

# 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.

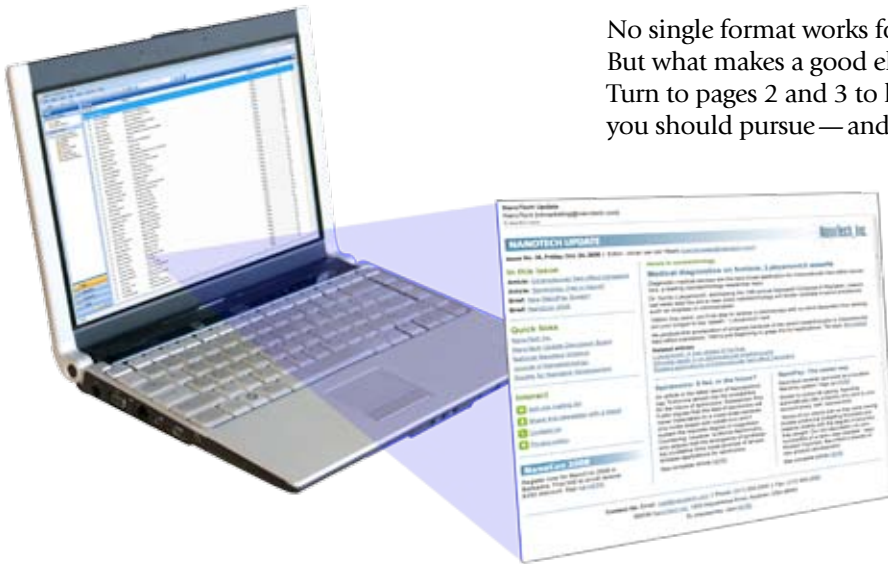
A well-crafted email newsletter scores on both fronts, while also helping to build trust, credibility and respect with your customers. Customers opt-in for newsletters — meaning they often want interaction. In a survey, the Nielsen Norman Group usability research firm found 69% of respondents said they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

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.<sup>1</sup>
- **Including a social aspect.** Many users pass them along to friends and colleagues.<sup>1</sup>
- **Connecting with the audience.** Users can associate emotions with email newsletters (unlike websites, where functionality reigns).<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>1</sup>
- By feeling personal and including a social component, email newsletters better connect with an audience than a website.<sup>1</sup>
- To achieve the best open rates, keep the email subject line simple and straightforward.<sup>2</sup>

# 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.<sup>1</sup> Yet, a 2007 study found fewer than 7% of major online retailers give subscribers any idea of how many emails to expect.<sup>4</sup>

## Don't distract with design

For B2B newsletters, a simple design can deliver results.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

## 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.<sup>3</sup>

## Don't hide

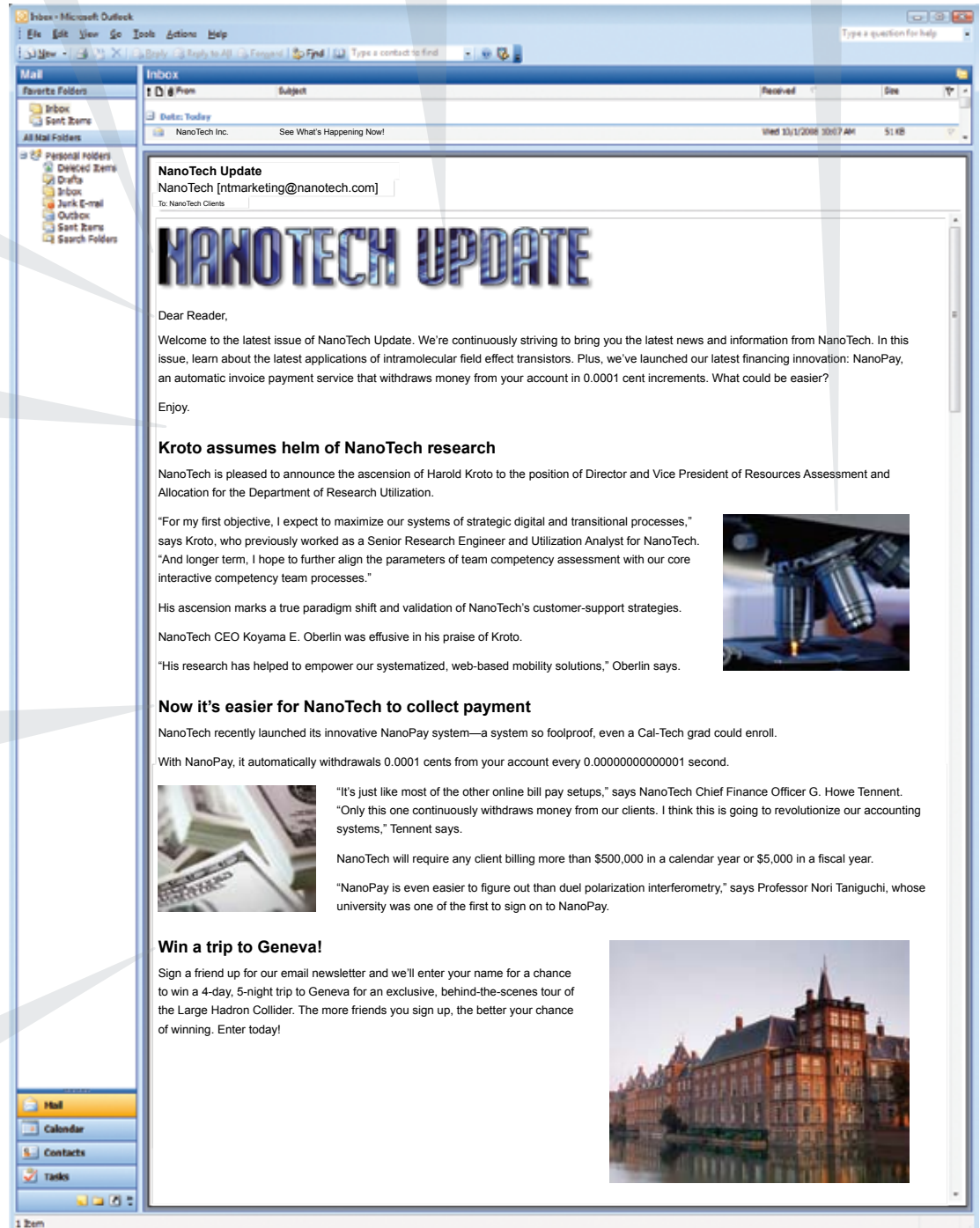
Who is this newsletter from, a vice president or an intern? How does the reader contact you to offer feedback or suggestions? A newsletter serves as an ambassador for your company. Give it an identity.

## 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.<sup>5</sup>



# E-newsletter elements: what to emulate

## When to send

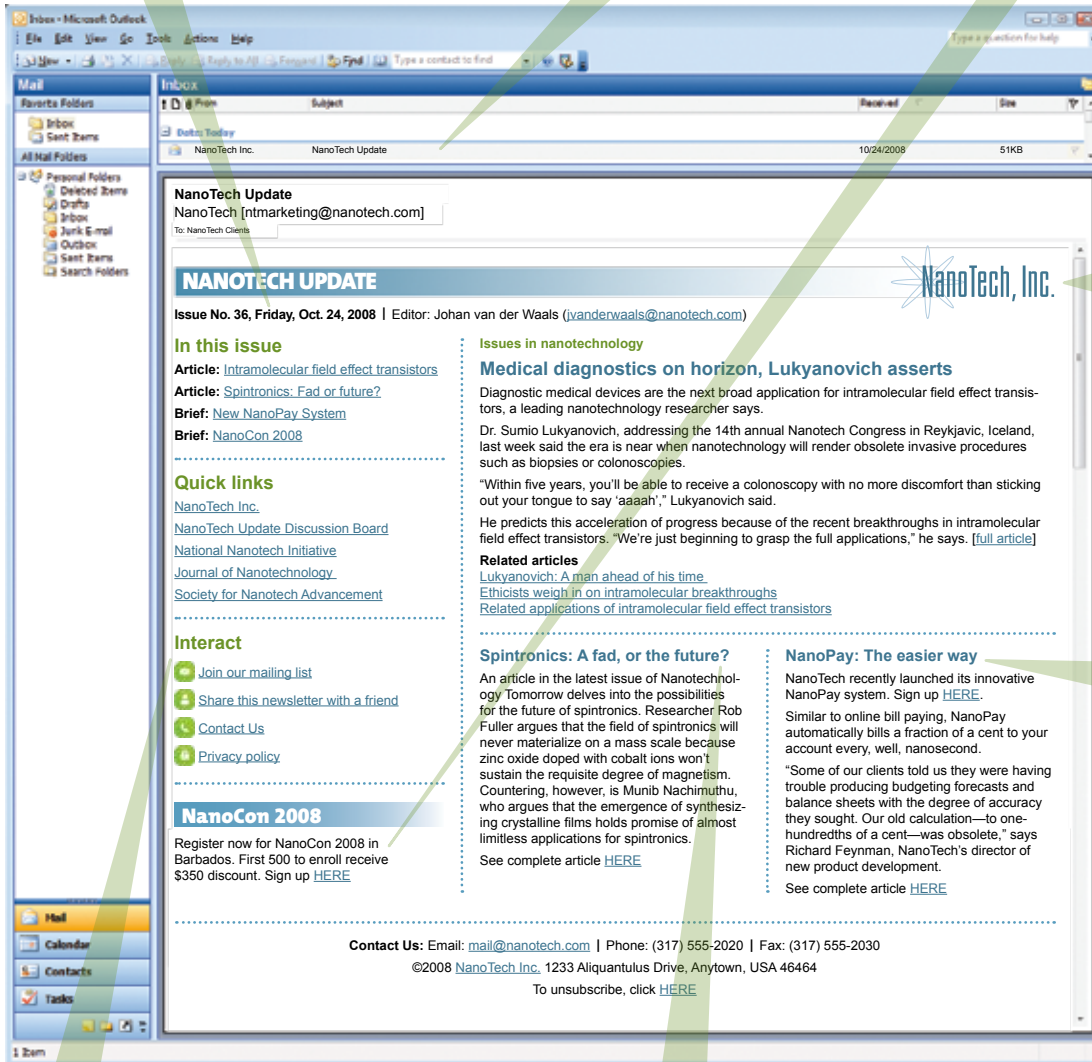
A study of 2.7 billion emails by a software solutions firm found that while there's no best day to send email, Fridays demonstrated the highest open rate (39.6%).<sup>7</sup>

## Keep the subject line businesslike

A 2007 study found the most opened emails were those with simple and straightforward subject lines.<sup>2</sup> 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*.)<sup>2</sup>

## 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.<sup>5</sup>



## 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."<sup>6</sup>

## 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.<sup>7</sup> Organizations that routinely trim their lists experience better click-through rates.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> If you want a lot of readers, focus on short, scannable content.<sup>8</sup> 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).<sup>8</sup> The Nielsen Norman Group suggests mixing briefs and in-depth coverage, mirroring the users' interests.

- <sup>1</sup> Nielsen Norman Group Report. Email Newsletter Usability: Executive Summary. Accessed 9/22/08 at <http://nngroup.com/reports/newsletters/summary.html>.
- <sup>2</sup> 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>.
- <sup>3</sup> Nielsen, J. Email Newsletters: Surviving Inbox Congestion. Accessed 5/2/2008 at <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/newsletters.html>.
- <sup>4</sup> 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](http://blog.emailexperience.org/2007/07/retail_email_subscription_benc.html).
- <sup>5</sup> Bailor, C. Best Practices: Subscribing to Smooth Email Marketing. Accessed 9/22/08 at <http://www.destinationcrm.com/Articles/PrintArticle.aspx?ArticleID=41769>.
- <sup>6</sup> 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](http://www.silverpop.com/practices/studies/email_creative/index.html).
- <sup>7</sup> Stewart, M. ExactTarget 2005 Email Marketing Response Rate Study. Accessed 9/22/08 at <http://email.exacttarget.com/resources/whitepapers/2005responseratestudy.html>.
- <sup>8</sup> Nielsen, J. Long vs. Short Articles as Content Strategy. Accessed 9/22/08 at <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/content-strategy.html>.