GUIDE:

START AND GROW **EMAIL NEWSLETTERS** PEOPLE LOVE



litmus

More than 80% of respondents to our State of Email survey send email newsletters, making them the most popular type of email that marketers send. Plus, they made the list of the top six email marketing trends you need in your wheelhouse.

Whether you're new to newsletters–or looking to reimagine your current one–this guide is filled with the tips you need to start an email newsletter people look forward to receiving. We also give you a peek into how we've put this advice into practice in our Litmus newsletters.

READ ON TO LEARN:

1. Why offer email newslettters
2. Four questions to answer about your newsletter
3. How to create your newsletter (and free tools to do it!)
4. How to gain newsletter subscribers

Why offer email newsletters?

Email legend has it that the very first newsletter email was sent on December 22, 1977. Sent twice a month, it covered "technology, user, product, and legislative trends in graphic, record, and microcomputer communications."

It ran until 2001, and is credited for being the birth of what we now consider digital marketing across channels (including email!).

Newsletter emails have become a highly popular tactic used by B2B and B2C marketers across verticals, including non-profits, news organizations, independent thought leaders and contractors and consultants.

Here are some key benefits email newsletters can deliver:

- Establish brand trust and credibility
- Demonstrate the value your brand offers
- Build and nurture direct connections with subscribers
- Learn more about subscriber interests
- Increase brand awareness
- Encourage retention and engagement
- Increase revenue with paid ads/subscription models

FUN FACT:

The *New York Times* produces 50 different newsletters read by 15 million people a week.

Despite your industry, brand, or reasons for having an email newsletter, it should not be about a hard sell. Your content can be somewhat promotional in nature, but newsletters are generally meant to educate/entertain/inspire your audience. (If some money–whether directly or indirectly–follows from that, great!)

When in doubt, turn to Ann Handley's philosophy on email newsletters: consider them a bridge to the rest of your marketing.



Source: StoryDoc survey

Four questions to answer before launching your newsletter

1. WHO is this newsletter directed to?

Your newsletter can forge a personal and direct connection with your readers. But who are they?

Clearly defining the type of reader that you intend to reach with your newsletter is a critical step in marketing your newsletter, attracting subscribers, and consistently selecting the right content for it.

Write a brief sentence or two that succinctly explains who your ideal audience is. It will be the "north star" that keeps you focused when you market and select content for your newsletter.

Consider these examples for inspiration:

AXIOS

The email newsletter publisher has 30 different newsletters that span topics ranging from crypto to science–but its overall audience is well-defined. "Smart professionals who are engaged in their work life and curious about the world."

THE SKIMM

Launched in 2012, The Daily Skimm was created to be a short, simple "confidence booster" for urban women ages 22-34 to initiate conversations about current events.

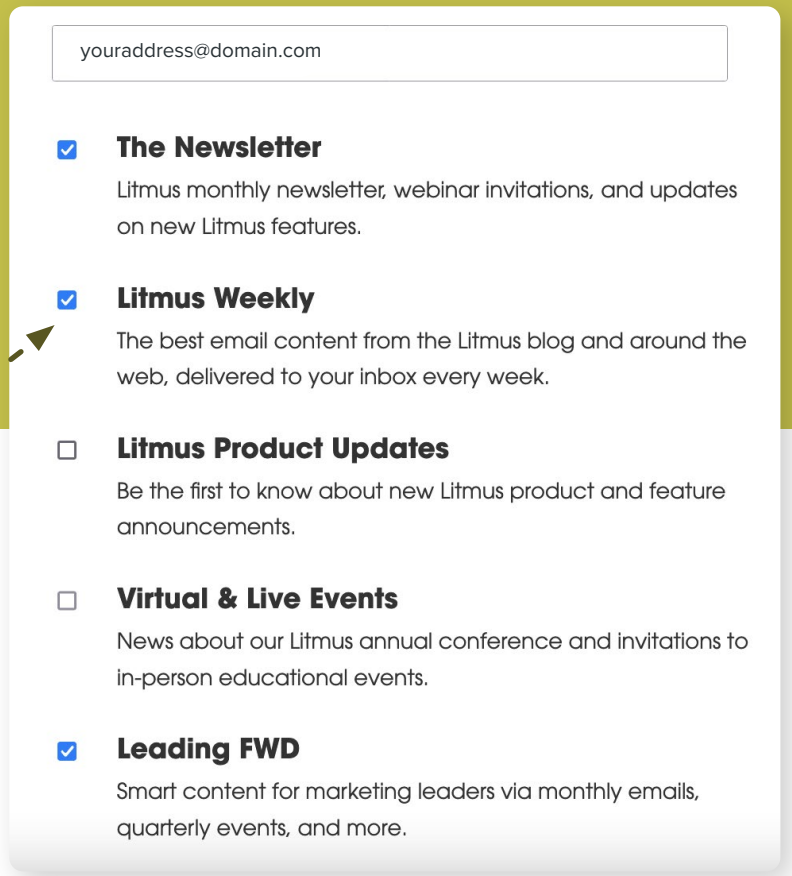
MORNING BREW

Its primary newsletter recently surpassed four million subscribers, but Morning Brew became a hit because of its clearly defined audience. It first targeted college students interested in business, with the purpose of making business news more enjoyable to read. As its readers age, it has evolved into speaking directly to young professionals.

If you'll offer a range of newsletters, describe the benefits from joining each. Let your subscribers choose what they want to receive in your email preference center.

The more you can tailor your newsletter to the right audience with segmentation, the more likely it is they'll love it. Plus, it makes it easier for you to hone in on the types of content they'll want to read.

This is how we present our newsletter options at Litmus



Litmus Email Newsletter Subscription Options

2. WHAT do you want to accomplish?

An email newsletter can accomplish many objectives. But you have to understand your unique "why."

Do you...

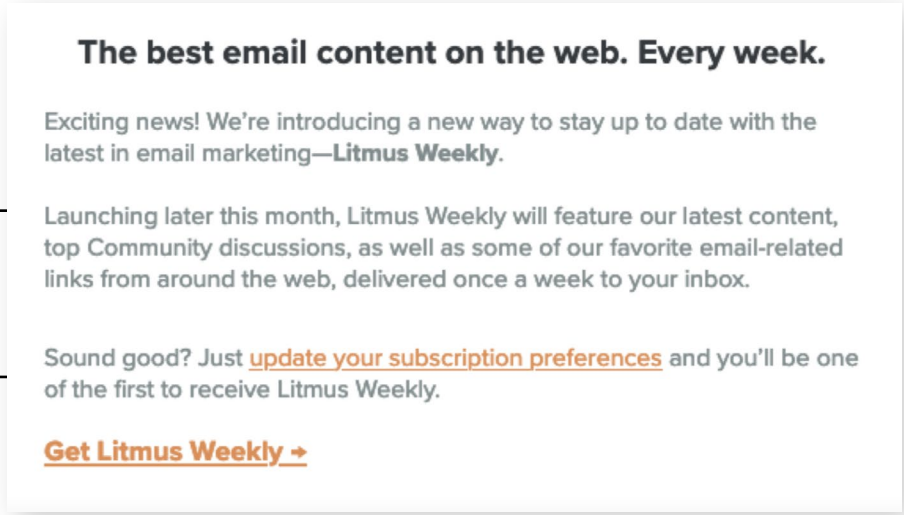
- Want to monetize the newsletter?
- Build a sense of community with your industry?
- Establish a more intimate/direct relationship with your subscribers
- Develop an owned channel to offer the occasional exclusive discount, referral discount, or product announcements?

Knowing what you want to get out of your newsletter is important. It will determine how you'll measure success, play a role in how often you'll produce your newsletter, and guide the types of content you'll include.

Over time, you might find that you get more out of your email newsletters than you expected (or intended).

In April 2016, we launched our first Litmus Weekly newsletter. “The goal was to build a sense of community among email marketers,” says Jaina Mistry, Litmus’ Director of Email Marketing. “We wanted to help email marketers do their jobs better by giving them the resources they needed to do that - whether they were Litmus content pieces or not.”

This was how we launched Litmus Weekly, way back in 2016:



The best email content on the web. Every week.

Exciting news! We’re introducing a new way to stay up to date with the latest in email marketing—**Litmus Weekly**.

Launching later this month, Litmus Weekly will feature our latest content, top Community discussions, as well as some of our favorite email-related links from around the web, delivered once a week to your inbox.

Sound good? Just update your subscription preferences and you’ll be one of the first to receive Litmus Weekly.

Get Litmus Weekly →

litmus

WEEKLY

Over the years, Litmus Weekly has delivered far more than we expected. “It’s been able to move the needle on business goals because we’ve been able to give that audience exactly what they want - great content delivered at a consistent cadence. That, in turn, has built a great amount of trust between Litmus and subscribers,” says Mistry.

With each send, we’ve learned more about what the audience enjoys and seems to deem valuable. To stay aligned with their needs, we’ve evolved the look and feel of Litmus Weekly a few times.

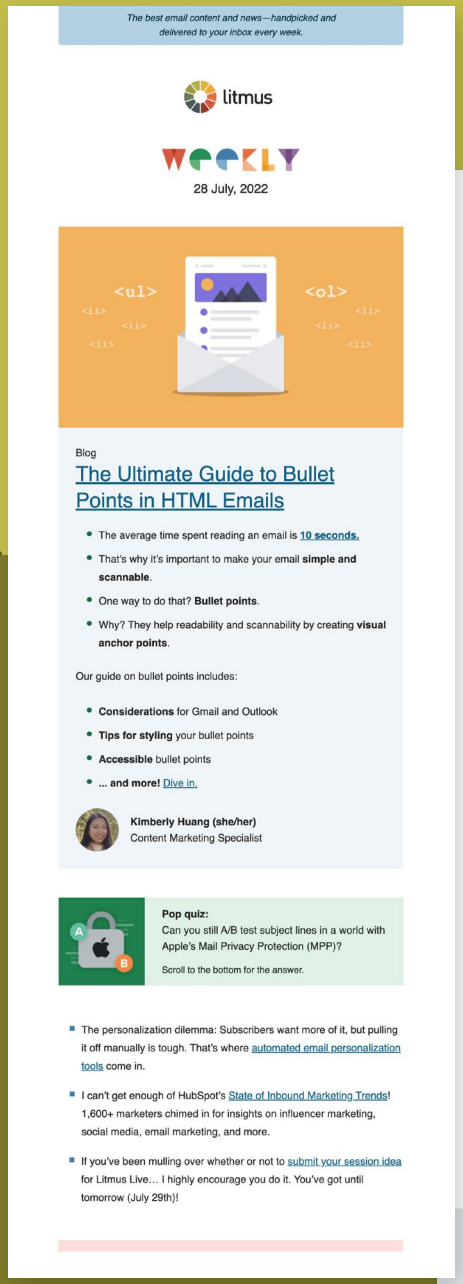
You can see its progression in these examples

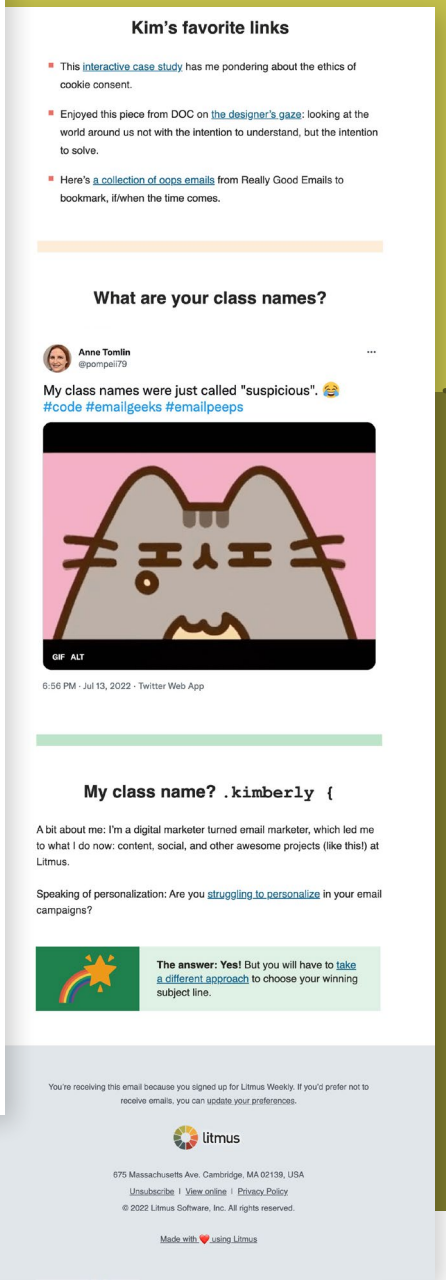
Evolution of Litmus Weekly

LITMUS WEEKLY IN 2016



LITMUS WEEKLY IN 2022





3. WHEN will the newsletter arrive in their inbox?

Should you send your newsletter emails weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or quarterly?

There's different advice out there for the ideal send frequency for email newsletters, but like so much in email marketing, the truth is, it depends.

Back into your "right" answer by focusing on these two elements:

CONSISTENCY

There is no magic formula for the ideal email send time–but consistency is important with newsletters. Showing up in your subscribers' inbox at the same time–whether that's 11 am every other Thursday, or 3 pm on the last Friday of the month– teaches them to expect your newsletter.

There may be rare occasions (like serious world events or holidays) that force you off that schedule, but bringing your email newsletter to their inbox at a predictable time and cadence works hand in hand with credibility and trust.

Think of your email newsletter as "on-demand" content your subscriber can rely on, when and if they want. Just as you expect to see that the next episode of your favorite streaming show dropped on HBO Max Thursday morning, you want subscribers to form that same expectation. They may not read it right away–but they know it's there when they're able.

CONTENT QUALITY

Putting out a good newsletter is hard work. It demands quality content that's interesting and relevant to your subscribers–whether you source that content internally, externally, or a combination of the two.

Be brutally honest about how much bandwidth your team really has to put into consistently creating a solid newsletter. You can always pick up steam once you find your stride, and learn more about what your subscribers want.

4. HOW will you measure if your newsletter is engaging?

We've already established that you can accomplish any number of objectives with your newsletter. But before settling on the "right" email marketing metrics, consider your goal.

When the intent is for people to consume your newsletter entirely in the inbox, for example, measuring click-through rates may not be the best metric. Instead, you may want to look at ways to include qualitative and quantitative measures–like how many people reply to your email newsletter.

Here are some other email newsletter measurement approaches to consider.

ESTABLISH BENCHMARKS AND COMPARE

The more you measure, the more you learn. That insight will help you determine a formula for what resonates with your audience, what's falling flat, and where you have new opportunities to test content, design, and functionality.

We recommend comparing each of your newsletters against past versions, using (at least) these email performance metrics:

- Click-through rate
- Open rate (and MPP open rate)*
- Read rate
- Unsubscribe rate
- Bounce rate

* **Note:** Since Apple's Mail Privacy Protection (MPP) went into effect in September 2021, the reliability of the open rate has been called into question. This will only impact the portion of your audience that has opted into MPP, but it underscores why you don't want to rely on "opens" as your only measure of email newsletter performance.

WHERE ARE PEOPLE CLICKING?

The success of your email newsletter is driven by many different factors, from content to visual appearance, to the audience. But by measuring which elements in your email are capturing attention in the form of clicks, you can slowly start to learn more about best practices for how to present your calls-to-action (CTAs), images, links in email body copy, and headlines.

WHAT TYPES OF CONTENT ARE PEOPLE CLICKING ON?

Your email newsletter will likely include a number of different content types–from new blog content, to informative stats, to event announcements, to polls, to pieces you didn't create but think your audience will enjoy.

Measure what (and where) they click from newsletter to newsletter to get a feel for the topics they're most responsive to, and the content types they prefer. As you see patterns, you can adapt your own approach to better mirror their preferences.



Source: StoryDoc survey

USE SENTIMENT MEASURES

Your email newsletter is about building a direct connection with your subscribers, and (ideally!) growing that audience over the long haul. What better way to know if your newsletter is hitting the mark than asking?

With the help of Litmus Personalize, powered by Kickdynamic, we use sentiment polls at the end of our email newsletters to get crowd feedback. These live measures are a great way to encourage reliable "signs of life" and invite crowd participation and engagement.



You might also consider using brief surveys to gauge sentiment, and "marrying" that feedback with any direct replies you receive about your email newsletter for a qualitative and quantitative feedback loop.

Create your email newsletter

Email newsletters offer plenty of opportunity to play with color, typography, visuals, and content. Before you dive into your options, remember email newsletters are meant to be:

- Visually appealing
- Scannable
- Functional
- Accessible
- Informative/Enjoyable/Engaging
- Relevant to the reader

Follow these steps to start creating:

1. CHOOSE YOUR TOOLS

There are many newsletter software tools you can lean on to simplify your email creation process, but naturally, we're a bit biased towards Litmus! Here, we start our design process using Figma.

Then, we pick and choose exactly how it will look and function using the elements and modules we've created and stored in Litmus Design Library.

This step helps us to streamline our email newsletter building process, eliminate redundant coding, and ensure brand consistency–while still allowing for plenty of creative freedom and flexibility.

And speaking of streamlined processes, we highly recommend using an email newsletter template. This reusable HTML file will make producing your email newsletters efficient, reliable, and scalable.

Claim your free Litmus newsletter tools!

Download your free Email Newsletter Template!

This Litmus Newsletter template is a straightforward email for updating subscribers with recent articles, featuring an image, description, and link for each article.

As an accessibility-focused template, it offers:

- Simplicity in design and code
- Responsive across devices
- Semantic markup
- Screen reader-friendly
- High contrast text
- Favors text over images
- Uses alternative text on images

And don't forget your -

Modular Starter **Template**

Modular Starter **Snippets**

2. SELECT YOUR SENDER NAME

Make sure your newsletter will be easily identifiable based on your sender name (also called your “from” name) in the inbox. For all the time and effort you put into designing and writing your email newsletter, our research indicates that your sender name is actually the strongest determinant of whether subscribers will open your message. (In fact, it’s even more important than the subject line).

Confirm that your sender name displays a real name–which could be your company name only, or your company name combined with that of an employee.

To boost your inbox credibility even further, consider taking steps to establish Brand Indicators for Message Identification (BIMI). Once established, it allows you to display a sender logo alongside your messages in the inbox, when verified under a set of BIMI specifications.

Pro tip: Strategize ways to address timely and relevant topics/ information, mixed with older original content that’s still pertinent/valuable.

3. GATHER CONTENT

Your email newsletter can be made up of any number of content types. (Just make sure to give creators of syndicated or third-party content proper credit.)

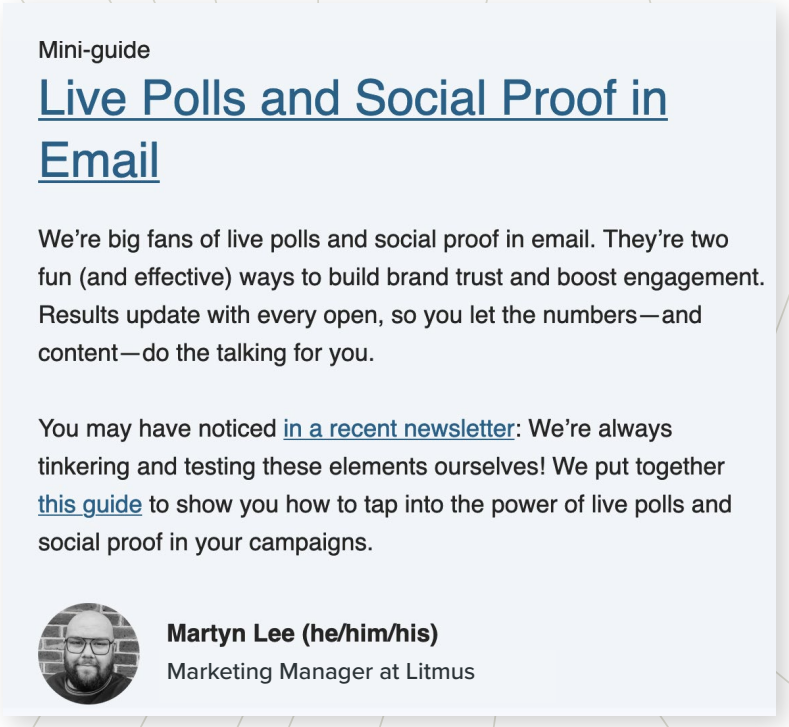
Consider these sources for email newsletter content:

- Blog posts/articles
- Short-form assets (listicles, infographics)
- Long-form assets (guides, ebooks, white papers)
- Internal training documents/tutorials
- Customer support Q&As
- Social media posts
- GIFs/memes
- Externally produced content
- Upcoming events
- Data visualizations

4. START CREATING

When writing and designing your email newsletter, think: short, sweet, and scannable. Here are some best practices we recommend–and apply to our own Litmus newsletters.

- **Use short headlines and subheads.** Change both in every edition to keep your content fresh.
- **Tie your headlines into your CTA button.** If someone's scanning and misses entire paragraphs of text, they may still click.
- **Use compelling images and pattern breaks.** This helps add visual interest and breaks up the copy so it's easier to digest.
- **Experiment with subject lines.** Think about how your subject line and preview text can encourage engagement from the reader. We use these to tease what the reader will learn in each of our newsletters.
- **Show your personality.** Various members of the Litmus content and email team alternate being the "host" of Litmus Weekly, to keep the personality fresh and relatable to all different types of email marketing practitioners.
- **Give them reasons to read.** Take your audience on a journey with lots of click throughs (with links) and calls to action. "Newsletter length is not as important as keeping your audience engaged (as long your message doesn't get clipped)," says Mistry.


Mini-guide

Live Polls and Social Proof in Email

We're big fans of live polls and social proof in email. They're two fun (and effective) ways to build brand trust and boost engagement. Results update with every open, so you let the numbers—and content—do the talking for you.

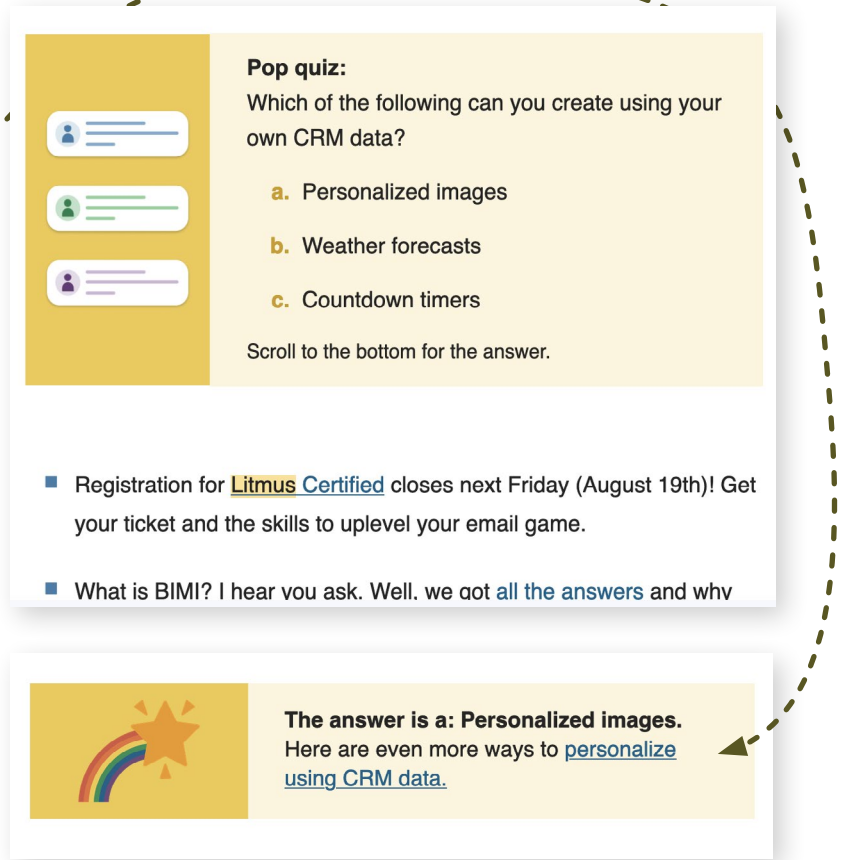
You may have noticed in a recent newsletter: We're always tinkering and testing these elements ourselves! We put together this guide to show you how to tap into the power of live polls and social proof in your campaigns.

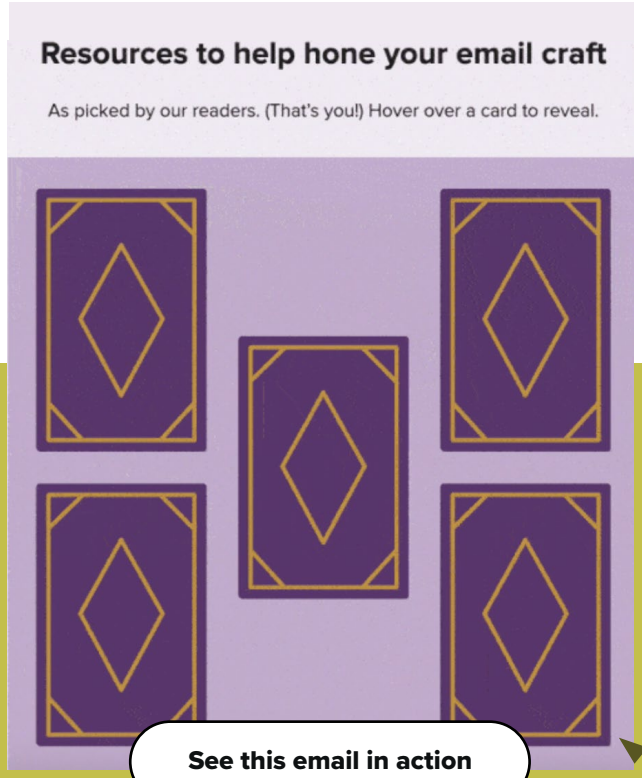
Martyn Lee (he/him/his)
Marketing Manager at Litmus

How we show unique personalities in Litmus Weekly

- **Train your audience to scroll.** We place a quiz near the top of our Litmus Weekly emails–but don't reveal the answer until they get to the bottom.

  You can see how we approach it in the example here



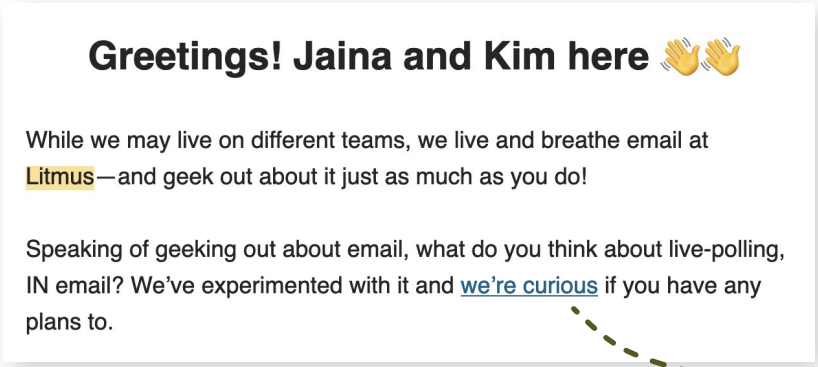


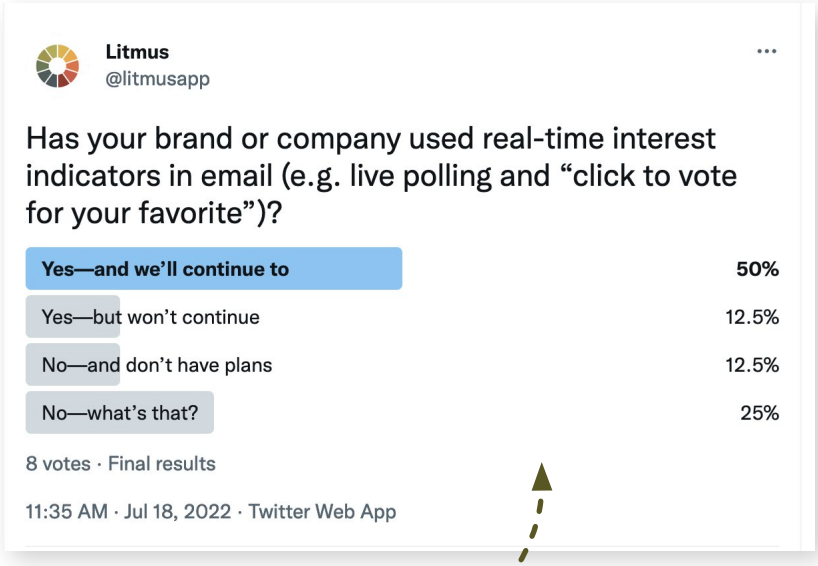
- **Play with features your audience values.** Your email newsletter is your chance to show your audience you "get" them. We know our fellow email marketers are interested in ways to level up their email performance, so we experiment with features like animation and interactivity, live polls, and more.

  Interactive flip cards in Litmus' May 2022 newsletter

- **Incorporate a feedback mechanism.** Whether you ask your audience to provide a simple thumbs up/down on whether they liked your newsletter, invite direct replies, or pose a question intended for a response on social media. Feedback is a win-win.

  These images show how we used a July Litmus Weekly edition to ask subscribers to share their opinion on Twitter, by clicking on our email newsletter.







Make it accessible

- **Accessibility matters.** "Don't forget to add ALT text–even if the image is only decorative and/or you're linking an image," says Carin Slater, Email Marketing Specialist at Litmus.

  And of course, you can catch issues–accessibility or otherwise– when you test your email in Litmus before you send.

SECTION 4

Build your email subscriber audience

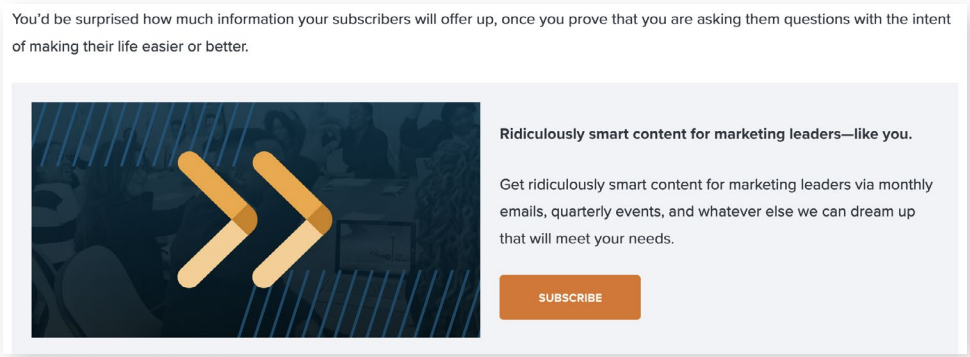
You've identified who you are trying to reach with your email newsletter, and how it will speak to their needs, interests, and desires. (The more clear you are on that, the easier convincing them to subscribe to your newsletter becomes).

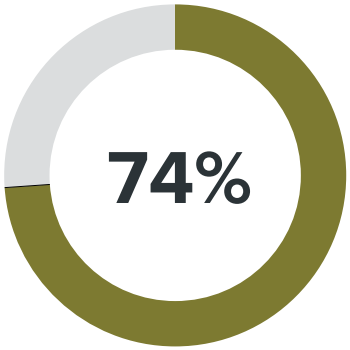
Try these tactics to build your audience:

1. **PROMOTE YOUR NEWSLETTER (AND WHERE TO SIGN UP) IN RELEVANT CONTENT**

   Our Leading FWD newsletter is geared toward marketing leaders. It features original Litmus and third-party content that we think is likely to appeal to marketing leaders.

   To promote it to this audience, we include a CTA encouraging readers of our Leading FWD blog posts to subscribe to the Leading FWD newsletter. We also promote it during our Litmus Leading FWD quarterly webinars, and on social media.





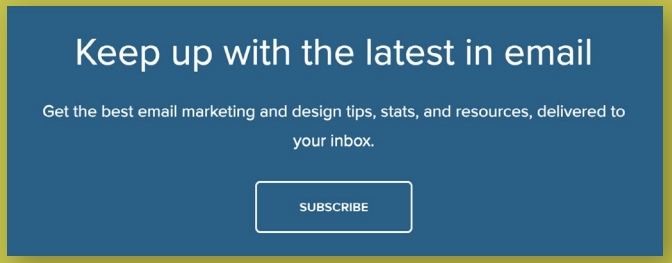
Percent of people subscribed to 1-10 email newsletters

Source: StoryDoc survey



Don't forget your website as another source of "low-hanging fruit" you can use to tell visitors–new and repeat–about your newsletter.

We include the block you see below on different pages of the Litmus website to bring awareness to our newsletters. Those who click are then taken to our subscription preference center, to choose the type of content they want to receive from us.

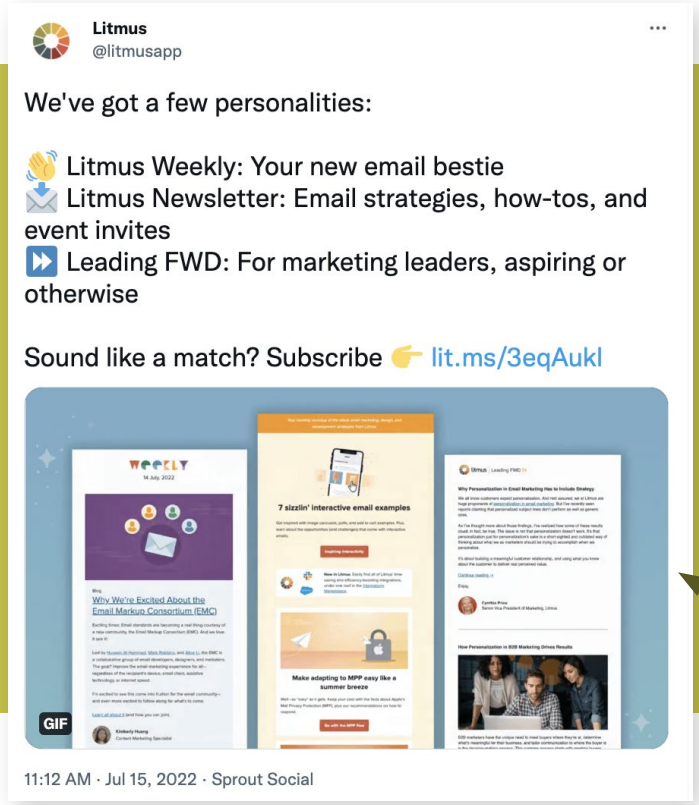


2. EXPERIMENT WITH TARGETED SITE POP UPS

We added a highly targeted “email geeks” pop up banner (powered by Mutiny) to our top developer-focused blog posts to encourage sign ups for our Litmus Weekly newsletter.

The pop up box you see below generated nearly 400 new newsletter subscribers in three months.





3. SHOUT IT OUT ON SOCIAL

LIke your website, social media is your chance to promote your newsletter and gain subscribers. Instead of just telling people what your newsletter offers, you can also get creative with showing them exactly what will turn up in their inbox.

The example shows how we apply this approach.

And finally...

GET READY FOR LAUNCH!

Newsletters are a cornerstone of email marketing—and you're now armed with the critical information and tools you need to take the leap with yours.



Give modular email creation a try

Litmus makes it easy to go modular. Store and organize your snippets and partials in Design Library. Then, quickly build and QA test emails with Visual Editor in Litmus Builder. It even comes pre-loaded with a fully optimized email template with modules so you can jump right in.

START YOUR FREE TRIAL

LET'S STAY IN TOUCH?

Get how-tos, inspiration, and more from our newsletters—for email pros, by email pros.

Subscribe Today

litmus

A LITTLE ABOUT US

Litmus provides the leading email personalization, optimization, and collaboration software for marketers. From pre-send campaign development, testing, and AI-driven content recommendations through Kickdynamic, to post-send insights for future content optimization, Litmus improves marketing performance and boosts customer engagement.

Drive conversion and revenue with Litmus' suite of solutions that enable users to efficiently build, test, and collaborate on large volumes of emails, while simultaneously creating highly personalized email experiences at scale.

With offices in Boston, San Mateo, and London and backed by Spectrum Equity, Litmus is used by major global brands across every industry, including 80% of the Fortune 100, the top 10 retailers, 9 of the top 10 ecommerce brands and U.S. banks, and 23 of the top 25 U.S. advertising agencies. Learn more about Litmus at litmus.com, subscribe to the Litmus blog, or follow us on social media—Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook.