if your subscribers sign up for your emails, there's no guarantee that they will open your emails once they get them in their inbox. Many marketers try increasing familiarity with their subscribers by keeping the subject line the same each day, week, or month that they send it.

But let's face it, those subject lines get old — fast — for subscribers. Why? Because there's no incentive from the subject line to click on that specific email right this instant. A better approach would be to try to have a different, creative, engaging subject line for each newsletter you send.

One company who does this really well is Thrillist. Here's a collection of email newsletters they've sent over the course of a few days:

A screenshot of an email inbox with a dark background and light text. Each row represents an email from Thrillist. The sender name is on the left, followed by a grey 'Inbox' label, and then the subject line. The subject lines are highly creative and varied.

Thrillist BOS	Inbox	A Fight You'll Want To Get In - version of Thrill
Thrillist NATION	Inbox	PIZZA Ice Cream. No Joke. - version of Thrillis
Thrillist BOS	Inbox	The Biggest Opening So Far This Year Is... - v
Thrillist NATION	Inbox	WARNING: This Email Is RED HOT! - version
Thrillist NATION	Inbox	What's Your State's Biggest Food Chain? - ver
Thrillist BOS	Inbox	You Need To Drink All Of These - version of Th

## Tip #4: Pick one primary call-to-action.

Okay, part of what makes a newsletter a newsletter is that you're featuring multiple pieces of content with multiple calls-to-action (CTAs). But, that doesn't mean you should let those CTAs all have equal prominence.

Instead, let there be one head honcho CTA — just one main thing that you would like your subscribers to do, and the rest of the CTAs are a “in case you have time.” Whether it's simply to click through to see a blog post or just to forward the email to a friend, make it super simple for your subscribers to know what you want them to do — and then do it.



## Tip #5: Keep design and copy minimal.

Like I said before, a newsletter can easily feel cluttered because of its nature. The trick for email marketers to make a successful email newsletter look uncluttered revolves around two things: concise copy and enough white space in the design.

Concise copy is key because you don't actually want to have your subscribers hang out and read your email all day.

You want to send them elsewhere — your website or blog, for instance — to actually consume the whole piece of content. Concise copy gives your subscribers a taste of your content — just enough that they want to click and learn more.

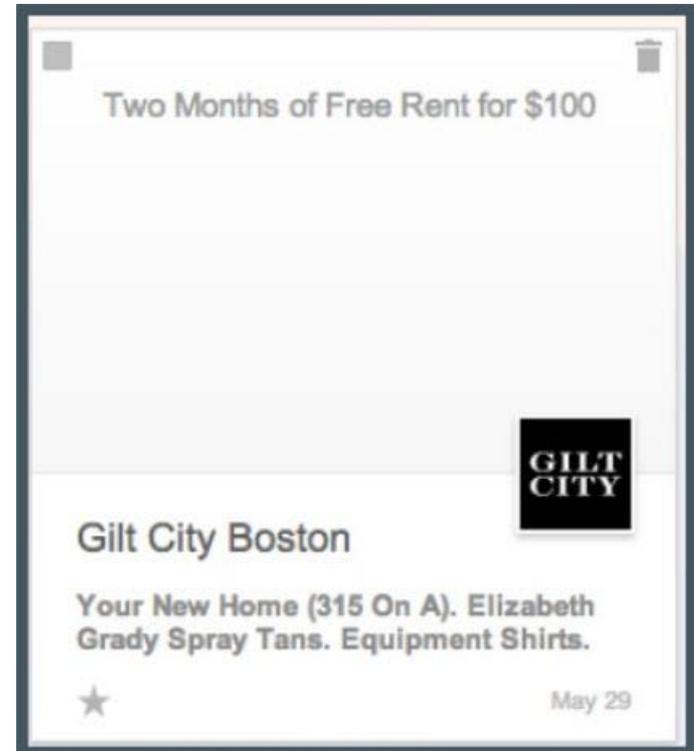
White space is key in email newsletters because it helps visually alleviate the cluttered feel, and on mobile, makes it much easier for people to click the right link.

## Tip #6: Make sure images have ALT text.

Given that visual content is incredibly important to the rest of your marketing activities, it'd make sense that you'd want to include them in your emails ... right?

Right. But email's a little bit trickier. Most of the time, people won't have images enabled, so you've got to make sure your images have one essential component: alt text. Alt text is the alternative text that appears when images aren't loaded in an email. This is especially important if your CTAs are images — you want to make sure people are clicking even without the image enabled.

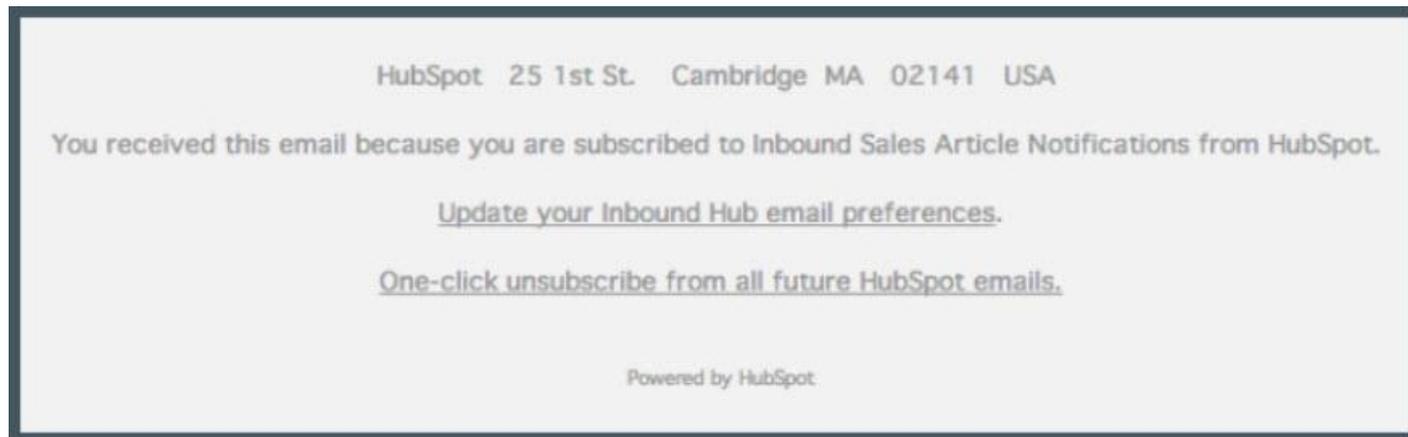
You can also see an example of alt text in action in the image to the right:



## Tip #7: Make it easy for people to unsubscribe.

This seems a little counter-intuitive, but it's key if you want to maintain an active, engaged subscriber list. Don't use weird language like "Alter your communication with us." Don't hide an unsubscribe button behind an image without alt text. Besides keeping your list healthy, having a clear unsubscribe process will help ensure your email isn't marked SPAM before it hits the rest of your list's inbox.

You can see an example of this below:



# Tip #8: Test, test, test.

I know we just listed out a whole bunch of “best practices” to make sure you’re doing email newsletters right, but you’ve also got to find out what works for your company and your list. Just like different cultures of people prefer different things, different groups of email subscribers prefer different things.

So use these email newsletter best practices as a jumping off point ... and then experiment to find your secret sauce. Run an A/B test on subject lines. Change up your CTA copy. Heck, even try not including images. The world is your oyster for your email newsletter, so find out what it likes.

# Ready to start your own newsletter?



Try a 60-day **FREE** trial with Constant Contact and get your email list started! *This is a risk-free trial and requires NO credit card.* Test out the system and make sure it is working to your satisfaction!

**Start Your 60 Day Risk-Free Trial TODAY!**

# More Resources

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Request a **Free Consultation** to Learn How We Can Help You Be Successful Growing Your Business.

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