RICOCHET
ASSOCIATION TRANSFORMATION

Run your newsletters like a newsroom.

Apply publishing best practices for greater impact.

PRESENTER
Chris Gloede, CAE — Chief Consultant, Ricochet

Hilton Anaheim
Friday, July 10, 2026

62%

of newsletter readers say they *don't read most* of the newsletters they get.

71%
subscribe to fewer than 5 newsletters

3%
call newsletters their preferred news platform

Source: Pew Research Center, "Email Newsletters as a Source of News," February 2026 (survey of 5,153 U.S. adults).

The channel you already own.

Members still choose email — the fight is for the read, not the address.

61%

of members say **email is their primary way** to stay connected to their association.

51% already say they get **too many messages**

> Your publication needs to be a must-read, not a maybe-read.

Source: Higher Logic, 2025 Association Member Experience Report; Pew Research Center, February 2026.

Run it like a newsroom.

The modern newsroom.

One newsletter, four jobs — and on a small staff, you're wearing every hat.

Publisher

Strategy, money, marketplace fit.



Editor-in-Chief

Audience, content, design direction.



Managing Editor

Operations, calendar, layout, quality.



Digital Editor

Platforms, deliverability, data, metrics.



The map for the next hour: one act per hat, then an AI performance review of all four.

Wearing the Publisher hat.

Strategy first: why does this newsletter exist, and who is it fighting for attention?



Publisher
Strategy & money

Editor-in-Chief
Audience & content

Managing Editor
Operations & quality

Digital Editor
Delivery & data

Choose your primary M.

Every newsletter exists for money, mission, or membership — pick your primary purpose.

Money

Advertising, sponsorships, and subscription revenue.

Mission

Advancing the cause — some mission publications rightly lose money.

Membership

Gated value that to drive acquisition or reinforce member value.

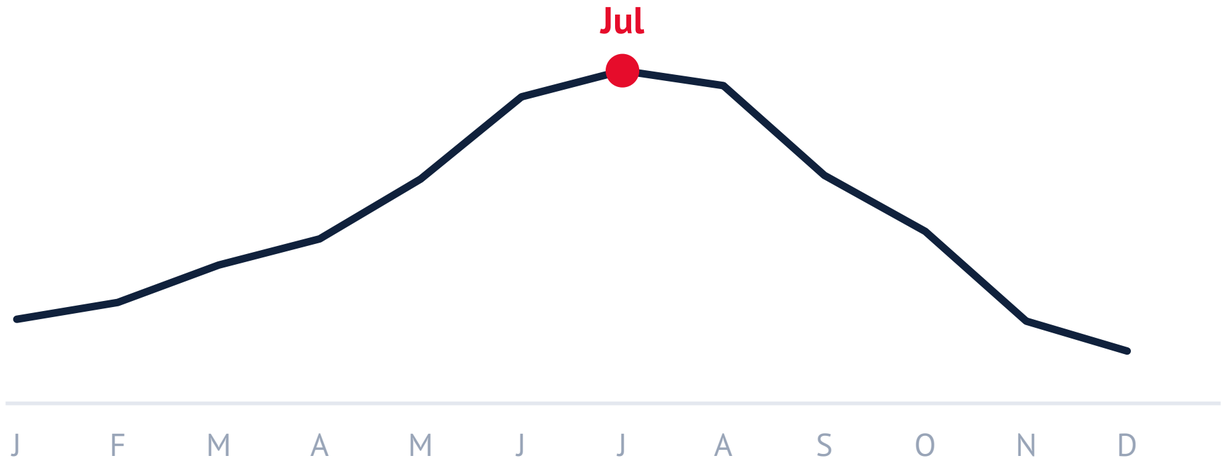
Source: Ricochet, Association Newsletter Success Certificate Course.

Set your portfolio and cadence on purpose.

How many publications, how often — set deliberately, not by habit.

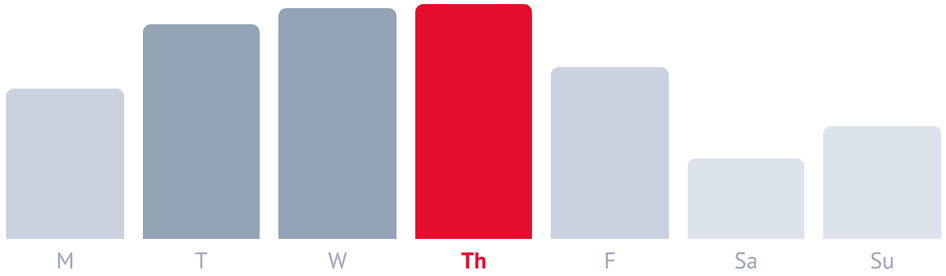
Engagement across the year

Peaks **June–August**, sags November–December.



Best day to send

Tue–Thu win clicks — **Thursday best**, Saturday weakest.



Source: Higher Logic, 2025–2026 Association Email Benchmark Report (~1,500 associations, 2B+ emails).

Know your attention marketplace.

Your competitor isn't another association — it's everything else in the inbox.



138%

jump in paid newsletter subscription revenue on the largest creator platform in one year **($8M → $19M)**. The for-profit newsletter economy is professionalizing fast.

> **The publisher's move:** name your five closest competitors, then say what you offer that they can't.

Source: beehiiv, State of Newsletters 2026 (28B emails analyzed); Ricochet, Association Newsletter Success Certificate Course.

Wearing the Editor-in-Chief hat.

The product: who it's for, what goes in it, and what it looks like.

Publisher
Strategy & money



Editor-in-Chief
Audience & content

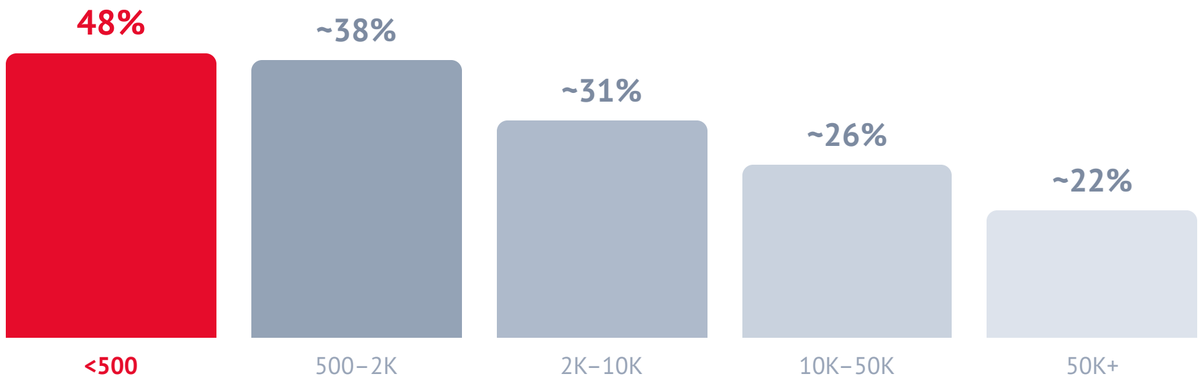
Managing Editor
Operations & quality

Digital Editor
Delivery & data

Target smaller, win bigger.

The most counterintuitive finding in association email: small lists massively outperform.

Engagement declines at every list-size tier



Average open rate by send-list size.

>8%

clicks on lists under 500 — **several times** the engagement of large blasts.

84% of members say a personalized experience is important.

> **The EIC's move:** audit lists annually and segment by role, interest, and career stage.

Source: Higher Logic, 2025–2026 Association Email Benchmark Report.

You don't always have to write it all.

DIY

Original work from staff or volunteers — highest cost, highest differentiation.

Repurposed

Partner- or third-party content, credited and reframed for your reader.

Summarized

Synthesized versions of longer pieces — where AI earns its keep.

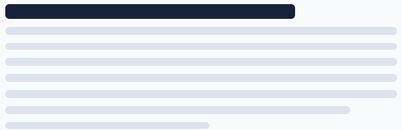
Remixed

Reformatted content — article → infographic → social clip.

Source: Ricochet, Association Newsletter Success Certificate Course.

Pick an archetype with intentionality.

The five newsletter design archetypes — associations ignore the big-picture layout (pun intended).

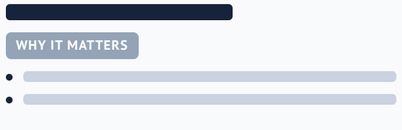


Long-form

E.G. NEW YORK TIMES

The whole article lives in the email — full value without leaving the inbox.

Common fit: deep advocacy and hill policy updates.

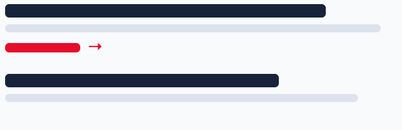


Scannable

E.G. AXIOS

Bolding, bullets, and labeled sections. Brief by design — it respects limited time.

Common fit: association news, education, event digests.



Teaser

E.G. WIRED

Punchy headlines and short intros that drive clicks out to your website.

Common fit: association news, education, event digests.

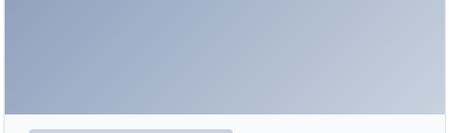


Curator

E.G. SMARTBRIEF

A digest of the best outside sources with light commentary — it makes you the trusted voice.

Common fit: industry news digests.



Imagery

E.G. ELLE DECOR

High-impact photography with minimal text — sparks an emotional connection.

Common fit: social-first, image-forward, next-generation readers.

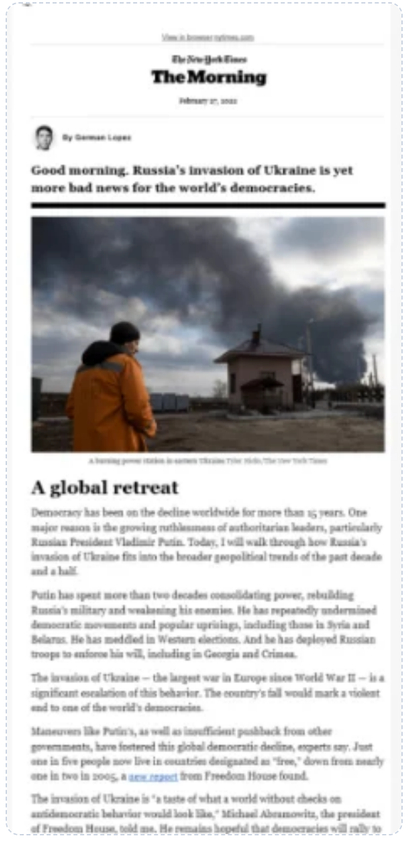
Source: Ricochet, Association Newsletter Success Certificate Course.

RICOCHET
ASSOCIATION TRANSFORMATION

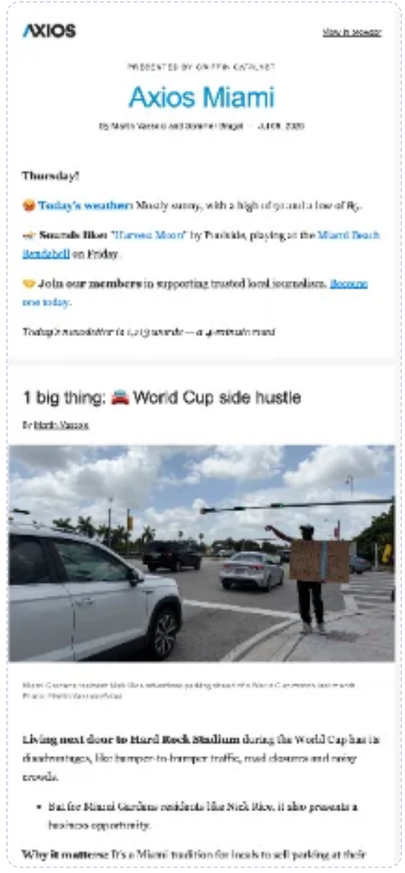
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Commercial newsletters are the benchmark.

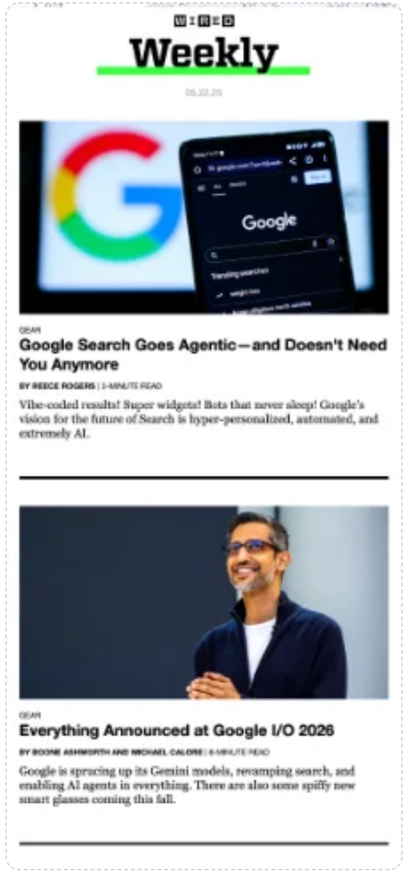
Long-form
E.G. NEW YORK TIMES


The New York Times
The Morning
By Damian Lopez
Good morning. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is yet more bad news for the world's democracies.
A global retreat
Democracy has been on the decline worldwide for more than 15 years. One major reason is the growing ruthlessness of authoritarian leaders, particularly Russian President Vladimir Putin. Today, I will walk through how Russia's invasion of Ukraine fits into the broader geopolitical trends of the past decade and a half.
Putin has spent more than two decades consolidating power, rebuilding Russia's military and weakening his enemies. He has repeatedly undermined democratic movements and popular uprisings, including those in Syria and Belarus. He has meddled in Western elections. And he has deployed Russian troops to enforce his will, including in Georgia and Crimea.
The invasion of Ukraine — the largest war in Europe since World War II — is a significant escalation of this behavior. The country's fall would mark a violent end to one of the world's democracies.
Maneuvers like Putin's, as well as insufficient pushback from other governments, have fostered this global democratic decline, experts say. Just one in five people now live in countries designated as "free," down from nearly one in two in 2005, a new report from Freedom House found.
The invasion of Ukraine is "a taste of what a world without checks on antidemocratic behavior would look like," Michael Abramowitz, the president of Freedom House, told me. He remains hopeful that democracies will rally to

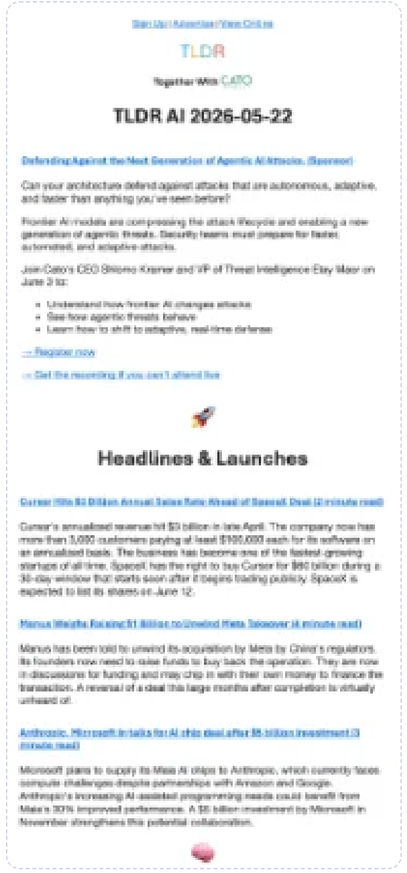
Scannable
E.G. AXIOS


AXIOS
View in browser
Axios Miami
Thursday!
Today's weather: Mostly sunny, with a high of 91 and a low of 83.
Sounds like: "Harvest Moon" by Pushkin, playing at the Miami Beach Bandshell on Friday.
Join our members in supporting trusted local journalism. Become one today.
Today's newsletter is 1,213 words — a 4-minute read.
1 big thing: 🚘 World Cup side hustle
By Mark Vargas
Living next door to Hard Rock Stadium during the World Cup has its disadvantages, like bumper-to-bumper traffic, road closures and noisy crowds.
But for Miami Gardens residents like Nick Rice, it also presents a business opportunity.
Why it matters: It's a Miami tradition for locals to sell parking at their

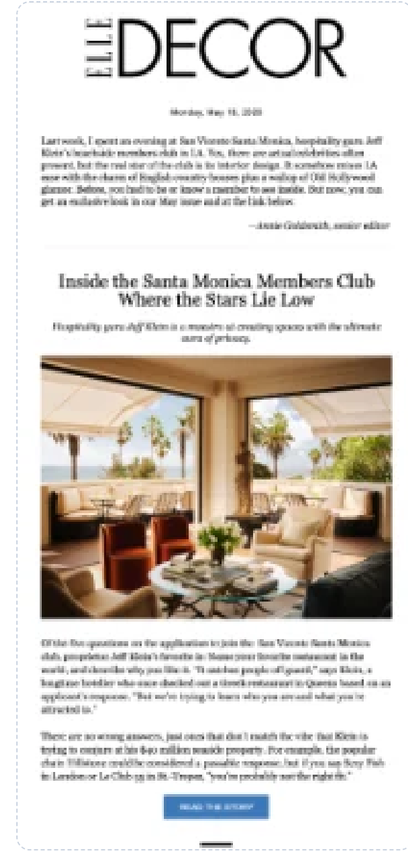
Teaser
E.G. WIRED


WIRED
Weekly
GEAR
Google Search Goes Agentic—and Doesn't Need You Anymore
BY REECE ROGERS | 3-MINUTE READ
Vibe-coded results! Super widgets! Bots that never sleep! Google's vision for the future of Search is hyper-personalized, automated, and extremely AI.
GEAR
Everything Announced at Google I/O 2026
BY BOONE ASHWORTH AND MICHAEL CALORE | 6-MINUTE READ
Google is sprucing up its Gemini models, revamping search, and enabling AI agents in everything. There are also some spiffy new smart glasses coming this fall.

Curator
E.G. SMARTBRIEF


TLDR
Together With CATO
TLDR AI 2026-05-22
Defending Against the Next Generation of Agentic AI Attacks. (Sponsor)
Can your architecture defend against attacks that are autonomous, adaptive, and faster than anything you've seen before?
Frontier AI models are compressing the attack lifecycle and enabling a new generation of agentic threats. Security teams must prepare for faster, automated, and adaptive attacks.
Join Cato's CEO Shlomo Kramer and VP of Threat Intelligence Etay Maor on June 3 to:
Understand how frontier AI changes attacks
See how agentic threats behave
Learn how to shift to adaptive, real-time defense
→ Register now
→ Get the recording if you can't attend live
Headlines & Launches
Cursor Hits $2 Billion Annual Sales Rate Ahead of SpaceX Deal (2-minute read)
Cursor's annualized revenue hit $2 billion in late April. The company now has more than 1,000 customers paying at least $100,000 each for its software on an annualized basis. The business has become one of the fastest-growing startups of all time. SpaceX has the right to buy Cursor for $60 billion during a 30-day window that starts soon after it begins trading publicly. SpaceX is expected to list its shares on June 12.
Manus Weighs Raising $1 Billion to Unwind Meta Takeover (4-minute read)
Manus has been told to unwind its acquisition by Meta by China's regulators. Its founders now need to raise funds to buy back the operation. They are now in discussions for funding and may chip in with their own money to finance the transaction. A reversal of a deal this large months after completion is virtually unheard of.
Anthropic, Microsoft in talks for AI chip deal after $5 billion investment (3 minute read)
Microsoft plans to supply its Maia AI chips to Anthropic, which currently faces compute challenges despite partnerships with Amazon and Google. Anthropic's increasing AI-assisted programming needs could benefit from Maia's 30% improved performance. A $5 billion investment by Microsoft in November strengthens this potential collaboration.

Imagery
E.G. ELLE DECOR


ELLE DECOR
Monday, May 18, 2026
Last week, I spent an evening at San Vicente Santa Monica, hospitality guru Jeff Klein's boardside members club in L.A. Yes, there are sat tables/celebrities often present, but the real star of the club is its interior design. It somehow mixes LA ease with the charm of English country houses plus a wallop of Old Hollywood glamour. Before, you had to be or know a member to see inside. But now, you can get an exclusive look in our May issue and at the link below.
—Annie Goldsmith, senior editor
Inside the Santa Monica Members Club Where the Stars Lie Low
Hospitality guru Jeff Klein is a master at creating spaces with the ultimate aura of privacy.
Of the five questions on the application to join the San Vicente Santa Monica club, proprietor Jeff Klein's favorite is: Name your favorite restaurant in the world, and describe why you like it. "It catches people off guard," says Klein, a longtime hotelier who once checked out a Greek restaurant in Queens based on an applicant's response. "But we're trying to learn who you are and what you're attracted to."
There are no wrong answers, just ones that don't match the vibe that Klein is trying to conjure at his $40 million seaside property. For example, the popular chain Hillstone could be considered a passable response, but if you say Sexy Fish in London or Le Club 55 in St.-Tropez, "you're probably not the right fit."

Source: Ricochet, Association Newsletter Success Certificate Course.

Wear the Managing Editor hat.

Operations: the calendar, the quality bar, and the layout.

Publisher
Strategy & money

Editor-in-Chief
Audience & content

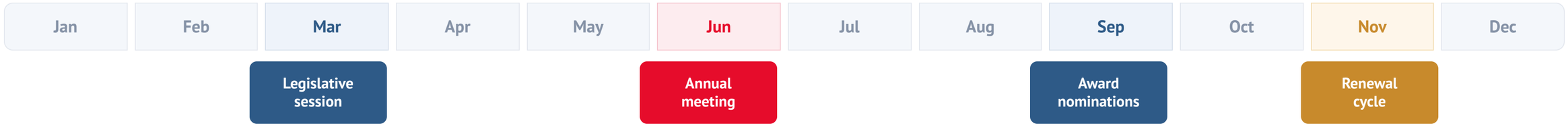


Managing Editor
Operations & quality

Digital Editor
Delivery & data

Run a calendar, not a scramble.

A full-year content calendar turns every issue from a crisis into a checklist.



Build the year around your seasonal anchors.

Lock themes early: 4–6 weeks out for monthlies, 14-10 days for weeklies.

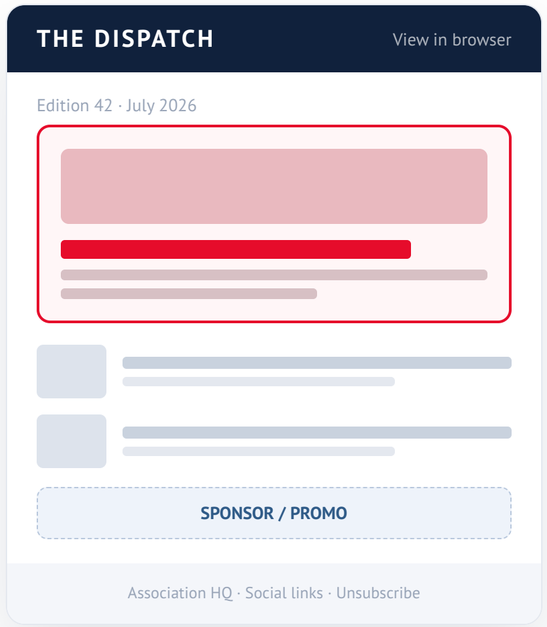
Assign & chase in a project tool — Asana, Monday, Trello — not buried email threads.

AI quality bar: fact- and style-check every article against AP, Chicago, or house style in seconds.

Source: Ricochet, Association Newsletter Success Certificate Course.

Creative best practices for every newsletter archetype.

The anatomy of a modern association newsletter.

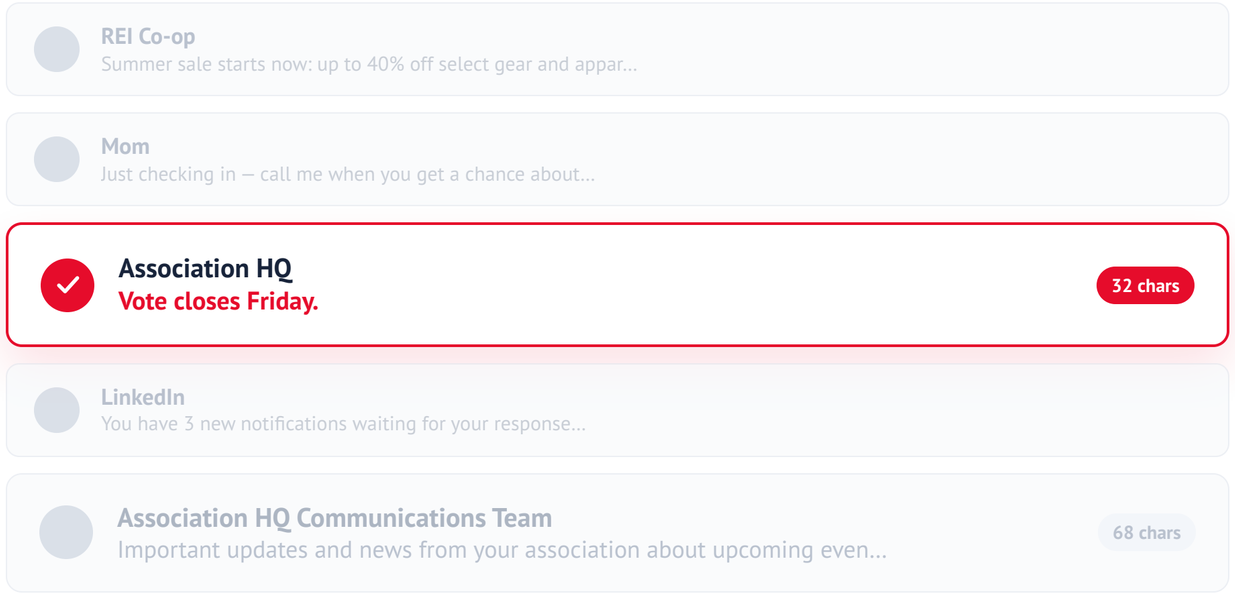


- **Compact masthead**
  Edition + date; content visible without scrolling.
- **One clear lead story**
  Above the fold — the single thing you want read.
- **Scannable modules**
  Headline, one-line summary, one link each — promos visually distinct.
- **Single column · 600px max**
  View-as-webpage link in header; distinct footer with social + unsubscribe.

Source: Ricochet, Association Media Creative Best Practices; Association Newsletter Success Certificate Course.

Shorter subjects win — and almost nobody uses them.

The cheapest optimization in email.



<40

characters wins best opens — yet most association emails still run **40–60+**.

<9
chars post the highest opens

30–39
chars peak for clicks

> Front-load the compelling words; push context into the **preheader**; keep the "from" name consistent.

Source: Higher Logic, 2025–2026 Association Email Benchmark Report; Ricochet, Association Media Creative Best Practices.

Weight and release.

Two separate disciplines: keep it light, and don't dump it all at once.

WEIGHT

Keep it under the Gmail clip line.



88%

of association emails already qualify — everything below the line, Gmail clips.

RELEASE

Throttle the send in waves.



Protects deliverability, dodges corporate quarantine nets, and buys an **emergency-fix window** if an error slips through.

Source: Higher Logic, 2025–2026 Association Email Benchmark Report; Ricochet, Association Newsletter Success Certificate Course.

Wear the Digital Editor hat.

The invisible work: if it doesn't reach the inbox, nothing else matters.

Publisher
Strategy & money

Editor-in-Chief
Audience & content

Managing Editor
Operations & quality



Digital Editor
Delivery & data

Deliverability is the gatekeeper.

Before opens, before clicks — did it even arrive?

100 emails sent → how many arrive?



The cross-platform industry average is just **84%** — roughly 1 in 6 never reaches an inbox. Association-specialist platforms report as high as **99%**.

The four pillars

Identity & trust
Domain authentication

Sender reputation
Consistent volume & tempo

Recipient feedback
Complaints & engagement

Data & content hygiene
Bounces & file weight

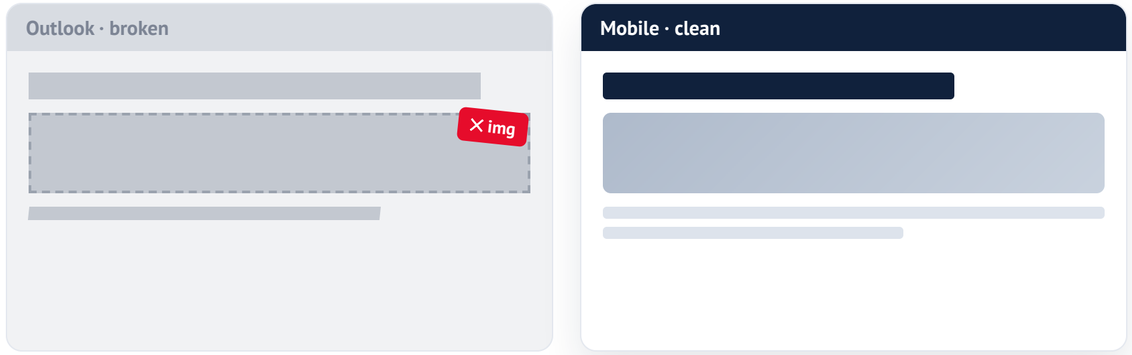
Now table stakes: Gmail, Yahoo, and Microsoft require **SPF, DKIM, and DMARC** for senders over 5,000 emails/day. Free check: **mail-tester.com**.

Source: Higher Logic, 2025–2026 Association Email Benchmark Report; Litmus, The Ultimate Guide to Email Deliverability.

The unglamorous work that pays.

Rendering and list hygiene — invisible when right, expensive when wrong.

Test every render



Only **47%** of marketers design fully responsive, mobile-friendly emails.

A bounce = a lost member.

For an association, a bounced address is often a lapsed member or a broken billing contact — investigate, don't just delete.

Merge duplicates — carefully, and manually — so no member gets your newsletter twice.

Source: Litmus (with Validity), The State of Email Report 2026 (survey of 500+ marketers); Ricochet, Association Newsletter Success Certificate Course.

Open rates are worthless.
There. We said it.

17% ~~vs~~ **43%**

Platform A
average "open rate"

Platform B
average "open rate"

A 26-point spread on the same metric. When a ruler disagrees with itself, stop measuring with it.

Apple Mail Privacy Protection auto-registers opens the reader never made — nearly doubling reported opens (17.32% real vs. 32.49% MPP-inclusive).

Even Higher Logic — whose business is association email — calls opens **"directional, not definitive."**

New: France's CNIL now treats open-tracking pixels like cookies — **separate consent required**, existing lists must comply by July 14, 2026.

Source: Brevo, 2026 Marketing Orchestration Benchmark (50,000+ businesses); MailerLite, Email Marketing Benchmarks 2025 (3.6M campaigns); Higher Logic, 2025–2026 Association Email Benchmark Report; CNIL, tracking-pixel recommendation, April 14, 2026.

Measure what matters.

Three numbers that can't lie to you.

01

Deliverability count

The raw number of members who actually received the issue in an inbox.

02

Clicks

Intentional action — rising every year 2022–2025 even as opens wobbled. Clicks signal intent to register, renew, or engage.

03

Database growth

Is the number of people receiving your newsletter bigger this month than last?

~~Open rate~~ Retired. It is completely unreliable.

Bonus honesty metric: unsubscribes

Your fatigue alarm — top performers hold near **0.09%** vs. a 0.46% average.

Source: Ricochet, Association Newsletter Success Certificate Course; Higher Logic, 2025–2026 Association Email Benchmark Report; Brevo, 2026 Marketing Orchestration Benchmark.

RICOCHET
ASSOCIATION TRANSFORMATION

Your AI performance review.

Four hats, four prompts, five actions per hat — a strategic gut check before you leave.

Publisher



Editor-in-Chief



Managing Editor



Digital Editor



Review the Publisher hat.

Is your newsletter strategy actually a strategy?



PUBLISHER REVIEW PROMPT

"Act as an expert newsletter publisher. I run my association's newsletter and want a strategic evaluation of how well I am performing in the publisher role. First, ask me specific questions about my newsletter's primary goal (money, mission, or membership), its audience, my publication portfolio, sending frequency, and partnerships. Also give me the option to upload an image of a recent newsletter so you can evaluate it against my goals. Once I provide those details, give me a strategic evaluation of my performance as publisher and suggest the five most important actions that might improve my newsletter's impact."

Upload your newsletter

Source: Ricochet, Association Newsletter Success Certificate Course.

Review the Editor-in-Chief hat.

Does the product fit the reader?



EDITOR-IN-CHIEF REVIEW PROMPT

"Act as an expert newsletter editor-in-chief. I want a strategic evaluation of how well I am performing in that role. First, ask me specific questions about who my target audiences are, how I source and develop content, and what content is gated for members. Also give me the option to upload an image of a recent newsletter so you can evaluate it against my goals. Once I provide those details, give me a strategic evaluation of my performance as editor-in-chief and suggest the five most important actions that might improve my newsletter's impact."

Upload your newsletter

Source: Ricochet, Association Newsletter Success Certificate Course.

Review the Managing Editor hat.

Is the operation running you, or are you running it?



MANAGING EDITOR REVIEW PROMPT

"Act as an expert newsletter managing editor. I want a strategic evaluation of how well I am performing in that role. First, ask me specific questions about my content calendar, how I assign and collect contributions, my editing and fact-checking process, and my newsletter's layout. Also give me the option to upload an image of a recent newsletter so you can evaluate it against my goals. Once I provide those details, give me a strategic evaluation of my performance as managing editor and suggest the five most important actions that might improve my newsletter's impact."

Upload your newsletter

Review the Digital Editor hat.

Is the invisible work getting done?



DIGITAL EDITOR REVIEW PROMPT

"Act as an expert newsletter digital editor. I want a strategic evaluation of how well I am performing in that role. First, ask me specific questions about my email platform, my authentication setup (SPF, DKIM, DMARC), how I handle bounces and list hygiene, and which metrics I track. Also give me the option to upload an image of a recent newsletter so you can evaluate it against my goals. Once I provide those details, give me a strategic evaluation of my performance as digital editor and suggest the five most important actions that might improve my newsletter's impact."

Upload your newsletter

When you get back to the office.

AI review, first

Run the four prompts — let the results set your priorities before you change anything.

Publisher

- [ ] Declare your primary M at the top of your template.
- [ ] Name your five closest attention competitors.

Editor-in-Chief

- [ ] Commit to one design archetype; cut what doesn't fit.
- [ ] Audit one list; segment by role or interest.

Managing Editor

- [ ] Shorten your next subject line to under 40 characters.
- [ ] Build or update your full-year content calendar.

Digital Editor

- [ ] Run mail-tester.com; confirm SPF, DKIM, DMARC.
- [ ] Rebuild your dashboard — retire the open rate.

RICOCHET

Show up where members already are. Publish something worth reading when they get there.



Go deeper with an Academy course.

Learn more newsletter strategy and design best practices in the Association Newsletter Success Certificate Course — six live weekly classes teaching every newsroom hat, with AI-assisted exercises, recordings, CAE credit, and a printable certificate.

[redacted]

Regular ~~$599~~
FREE for VMAE members

ENROLL AT **www.ricochetadvice.com/academy**

RICOCHET
ASSOCIATION TRANSFORMATION

Let's keep the conversation going.

Which newsletter hat is your biggest challenge?

Chris Gloede, CAE

Chief Consultant, Ricochet

PHONE
773-510-6066

MEET WITH US
ricochetadvice.com/meet-with-us

WEB
ricochetadvice.com

LINKEDIN
linkedin.com/in/chrisgloede

BOOK A CALL
ricochetadvice.com/meet-with-us

Sources

01 Pew Research Center, "Email Newsletters as a Source of News," February 2026 (survey of 5,153 U.S. adults).

02 Higher Logic, 2025 Association Member Experience Report.

03 Ricochet, Association Newsletter Success Certificate Course.

04 Higher Logic, 2025–2026 Association Email Benchmark Report (~1,500 associations, 2B+ emails).

05 beehiiv, The State of Newsletters 2026 (28B emails analyzed).

06 Ricochet, Association Media Creative Best Practices.

07 Litmus, The Ultimate Guide to Email Deliverability.

08 Litmus (with Validity), The State of Email Report 2026 (survey of 500+ marketers).

09 CNIL, tracking-pixel recommendation (open-tracking consent requirement), April 14, 2026.

10 Brevo, 2026 Marketing Orchestration Benchmark (50,000+ businesses).

11 MailerLite, Email Marketing Benchmarks 2025 (3.6M campaigns, 181,000 accounts).

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