



# Library Newsletters: Best Practices



**A GUIDE TO**  
Connecting with your  
community through  
newsletters

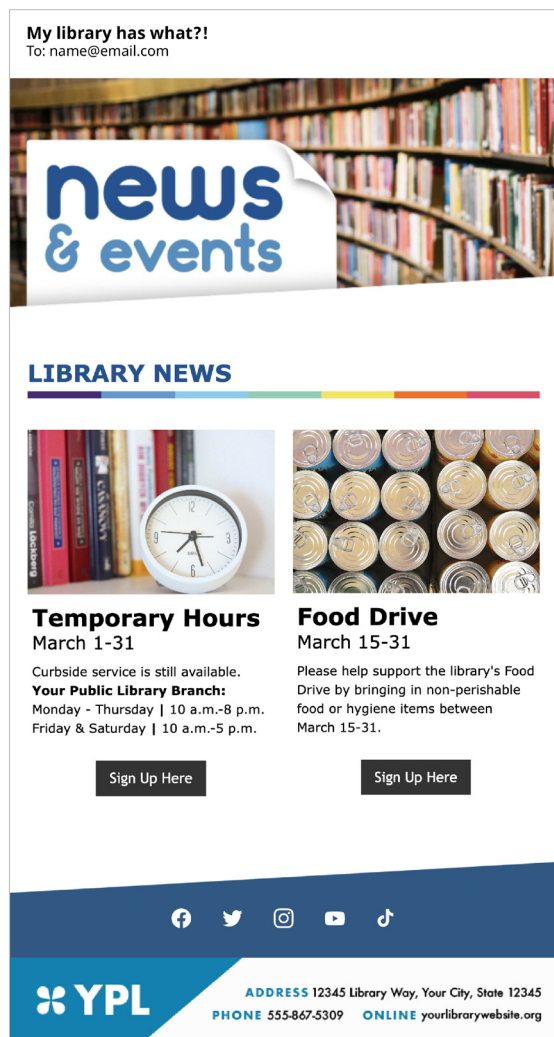
Learn more: [www.ebsco.com/novelist](http://www.ebsco.com/novelist)

# Introduction

Newsletters are an effective way to make a meaningful connection with your community. They're easy and convenient for your subscribers, as well as for you.

Connecting with your community means bringing the information to them, wherever they are. And that means anywhere their mobile device will take them. Newsletters serve as an essential outreach effort.

These best practices and tips come from libraries big and small, urban and rural, in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. We're sharing them in the hope that they will help you connect with readers, seniors, caregivers of young children, teens, job hunters — whomever you're trying to reach in your community.



## Anatomy of a Good Newsletter

- 1 Subject line:**  
Aim for 20-50 characters, or 3-5 words. Keep in mind that most mobile devices will cut off subject lines at about 30 characters.
- 2 Make it eye-catching:**  
Use a big image at the top to grab eyeballs! (And make sure the image is on brand and relevant.)
- 3 Less is more:**  
Keep the text short so your subscribers can skim and scan.
- 4 Call to action:**  
Always have a clear and concise call to action (CTA). What is it that you want your readers to do?
- 5 Signature/Footer:**  
This is a great place for your library's branding and contact info.

# Planning for Your Newsletter

Keep these five steps in mind as you plan your newsletter:

- 1 Determine your goals
- 2 Set up for success
- 3 Gather intelligence
- 4 Establish your brand
- 5 Analyze your results

## 1 | Determine Your Goals

What are your goals? What will make this an effective and successful newsletter? If you decide ahead of time what success looks like, you'll be able to determine if your newsletter is working.

The first place to look for goals for your newsletter is your library's strategic plan. Your strategic plan likely has goals such as "support literacy in our community;" "encourage reading;" "increase attendance at programming;" "reach more adults without children," etc.

***A newsletter can support all of these goals.***

If you don't have a strategic plan or are currently in the process of creating a new one, you can develop goals for whatever you want to accomplish — including increasing circulation, getting higher attendance at book clubs, increasing cardholders, updating your community about new building projects, etc. Consider how a regular newsletter will help support these goals.

## Subject Line Best Practices:

### Short, sweet, and to the point:

Email subject lines should communicate the content of the email and entice readers to open it. A tall order? Yes! But the success of your email depends on it. Be creative!

### A few successful subject lines:

- Summer Reading begins...now!
- My library has what?!
- 4 online resources for homework help
- Hooray! It's time for new books!

### Numbers get results:

Numbers in subject lines draw attention. Use numerals instead of spelling out the number.

**Questions do the trick, too:** Leading with a question that makes your readers wonder or stirs emotion will help open emails. Leverage curiosity!

**Emojis are friendly and fun:** For lighter subject emails, consider adding an emoji to your subject line.

**Avoid words that trigger spam filters:** Words like "free" or even "money" could potentially send your email to spam. Familiarize yourself with words and phrases that are likely to cause these triggers.

**Use title or sentence casing.** But never all caps. Avoid overuse of special characters.



## 2 | Set Up for Success

✓ **How much time can you commit to your newsletter?** Ask yourself practical questions about the time you can dedicate to your newsletter before you begin. How often will you need to send out your newsletter? Are you creating a weekly programming newsletter? A monthly reading recommendations newsletter? Or perhaps a quarterly update on how various building projects are going?

✓ **Is your newsletter accessible?** Reaching subscribers includes creating emails that are accessible to everyone. Incorporate best practices regarding text size and color, using proper alt text (alternative text) for images, and meaningful link text. For example, rather than **“Click here** to view today’s programs,” create a text link that simply says, **“Today’s Programs.”**

✓ **Where will the content come from?** Knowing how often you plan to send and whether it will be an individual or group effort will help you evaluate how much time it will take to create content for your newsletter. The amount of programming you provide may also help you make decisions. If, for example, your library has the resources to offer storytimes every week, but not other children’s programs, a monthly programming newsletter may be a better option than a weekly one. If a building project is going gangbusters, your community will want to see inspiring images and updates every month rather than quarterly.

✓ **Are you compliant?** Sending emails requires knowledge and understanding of local and applicable email marketing laws: CAN-SPAM in the U.S., CASL in Canada, GDPR in Europe, ACMA in Australia, and EUMA in New Zealand. Familiarize yourself with these laws and stay compliant.

## Three Steps to a Better CTA:

A “call-to-action” or CTA is a prompt in your email that asks your subscribers to take a next step. That step may be to read a blog article, register for a program, sign up for a newsletter, or donate. The CTA is usually a button or can be linked in-text to the place where you’d like the reader to take action. “Learn more” is an example of a common CTA.

Review these three steps as you think about the actions you might want your subscribers to take when reading your newsletter:

- 1 **Consider the placement:** Is the CTA in a prominent spot in the email? Is there an image or graphic to draw attention? The farther down the reader has to scroll to find the CTA, the less likely they are to find it.
- 2 **Use exciting language:** “Click here” may be the most common example that we all recognize, but it’s no longer exciting or effective. Change up the language when you can. If you’re promoting an event, instead of “Register,” try something like “Sign me up!”
- 3 **Use the right colors:** Staying within your library’s brand guidelines, what is the most eye-catching color you can use for your CTA? Also consider accessibility; backgrounds and text with high contrast are more easily seen by those with impaired vision.



# 3 | Gather Intelligence

If you're already doing a newsletter, **identify what is and isn't working**. Ask your staff what they like about the newsletter — and what they hear patrons saying about the newsletter. Consider a brief subscriber survey. Regularly check open and click-through rates. Track what kind of links people are clicking. Evaluate if the tone of your newsletter matches the images you include and the audience you're trying to reach.

## Identify the audience(s) you want to reach.

If this is your first newsletter, you might want to start small. An excellent place to start is with an audience your library already has success reaching — think caregivers of young kids (who are probably interested in your storytimes, picture book collections, craft programs, etc.).

Another way to determine your target audience is to **go back to your goals and your strategic plan**. Does your strategic plan include career guidance? Then job seekers would be an excellent target audience to identify. Does your strategic plan include boosting usage of your small business resources? New entrepreneurs would be a great target audience to further that goal.

**Determine your audience segments.** Asking yourself lots of questions about the people who make up your target audience will help you determine how to appeal to their needs. What are their interests? When are they likely to come to the library? What library resources do they like to use?

**Think about the newsletters you receive.** Are there ideas and elements you can borrow from those?

# 4 | Establish Your Brand

Your target audience and your goals will be the basis for helping you understand the tone of your newsletter and the images and designs you include.

## Branding:

Consistency is key. When your community receives a newsletter from you, it should be recognizable and consistent with your other communications. Is your logo included in the header or footer? Does the footer have key contact information? Is the color palette of your communication consistent with your website and branding guidelines?

## Style:

Your audience and branding give you a basis for the look and feel of your newsletters. Happy, fun subjects mean happy, fun images and colors. Professional subjects mean clean, subdued images and colors.

## Voice:

Keep your audience in mind as you write. Consider creating a persona for each of your audiences and write to that "person." Your voice in speaking to caregivers may differ from your voice for the genealogy club. Use humor where appropriate because it works!



One thing to keep in mind is to KEEP IT PERSONAL. It's a letter from you to a member of your community. Above all, don't forget where this whole thing started: Connecting with your community.

## 5 | Analyze Your Results

The average open rate for nonprofits and educational sectors is roughly 23-26%. If your open rates are in that range, you're doing great.

Industry	Open Rate	CTR	CTOR	Unsubscribe Rate
Education	28.5%	4.4%	15.7%	.2%
Entertainment, Media, and Publishing	23.9%	2.9%	12.4%	.1%
Nonprofit	26.6%	2.7%	10.2%	.2%

Source: <https://www.campaignmonitor.com/resources/guides/email-marketing-benchmarks/>

### Don't get *\*too\** stuck on the numbers.

Though these are helpful benchmarks and will help you pinpoint a long-term goal for metrics, don't get too hung up on the numbers. For now, focus on trends over time. Are you building your subscriber list? Is your unsubscribe rate low? Are you seeing increased attendance at programs promoted in your newsletter? Think back to the goals you determined for yourself at step one. Are you meeting those goals?

## Glossary of Email Metrics

<b>Open Rate</b>	Percentage of recipients who received and opened the email. This metric shows awareness of your email and interest in what you have to share.
<b>Click-through Rate (CTR)</b>	Percentage of recipients that clicked on any link in your email. This shows engagement because an action was taken to learn more.
<b>Click to Open Rate (CTOR)</b>	Percentage of recipients who clicked on any link out of the total opened emails. This gives an understanding of the performance of your email content and the effectiveness of its design, CTA placement, and copy.
<b>Unsubscribe Rate</b>	Percentage of recipients who unsubscribed from an email message. This metric tells you who is not interested in your message. A few unsubscribes is normal; watch for trends over time. If this figure increases dramatically, it's time to assess whether your message is right for your audience.

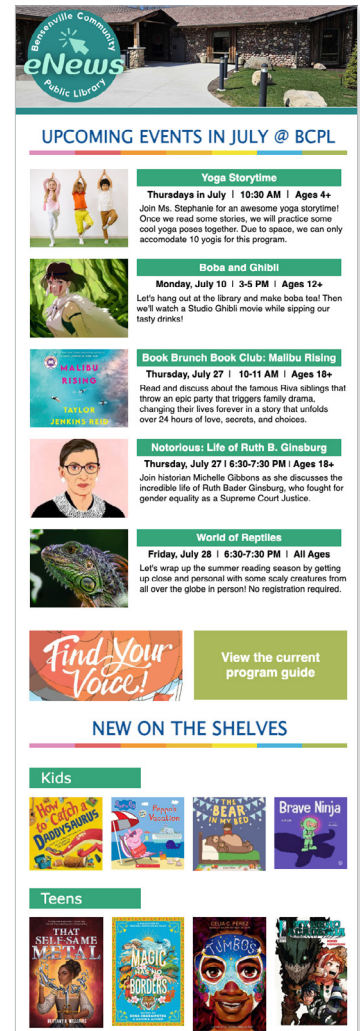
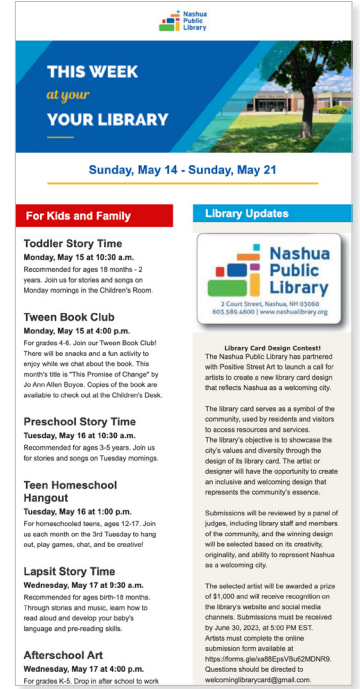
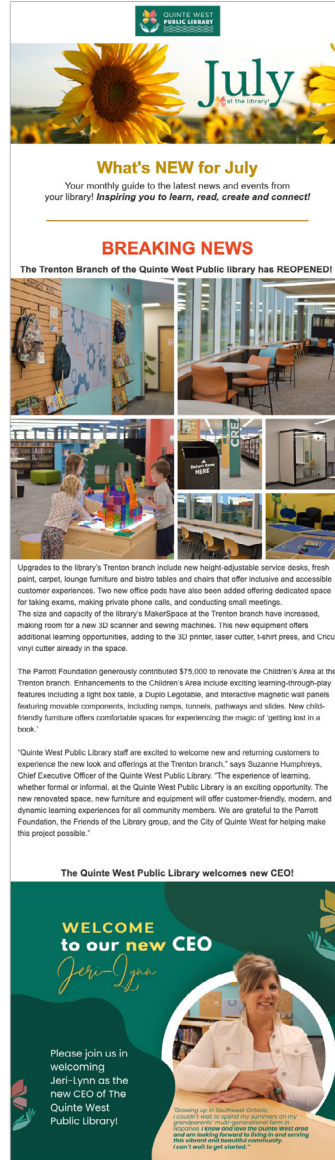
# 5 | Analyze Your Results (cont.)

If you've been at this for some time and are still not satisfied with your results, perhaps it's time to analyze your newsletter. Some questions to ask yourself as you review your content, design, and voice:

**Is your newsletter interesting?** Are your images eye-catching and relevant? What kinds of links get the highest click rates, and which get the lowest? For example, you may find that you get higher click rates on links to books in your collection versus links to databases. Knowing what links are clicked most often can help you make editorial decisions over time.

**Is your email providing valuable information to subscribers?** Does your newsletter provide entertainment or solve a problem? Are you being too repetitive? Are you sending the right information to the right audience?

**Is your newsletter concise?** It's tempting to include all your information in a newsletter. However, it's better to keep text brief and link to further details such as blog posts, your website, and programming calendars. Keep your newsletters concise, and let your readers click to learn more if they want.



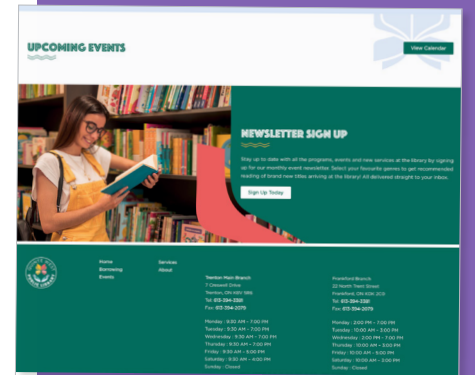
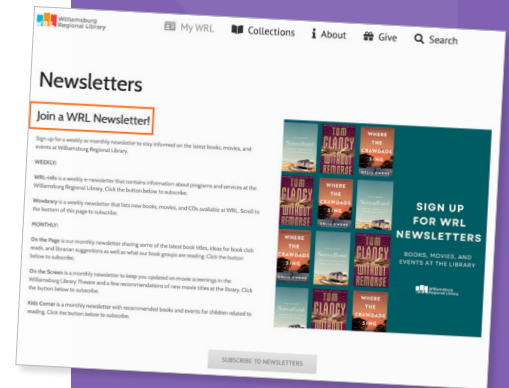
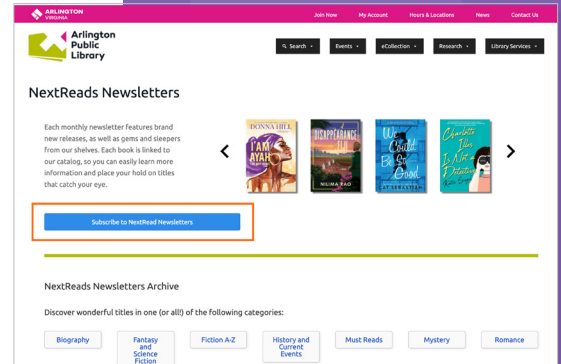
“...we've added a checkbox on our library card application. That way customers can indicate they want to receive library emails. For our welcome email, we sent 24,280 emails; 78 people opted out. We got zero complaints and a handful of compliments.”

RHONDA MASSIE, BLOOMINGTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



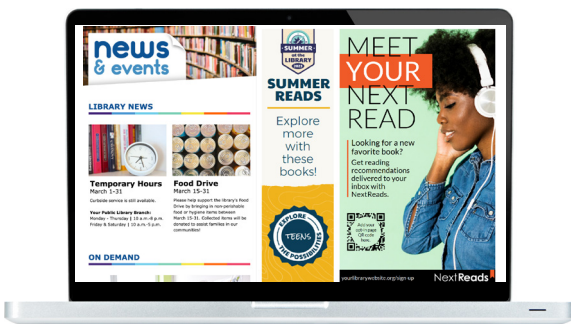
# 7 Proven Ideas for Growing Your Subscriber List:

- 1 **Make sure staff know about the newsletter** and get them signed up! They are patrons, too, and should be interested in what's happening at their library.
- 2 **Ask people to subscribe** to one or more newsletters when they get their library card.
- 3 **Sign up people at programs or special events** at your library, or at outreach events in the community. ("To find out about programs like this, be sure to add your name and email address to our newsletter list.")
- 4 **Set up a clipboard or tablet on a table** near the checkout where people can sign up on the spot.
- 5 **Create a poster or sign** letting patrons know about the newsletter and where they can subscribe. QR codes can get them quickly from paper to the sign-up page.
- 6 **Add a sign-up link** to your library's website.
- 7 **Post a message on social media** about your newsletter with a link to the sign-up page.



As you put these best practices into place, the most important thing to remember is to always consider the needs of your community. How can you connect them with the resources your library has to offer? Really get to know your community, and you'll write a valuable newsletter.

## Ready to try newsletters to connect with your community?



**LibraryAware** provides everything you need to promote your library. With tools for email marketing, social media, print marketing, and more, libraries can engage with their communities at any time, wherever they are. Since NoveList created LibraryAware especially for libraries, you'll find thousands of library-specific templates, and millions of free-to-use book jackets, images and graphics.

It also includes unlimited users, as well as subscribers and email sends, to meet your growing needs.

For nearly two decades, NoveList has provided **NextReads**, an award-winning recommendation newsletter service for libraries. The professionally written, themed newsletters are linked to a library's catalog and go out automatically to interested readers. They can be sent as is or customized by the library. The newsletters reflect an inclusive collection development ethic with titles that include authentic perspectives of authors from a variety of races, cultures, nationalities, genders, sexual orientations, abilities, and religions, with Own Voices titles selected wherever possible.

**Take a tour!**