



How to Connect with Your Audience Through Email

THE E-NEWSLETTER IS ALIVE AND WELL

BY GIGI ROSENBERG



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Twice a month, artist Patrice A. Federspiel (artofaloha.com) sends an email newsletter or e-newsletter to her 2,500 subscribers.

"I strive to both instruct others as to what the life of an artist can be like and to encourage everyone to 'go for it' — whatever their 'it' may be," she said.

In the five years since Federspiel began sending her newsletter, it's become "the most important marketing tool I have. It keeps me in touch with hundreds of people each month," she said.

But email seems so old-fashioned. Are people even reading e-newsletters anymore? The answer is a resounding "yes," according to a recent *New York Times* article.

"Newsletters are clicking because readers have grown tired of the endless stream of information on the Internet, and having something finite and recognizable show up in your inbox can impose order on all that chaos," David Carr wrote in his column, *The Media Equation*.

MailChimp, one of several companies offering business-to-consumer email services, sends more than 10 billion emails per month with 10,000 new users signing up every day.

"The email newsletter is a direct connection with patrons.

There's not a middle person like there is with Facebook or Twitter where you need to play by their rules," said Dan Blank of WeGrowMedia



1 *Roots I*, 2014, by Patrice A. Federspiel. Watercolor and gouache on 300# Arches watercolor paper, 30" x 13". Copyright © 2014 Patrice A. Federspiel. Used by permission of the artist. 2 Dan Blank of WeGrowMedia.



(wegrowmedia.com) who coaches authors and other creative professionals on how to connect with an audience.

An e-newsletter is a private message between you, the artist and your subscribers. “Sending an email newsletter is more personal than posting to social media,” Federspiel said. “I feel more comfortable reaching out to people who have opted to hear from me.”

With a tweet or a Facebook post, you will miss many of your followers. But “no matter what, people check their email,” Blank said.

A newsletter’s overt purpose shouldn’t be sales. You would never send a newsletter with the subject line “Buy my art” even if that’s what you eventually want your audience to do. This newsletter’s main purpose is to maintain and build a relationship with your audience — some of whom may later purchase an artwork or attend a workshop.

“SENDING AN EMAIL NEWSLETTER IS MORE PERSONAL THAN POSTING TO SOCIAL MEDIA. ... I FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE REACHING OUT TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE OPTED TO HEAR FROM ME. ~ PATRICE A. FEDERSPIEL

START WITH YOUR LIST

To get started with an e-newsletter or to make your current one more effective, build or expand your list of subscribers.

If you’re just beginning, “start with people you know,” Blank advised. Artists can sometimes have “this romantic vision of this beautiful, sophisticated, tasteful audience that doesn’t include family or friends,” he said. But that beautiful list of perfect people usually doesn’t exist in reality. If your biggest fans are family and friends, for now, that’s fine.

Blank advises artists to then look beyond friends and family to all of their affiliations — the PTA, Toastmasters, the schools you attended and so on — and ask people already in your circles if you can add them to your newsletter list.

In most cases, you need to ask permission before adding someone to your list. (I say most cases because when I started out, I assumed good friends and close colleagues would be OK if I added them.) But if you’re not sure, ask. If you’re asking someone in an email, you can send them an example of one newsletter and ask if they’d be interested in subscribing. If I’m talking to someone in person, I might say “I’d love to invite you to my next reading. Can I add your name to my newsletter list?” Just make sure that whoever you’re asking has a reason to want to receive your news. A good friend might want to cheer you on even if she might not buy artwork. A prospective student wants to know when you’re teaching. A collector wants to see more of your work and receive an invitation to your opening.

When I coach artists, one of their assignments is to amass a list of 200-300 newsletter subscribers. If you think of all of your affiliations it shouldn’t be too hard to build a list of that size.

To keep growing your list, “have all paths lead to your newsletter,” Blank said. For example, add a link to subscribe to your newsletter in your email signature and place a sign-up form on every page of your website. (A designer can make

this look tasteful and not like a sales pitch on every page.)

"Give them a reason to sign up," said Blank, who advises artists to offer a giveaway to encourage potential subscribers. It doesn't have to be fancy. "It could be a list of 10 ways you get inspiration or access to a small digital print. Whatever it is, it should not be a cost to you," he said.

Then, collect names wherever you go. When I teach, I ask participants in my classes to sign up for my newsletter. Artists can have a sign-up at gallery shows, art fairs and everywhere you show up as an artist.

KEEP IT PERSONAL

The three artists interviewed for this article send out newsletters either once or twice a month — that's 12 to 24 times a year. Blank recommends a weekly newsletter, which is what he sends every Friday.

"Weekly is like a TV show," Blank said. "Would you watch a TV show that was on every three weeks?" Probably not. "If it's weekly then if they miss one issue, they catch up quickly. With a monthly newsletter, if they miss one issue then they haven't heard from you in eight weeks."

Also, with monthly it's too easy to let the deadline slide and before you know it, you haven't sent out a newsletter in half a year. So, whatever your schedule, stick to it.

But I don't have anything to say, you might be thinking.

Remember that the operative word in newsletter is letter. It's not an article and it's certainly not a newspaper. The most common mistake artists make is to cram too much in each issue. They include all of their upcoming events, too many photos and a long, rambling letter.

The best newsletters include a short letter written in a personal tone of voice with a couple of great photographs and an invitation or call to action that sounds fun and exciting, not like a sales pitch.

7 TIPS FOR BETTER E-NEWSLETTERS

1. Your e-newsletter is a letter that one person will be reading alone. Make it a personal, heartfelt note.
2. To keep it personal, use your own name in the "from" line, not the name of your company.
3. The "subject" line should entice your audience to open the email. I aim for subject lines that are short and to the point and include an action. For example, when I'm announcing a New York workshop, I write "Meet me in New York City." For more ideas, see Campaign Monitor's list of eight subject line formulas: bit.ly/subjectlineformulas
4. Include at least one large photo of a recent work with a caption. If it's related to the topic of your note, even better.
5. Stick to your schedule. The only way to see if the newsletter helps your bottom line is to publish on schedule month after month, or week after week, for a year.
6. Build your mailing list every day wherever you show up as an artist. Include a link to subscribe in your email signature and a sign-up form on your website.
7. Don't focus on who and how many unsubscribe. Instead, focus on the subscribers who still want to hear from you.

Some examples of topics for a newsletter include:

- An invitation to an upcoming show with photos of your work and details of the venue and anything else that will entice someone to attend.
- An update and photos from a recent show.
- A recent discovery you've made in the studio.
- An announcement of a residency you've won and what you plan to create while on the residency.

In addition to your one topic, you can include links to your website, your workshop schedule and so on.



4 Birth of an Island, 2014, by Patrice A. Federspiel. Watercolor and gouache on 300# Arches watercolor paper, 22" x 30". Copyright © 2014 Patrice A. Federspiel. Used by permission of the artist.



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“ IT GIVES ME A MONTHLY FOCUS. ... WHEN I HAVE TO PUT A NEWSLETTER TOGETHER, I NEED TO SIT DOWN AND THINK ABOUT WHAT IS COMING UP THAT IS NEWSWORTHY. ~ HELEN HIEBERT



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Does the newsletter help the bottom line? Yes, Hiebert said it helps her market her workshops and sell books.

“I get fan letters each time I send out a newsletter,” she said, “which makes me feel like it is worthwhile.”

The newsletter also “gives me a monthly focus,” she said. “When I have to put a newsletter together, I need to sit down and think about what is coming up that is newsworthy. So in that regard, it is also a planning tool.”

CHOOSE A NEWSLETTER SERVICE

After you’ve built your list, choose a newsletter service that will format your text and photos, manage your subscriber list and send the email. If you have less than 2,000 subscribers, MailChimp offers one service that is completely free. That means you can download your list of subscribers, use their templates and send your e-newsletter at no cost.

MailChimp offers tutorials so if you have patience and a little technical skill, you could probably make and send your newsletter on your own. Campaign Monitor is another popular service that artists use. The templates are beautifully designed and Campaign Monitor doesn’t add its name and logo to the bottom of every newsletter, unlike some other newsletter services. Some artists like this feature because they don’t like to host what feels like an advertisement — even if it’s at the end.

Blank advises you to spend 30 minutes looking at a few services, pick one that you like best and get started. You can make a free account, fool around with templates and send tests at no cost. No matter which service you choose, you can always transfer your subscriber list to a new service if later on you discover one you like better.



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6 *Color Song*, 2012, by Dreama Tolle Perry. Oil on panel, 12" x 12". 7 *Sunshine Dreams*, 2012, by Dreama Tolle Perry. Oil on panel, 8" x 8". Copyright © 2012 Dreama Tolle Perry. Used by permission of the artist. 8 *The Wish*, 2014, by Helen Hiebert. Handmade paper, bamboo, wood, 7' x 7' x 7', an interactive and multi-sensory permanent installation at Anythink Huron Street Library in Denver, Colorado. Copyright © 2014 Helen Hiebert. Used by permission of the artist.

“ THE BEST WAY TO KEEP IMPROVING YOUR NEWSLETTER IS TO READ THE ONES THAT ARRIVE IN YOUR EMAIL INBOX. ~ GIGI ROSENBERG

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Dear Gigi,

Happy New Year! I'm off and running (well, skiing, swimming and making LOTS of paper!) I hope your year is off to a good start!



2ND ANNUAL RED CLIFF PAPER RETREAT

Registration is now open for the Red Cliff Paper Retreat, which will take place in my studio September 11-13, 2015. You are invited to my studio in the heart of the Rocky Mountains to cut, fold, layer, collage, weave, glue and make paper as you explore its potential in two and three dimensions. This year's retreat has a theme: Paper Panels. We will focus on panel structures including innovative book structures, folding screens, and lantern panels. Papermaking techniques will include standing and watermarking on flat sheets and working sculpturally with abaca.

WORKSHOPS

I'm delighted to be offering workshops around the West this winter and spring (I'm working on some Midwest and East Coast events in the future). Click [here](#) for details about ALL of my upcoming workshops. Here's the list:

JANUARY

Breckenridge, Light Catchers, Jan 24

FEBRUARY

San Francisco Center for the Book: Paper Balloons, Tubes & Vessels, Feb 6/7

MARCH

Denver Guild of Book Workers & Book Arts League: Paper Weaving, Mar 7/8
University of Utah: Experimental Papermaking, Mar 20/21

APRIL

Durango Arts Center: Paper Possibilities, April 18/19

MAY

Two Hands Paperie, Boulder: Playing With Paper, May 2
Two Hands Paperie, Boulder: Collapsible Inflatable Paper, May 3



CODEx BOOK FAIR, Feb 8-11

I'll be exhibiting once again at the CODEx International Book Fair in Richmond, California. I've been ultra busy these past two months working on my newest book, *Interlaced* (mock-up page spread above, colored sheets of abaca you see at the top of this newsletter will feature paper cuts by Beatrice Coron). The edition of 25 contains visual and written reflections about paper, light, geometry, numbers and color.

If you live in the Bay Area or are traveling to Codex, please stop by my booth! I'll have the first copy of *Interlaced* plus paper, my other artists' books, and a few surprises.

I continue to blog weekly about my adventures with paper. Don't miss The Sunday Paper - [sign up here](#).

Waiting you a wonderful 2015.

Helen



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The best way to keep improving your newsletter is to read the ones that arrive in your email inbox. Notice what makes you open one and what makes you delete another without opening it. Study subject lines and greetings. Scrutinize captions. What do you respond to? Then make a list of 12 topics that you're excited about and that you think will interest your readers and write your first letter.

With time, you may find that a newsletter becomes an enjoyable part of your marketing practice. "I love figuring out what to write, editing, pairing paintings with the words, and designing the look and feel," Federspiel said. "A newsletter is a lot of work, but for me it truly is a labor of love." **PA**

Gigi Rosenberg is the editor of Professional Artist. She's also an artist coach and the author of *The Artist's Guide to Grant Writing* (Watson-Guptill, 2010). She's been a guest commentator on Oregon Public Broadcasting, performed at Seattle's On The Boards, and been published by Seal Press, Poets & Writers, and Parenting. Visit gigirosenberg.com or reach her at grosenberg@professionalartistmag.com.

[9] A recent edition of Helen Hiebert's e-newsletter. [10] *Mother Tree*, 2010, by Helen Hiebert. Handmade paper, thread, wooden armature, 7' x 5' x 5'. Copyright © Helen Hiebert. Used by permission of the artist. [11] Helen Hiebert