

ISOJ 2018: Day 2, Afternoon Session

NEWSLETTERS: How Email, an Almost 50-Year-Old Technology, Has Become the Next Big Thing for News Organizations

Chair & Presenter: Sara Fischer, Media Reporter, **Axios**

- **Elisabeth Goodridge**, Editorial Director, Newsletters and Messaging, **The New York Times**
 - **Mónica Guzmán**, Co-Founder and Director, **Evergrey**
 - **Dheerja Kaur**, Head of Product and Design, **theSkimm**
 - **Fernando Rodrigues**, Founder and Editor, **Drive Premium/Poder360**
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Elisabeth Goodridge: OK. Hi, everyone. I'm Elisabeth Goodridge. I am so excited to be speaking to you all and being part of this amazing conference. So thank you, Rosental. Thank you, Mallery. It's been a pretty powerful group of people, and I am pretty psyched to be part of it, so thank you so much.

So, I have been really lucky in my career. I've been at The Times for nearly nine years. And as we all know, it's an extraordinary time to be in the newsroom. And also, it's a pretty extraordinary time to be in email. So, I'm going to take this time right now to talk about what a legacy news organization is doing with its email. In fact, we're going to talk about how we are upgrading our current portfolio as well as launching our new newsletters with a lot of editorial strategy before.

So, as I said, I've been at The Times for nine years. I've been in digital all that time. I've been an editor in Washington. I did international stuff. My most recent job was working as a deputy in the metro desk. And in 2016, they offered me an opportunity to change to email. And I said, you know, "Sure." I wanted a change. I wanted a challenge. Also, I like email. I love email. But I should say that I never really growing up was thinking, *Man, I will really make it if I become the email editor at The New York Times.* [laughter] But you know what? As I said, I like email. I love email.

And sometimes when I see things like this, this kind of, like, I gotta take offense. This story was from Tech Crunch. And he's saying that email is like sidewalks. It's like forks. You don't really think about it, so you can't even like or dislike it. And I took offense to that, because I love email. I like email. And so do our readers, especially back in 2016 when I started and I did a deep dive into our research and I commissioned a lot.

There's a lot of reasons why people like email. OK. So, it plugs into their routine. They can look whenever they want, especially on their mobile phone. You don't

have to learn a new app. The feeling of click and delete is pretty powerful after you've read an email. And then, you know, you get Times journalism.

So here's a couple of examples of what types of newsletters we have. Again, there was no one in this job before I started, in terms of editorial presence in our newsroom products. So, we've done a lot of work looking at what kind of emails we're sending out, so you get breaking news alerts. I'm sure you've gotten a lot of those. You've gotten our guides.

Here are two examples of how readers can benefit from two different types of newsletters. So, you've got The Interpreter, which we call a stand-alone product. So, it's your smart college friend writing you an email. Again, once you're done, you can click and delete. OK, then, you've got kind of a link list, is what we call a convenient list of stories in one place that you can go to our site [to see]. So, there's lots of benefits for readers, but there's lots of benefits for us as well. (Is that gonna work? Yeah, OK.)

So, all right, again, that panel this morning was like kick-ass, so smart, but we don't have to teach anyone how to use email, like you do with any sort of like AR or VR. [laughter] OK? Again, so not sexy email. Sexy but not as sexy as those apps. But we don't have to teach people how to use it. Email is a personal medium which is beneficial to both our journalists who can see who's reading and getting feedback almost immediately and build up a rapport perhaps.

And it's just, again, you are getting The New York Times in your inbox. Like, you are getting Andrew Ross working in your inbox. Sam Sifton from Cooking in your inbox. We can guide, inform, entertain, because email is so easy to experiment and refine using data and knowing what our audiences like.

Newsletters, for us, draw more traffic to NYTimes.com than our main Twitter account. And we're doing lots and lots of deep, deep, deep studies to see how much newsletter readers are loyal readers, and boy, are they.

All right. So, this is exhaustive. Look at these. So, I started in 2016. There are about 40 newsletters, editorial newsletters. Now there's more than 55. OK, so, that's a lot. That's a lot for one person. Tons of editors are focusing on email right now at The New York Times, but all of these newsletters we break down into frequency, into audience, into subject matter, into format. We are going through a good strategy of figuring out which ones should be refined, which ones should be upgraded, which ones should be sunsetted, which ones can we do better, can we approach differently? So we've got a lot. I'll leave this up. No, I'm just kidding, but sign up for them all. Trust me. It's worth it.

OK. So, it's not just me. I think someone else had mentioned that you cannot just be the editor and hand off your copy anymore. We are investing in editorial, product, design, technology, and audience. Because yes, it's not a very sexy product, but it works for us, it works for our readers, so we think it's a win/win. And I'm getting a new ESP, Email Service Provider. We built it internally. I have more

staff coming on, on every single section here at The Times. And I'm very, very lucky.

This is so key, though, for any journalism product. I believe that you have to have closer alignment. But with newsletters especially, you have to know how the product is doing by looking at your audience. You can't—again, I can't stress this enough—just be an editor and write something and send it to somebody else. You have to know how the product is doing, how you can refine it. Not just your text, but your product, your audience, your deliverability. Never knew what that word was. It's awesome.

All right. So, here we go. We're going to talk a little bit about what we have seen to be a good ingredient for an excellent stand-alone newsletter. Sara had touched a little bit about this, but you've got to understand your audience. Who are you writing for? You have to have an expert writer who people want to hear from. We are so lucky at The New York Times that we have a deep bench of experts on all different subject matters. And we rely on them to write newsletters like this in a conversational, clear tone.

Again, it's a personal medium. You don't write the same way you write social or you write that first-day lead, that second-day lead, that analytical take. It is a journalism format that speaks and should sound different from everything else, other different platforms. Again, there's a lot of email out there. A crap-load of email, crap-load of email newsletters. So, you have to provide invaluable information so that people open it up and read it and find value.

We're a subscription based company. We use email a lot as a daily habituation, so people can see, "Oh, my gosh, I've got to get my morning briefing. It's 6:15. I have to run my morning briefing." Much like their newspaper being dropped off by that Billy kid down on the corner, like, people get accustomed to reading their email. And we want them to have The New York Times as a daily essential part of their lives, and we see newsletters do that.

So, getting back to maintaining best practices. You've got to send it out at the right time. Do some AB testing. And also, it's got to look good. It's got to look really pretty. And again, this gets back to, you can't just write your test and hope it does well. You've got to really invest in those photos and that font and that deliverability.

OK. So now, I'm going to just breakdown a couple of different — or look at a specific couple of emails that we have, because otherwise I could talk about email for eight, 10, 12 hours. I can also go through every 55, and I don't think anyone wants that. So, I'm going to focus on a couple of really sexy ones we've done.

OK. So last summer, Game of Thrones. We knew that we had an audience that really liked Game of Thrones, because we would look at Chartbeat after our recaps would get published last year and say, "Wow!" Traffic was going through the roof. So, we thought we might have a chance to have a popup newsletter with this. So, we went through our ingredients and made sure we had everything. Fanatical

fans—check. Expert staff—we had three. Content—so we decided to hold some exclusive stuff for this newsletter, so we had interviews with the actors. We added some fun gifts and stuff.

But we also just strategically sent it out on Tuesday. So, we're thinking, okay, people are obsessed with the Game of Thrones. They watch the show on Sunday. They probably want to read a little bit too. And Monday, they get their recaps. So we'll send this out on Tuesday to give that little fix. And also, we tried to give them a little reader benefit, too, by saying, "We've gone through everything on the internet, and there's lots of things on the internet about Game of Thrones, and we're going to provide you not only exclusive content, but we're going to curate the best of the web." So, more than 80,000 subscribe to this newsletter. Again, we only sent it eight times.

Every single newsletter had an open rate, which is a key metric for email. Every single email had above 130% open rate. Yes, that's not unique. That means people have opened it again or perhaps forwarded it. The highest we had was at 250%, but our average unique for this send was 60%, which everybody who's in email says, "Oh, that's not a bad open rate." [laughter]

OK. So, DealBook. We're really proud. I'm so proud of Game of Thrones. But there's lots more coming! OK. So, DealBook. So, DealBook had been around for a while. Again, The New York Times has been around for a while. We have a lot of emails that have been more than 10 years old. Andrew Ross Sorkin made his name with this newsletter. He is one of our more prestigious business reporters. He's probably one of the more prestigious business reporters in this country. So, he got his career by writing an M&A newsletter about ten years ago. We decided last year that really was worth doing a relaunch, because we wanted to do more than just M&A. We wanted to look at stories that were at the intersection of business and politics.

So, what were the kind of things we needed to do? Well, we needed to staff it up. We knew our audience. We knew decision makers, [in] Washington, New York, Silicon Valley, and pretty much anywhere we wanted to get those decision makers. And what Andrew has, he's an expert, and he has that sourcing. So again, we're providing that invaluable information from an expert in a conversational tone. Then we also made a change to the design to make it much more friendly, get Andrew's face on there, and just to demonstrate we are investing in this product. We are investing because we know you as an audience really value this.

And a couple of things, you can see that there is this little blue highlight right there. We were listening to readers. They actually hated that blue highlight, so we actually changed the design. Again, refinement, best practices, listening to your audience to make it a better, better, better product.

OK. So, this is where I'm going to end. We have something coming up very soon this summer. We're relaunching what was called The Edit. Again, it was just a list of stories that we thought perhaps young people would want to read from The New York Times. There's wasn't that much strategy behind it. So, we thought, okay, we

want this audience. We want a young audience. We want to understand how they could think that The New York Times could be valuable to them. So we thought, you know what? This is kind of like the 'me' generation. Let's get them involved. Let's ask a couple of people to write in and say, "Do you want to be part of our team?" We thought we'd get a couple hundred submissions for this relaunch of The Edit, and that we would get like five or six people really saying, "Not only are we covering this generation, offering this product to this generation, but you are part of our product to this generation." We got more than 20,000 applicants to this initiative. And we are thrilled. And my friend, Lindsay Underwood has since relaunched this, just been going through and reading and reading and reading and reading.

So, stay tuned for this newsletter. Sign up for The Edit and any other one. It's worth your while. And thank you so much for your time.

[Applause.]

Mónica Guzmán: All right. So, this is our website, but it's not what matters. Our newsletters are what matters. Our newsletters are what matters. So, The Evergrey is a daily newsletter for the City of Seattle. It goes out Monday thru Friday, 7:30 in the morning, written by me, and since October, a reporter named Anna Sophia, who's amazing. We're a very small team. And we're really trying to do one thing in Seattle. We are trying to help people make the most of their city. We are trying to help people feel connected to their city, feel powerful, feel like they could access what's going on and what matters, and to do it in a product that they can read in three to four minutes every day.

So, to start off with a little bit of stats, I suppose, we have 8,600 subscribers. 18 months old. We have a 38% open rate, which we think is pretty good. It's not 120. I never even heard of 120 before today. [laughter] I didn't know that was a thing. So, holy crap! Yeah, would love that someday. That'd be cool. But, so, and our tagline is "Live like you live here." So, it's important to note that despite the name *newsletter*, I actually don't consider us to be really news. We're about what it takes to build a great local life. And there's a reason we did that.

So, stepping back real quick to talk about Seattle for a moment. Anyone here in Seattle? I know Matt is. We've got some Seattleites. OK. So, like many urban centers, Seattle is growing like crazy right now. It's actually the fastest growing city in the country. It has the third largest homeless population. And the two richest people on the planet live in Seattle. It's a really interesting place. Amazon is transforming it from the inside out, bringing so many newcomers from around the country and around the world. So, whether you just arrived in Seattle or you've been there your whole life, there's a real — you have a craving to get grounded, because things are shifting so quickly.

So, The Evergrey launched in October of 2016. Two weeks before the election, by the way. You know, with that mission to, what would it take to help people get grounded? So, it's important to say how we even got this started. We started with

some pretty intense research. More than 60 hours of interviews with folks in the city that we had sort of curated this list of communities that we knew we wanted to reach. And we talked to them. We asked them questions. And the questions were not, what news do you read? They were, what's your relationship with the city? Questions like, a year from now, let's say you want to get out of here. What had to have happened here for that to be your reaction? Or a year from now, you cannot believe how much you love Seattle. What had to have happened for you to have that reaction? Questions about their relationship with the city.

And we learned an incredible amount. It was just a whole room full of Post-It notes, all these patterns and things that we were seeing. And probably the number one most important lesson was that for people to care about what's going on around them, they have to make enough relationships to feel invested. They have to find their tribe. They have to know where they belong. Right now, we're getting pulled to the national. We're getting pulled to, you know, the things that are not local at all. But it's in local where you can have the most impact. It's in local where you work, and you drive, and you see your friends, and you hang out. If you have a great local life, that could eventually mean pretty awesome things for your city. It could mean pretty awesome things for your happiness, your joy, the value you feel is coming to your life. We actually think about these things. That was a really important lesson. The people who weren't all that happy in Seattle hadn't found their tribe. They hadn't found their community.

So, we thought, what if we can help? What if that's the value we can deliver? And we came up with some core values that we think of as chubby, curious, honest, useful, bold, and inclusive. So, that was something else from the research. We knew that whatever we did was going to have to be that. And the other thing that we decided from the research was, we have to make this a newsletter. Why did we make this a newsletter? When you're in email, what's the emails you read that make you happiest. It's the ones from your friends.

And we saw this opportunity to sort of take this on. Myself and my cofounder, Anika Annand, both felt that maybe the way journalism needed to change and evolve was to get closer, get closer to people. What would that look like? And we loved the idea of a newsletter, because with a newsletter, you can start with a hello and end with a goodbye. You can be personal. You can really write them and about them. You can include them. So, we did go with the newsletter.

So now, I'll actually open one of these so you can see what's up. I loved that, this subject line. We'll just in here. OK. So, I'm going to take you through the anatomy of an Evergrey newsletter. First, the introduction. It's always a good morning, a hello, and the day of the week, just to kind of ground us in something. And then we have what we call main content. So every day, we put something that is original. Something that we have created for the community usually with the community's help in some way. In this case, we were collecting everybody's favorite murals from around the city. So pro-tip for local—anything that is sort of like a hidden gem, delightful, people feel they have insight or knowledge, they love to share. We got

so many recommendations for beautiful murals in Seattle. And we wanted to update them on that.

So here, this is our main content. So, we have the intro. This is main content for this particular day. You'll notice one formatting thing we do. We always bold the names of our readers. So, things they contribute, they will get called out, they will get thanked, and they will always get bolded in our newsletter. Oh, and I should mention, main content, the way we think of our editorial strategy, another word, pride. We will publish perspectives, resources, introductions to communities around the city—because again, we want you to find your community—discoveries and explainers. We think we're pretty good at explaining things that are actually very unclear. And we've done that several times in our newsletter.

So, here's another section we think of as our news roundup. It's always got this heading, "Here's what's going on in your city." It's a sampling of the conversations and the articles going on in Seattle that day. And it's always a mix. There was one reader who gave really awesome feedback that I loved. She said, "The Evergrey has this way of always finding light even in darkness." So when there's bad news and sad news, it's not that — we don't sugarcoat it, but we'll give energy to it. We'll try to find some way to end with action. We'll try to find some way to make you feel like there is a direction that this can go in that could be good. Maybe. We'll try to gather some hope.

We also think about what I call guilt-free reading. So, everything in The Evergrey, there's just no jargon. There's no initiative number. There's no, you know, Representative So-and-So without explaining who the heck that is. We always take a step back assuming that somebody could be reading this and it's their third day in Seattle. So, yeah, the "Puget Sound takes no crap" was from the fact that they banned putting sewage into Puget Sound. So proud of that subject line. [adjusts microphone]

Sometimes we have extra sections. This one is a You Said It, so a reader email that led us to discover a really interesting new aspect of a local story. So, this person sent us some cool information, and we just added it back in the newsletter. And then every email always has our Calendar of Events.

Now, this may look pretty thrown together but it's really not. We actually have a whole process for how we come up with events. Events are really important in the lives of locals. Events are the opportunity to go out and meet people. Events are the opportunity to go out and listen to somebody, join a community, have fun, take your kids out. So, we actually have all these emojis you see. There's a code. And each week we have to find enough events that fit the code. So, for example, you'll see red balloons are family-friendly events. The outdoors here are for the outdoors. Then, there's music. But the important—most important ones are red balloons for family, this wave, this hand wave is about you can go and meet people. This is primarily a networking or mingling event. The lightbulb is for learning new ideas—lectures and things like that. This speaking is for listening to other locals with really

interesting stories and speaking out. Yeah, and then the outro. So that, very quickly, is sort of the body of the newsletter.

Another thing I should mention is, the language we use is very intentionally trying to promote the idea that it is okay for you not to be reading the local news all the time. Nobody does and nobody has to. So, for example, if you think about the phrase "In case you missed it," ICYMI, right? Who's seen that on social media? It's everywhere, right? We never use it, because "In case you missed it" innately says, "You're supposed to not miss it...ever, but in case you did, here you go." And we think that that actually adds strange pressure to somebody's life. And The Evergrey doesn't add pressure. The Evergrey just wakes up with you and tells you what's going on without making you feel like you're doing anything wrong by being busy. I think that's fine.

So, I should mention that, you know, we are primarily an email newsletter, and that's the metric that matters is subscribers and growth. But we try to be very, very close to people. So, I'm just going to quickly talk about some of the things that we have done, the experiences and events. We have regular reader meetups in places that we think people ought to go check out, because they are really cool, in the city, or with a guest that we think they can be introduced to.

We did, at the last local election for mayor, we asked folks in the Evergrey community who wanted to join the Evergrey Leadership Board. And the Evergrey Leadership Board, we all got together, figured out what questions they wanted to ask the mayoral candidates, and then they interviewed the mayoral candidates. And that was really fun.

The Evergrey Writing Group, rather than hire freelancers, we asked folks in the Evergrey community who wanted to sort of express themselves to the city, who had an interesting story to tell, who wanted to just become sort of a better writer or anything like that, and we got like 60 applications. It came down to a group of 14 people, and that was the Evergrey Writing Group. And they met twice a month for five months and workshopped each other's local essays and posts and things like that, and we published some of them. To, that was really fun.

We had a Facebook group with 500 members called Embrace the Grey. And the goal of Embrace the Grey was Seattle is very rainy. What if we can help each other actually take steps to make the rain more okay? To actually get to a place where the grey doesn't bring us down. That was a lot of fun. We created a bunch of really interesting content around that. The conversations were wonderful. Lots of engagement. That ended just last month with an event that we threw to sort of celebrate it.

And another one that I'll let you know about, because it was the hardest one we did was, last March, we learned, thanks to The Washington Post, actually, that the closest county to King County, which is where Seattle is—King County, Washington—the nearest county to King County that voted the opposite of King County in the presidential election was Sherman County, Oregon. So, we ended up

contacting somebody in Sherman County, building a pretty great relationship, you know, [with] someone who had voted for Trump. And Seattle, in King County, very, very not Trump. Very not Trump. And it turned out a lot of people in our community were curious, because there really aren't a lot of vocal conservatives or Republicans in Seattle, and they wanted to meet them and understand what was going on. So, we took a 10-hour road trip with 19 people from King County. And we met 16 people from Sherman County, in the county seat of Morrow, which only has 200 people, so that's pretty good that 16 of them came out. And we had a pretty amazing four hours of structured conversation to just see each other as human beings and restart some—some divisions. That was a really incredible experience.

So, let's see. I will say a couple more things. The main thing, you know, with newsletters and the way were.... Oh, I'm sorry. Wrap it up. Yeah, yeah, sorry. Actually, I'll just skip to this. So, another thing you should know about the Evergrey is we're actually part of a broader network called Whereby.U.S. So, Whereby.U.S publishes The New Tropic in Miami, another newsletter. And just in the last month-and-a-half, opened Pulptown in Orlando, Florida and Bridgeline in Portland, Oregon. So, I'd encourage you to check those out. And yeah, that's it. Thanks.

[Applause.]

Dheerja Kaur: All right. Hi, everybody. I'd Dheerja, Head of Product at theSkimm, and I'm here to talk to you a little bit more about how we think about building for intimacy at theSkimm and how we started that with email. So, a little bit about myself to start. I started my career in engineering and product across web, mobile, Grantland, RAP—I miss it very much—and moved to theSkimm when it was 10 people going and writing a newsletter and really thinking about, how do we grow that audience? How do we think about building products for this loyal audience and beyond? I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that I'm a super nerd, so if you want to talk about CMS's, API's product, technology, media, come talk to me.

But theSkimm. So, theSkimm's mission is we make it easier to live smarter by delivering news and information into your daily routine. Our core audience is female millennials, and we've built a really successful business off of that. But the starting story is that theSkimm's founders were TV news producers. They were producing the nightly news every night, and would come home and talk to their friends who were working professionals, on-the-go women, doctors, lawyers, bankers, you name it, and realized that what they were producing every night wasn't reaching those people. So, they quit their jobs and thought about, how can we connect the gap between media and news information? And then changing lives of millennials and how they were going about their days and not actually consuming the news.

So, they took a giant step back and thought about, what is the day in the life of this female millennial? What does she do throughout her day? What are her habits? What is her routine? What is she doing on her phone? And how do we deliver the news in a way that fits right into that daily life that isn't ask her to do too much or to go seek out too much? And so, they followed a bunch of people around and then thought about, OK, what is the first thing you do in the morning? You check your

email, right? I'm the third person here, so I think this is obviously very important to everybody at this stage. But we literally were like what we call the one-eye-open routine. You turn off your alarm. You roll over and you start scrolling through your inbox. And so, what better way to deliver the news that fits right into your routine than being in that first thing you do in the morning?

And so, they started the Daily Skimm, which is a newsletter that is delivered to you Monday through Friday, 6:00 in the morning, and delivers just a rundown of the news to get you started for your day and make you feel like a confident person who knows what's actually happening in the world. And from there, we really built an audience in a way that we were just part of their day.

And so when I joined theSkimm, I got on the phone with users, aka skimmers is what we call them, and it was incredible. I've never done anything like it. They would get on the phone with us, and they would say, "Yeah, so I wake up, I brush my teeth, take a shower, I read my Skimm, drink my coffee, and I go to work." And it was just like seamlessly just part of their morning routine in a way that I've never heard people talk about a brand or a media company or anything else. We were just part of their day. And it was truly incredible to see.

So, we learned a lot about that from email. So, a few keepings. I like to call it like this over-arching thing of, don't 'f' with it. So, email is a very intimate part of somebody's day and life, right? I'm sure you all feel that way. You're probably pretty protective of your inbox. And so, we think a lot about, like, what is the context of where somebody is when they are reading our newsletter? And how do we not mess with that? How do we make it feel very personal and very intimate?

And so, the way I like to think about it from a product standpoint is, most users or skimmers have sort of like this natural bifurcation of the way they look at their inbox. There's like the friends emails, which is like things that people you know are literally writing to you, so your friends, your coworkers, what-have-you. And then there's the second part, which is like the brand inbox, right? So, it's like, buy this, click this, like, do this, right? It's like anything from your sales on J Crew to like a bunch of listings of articles to read.

And so, when we think about our newsletter, we want to be that friend. We want you to think of the Skimm as if it was just a friend writing to you, and so that translates into the content. It's a very personal, voice-y, relatable tone that sounds like it's your smart best friend. But it's also the design, so we don't actually put images in that 6:00 a.m. newsletter, because we feel like it should honestly just literally feel like a written email from a friend in text form. And then we try to minimize friction, so we give you just what you need to know in that quick run-down. Go on with your day.

And so that context is really important when you're thinking about email, whether it's a morning email or a weekly email or what-have-you, it's really thinking about, what is the context in which somebody is actually consuming this? And how do I deliver the most value to them in that moment?

So, we have an email newsletter. But as I joined the company and as we kind of thought about growing the company, a lot of it was, OK, what else can we build? We've built this incredible audience. We've built this really successful product. What are the other products? And so, we went back to the drawing board, back to that beginning thing, which is that, what is a day in the life of that female millennial? And what is she doing? What is she doing on her phone? And what—at what points in her time, in her day, can we deliver a piece of information in a very valuable way?

And so, the first thing we built after the email was a calendar. So, we actually have an app that integrates content directly into your calendar in a way, again, that fits right into another major routine on somebody's phone, but also it gives you a little piece of information just to keep going throughout your day. And so, this is actually an example of the calendar. Ignore the dates. I kind of messed with them a little bit. But like, we literally will put calendar events in your phone from anything when Ramadan starts, to when the G7 Summit is, to earnings reports, to the World Cup, just to give you a bitesize piece of information about something that's coming up in a way that fits right into your routine. And that was a huge step for us, but still always going back to that ethos of making products that fit into somebody's routine and building relationship on that.

So, the other cool thing about this is that we actually built a subscription product too. So, this app that integrates in your calendar costs three bucks a month. And what we proved with that was that we had built this very intimate relationship with email. We had grown an audience that way, but we had built that like really core foundation of being part of somebody's day. and then not only did we build another product in someone's day, but we actually monetized them as well, which is obviously very relevant to us being here today.

Since then, we have built an entire brand company and business off of that relationship and that intimacy. So, we now have 7-million female millennials who read us every single morning. Our app, which again integrates into your calendar, is the top three grossing news app in the app store. We have over 30,000 Skimm ambassadors which are like our top 'x' percent. They are our super fans. They are our brand ambassadors. Boots on the ground. They're our most loyal community. And my most favorite piece—we've learned how to activate that audience, too. So, we registered over 100,000 people to vote the last election, which really is so compelling. It's an incredible stat. More importantly, it shows that with email we have built this audience that has this deep relationship and deep trust with us and that they will activate with us.

So, that's theSkimm.

[Applause.]

Fernando Rodrigues: Hi, everybody. Thank you for having me here. Thank you, Rosental. Thank you, everybody from ISOJ. And thanks for everybody to be here in

this time late afternoon on a Saturday. This all started about three years ago when I got fired from the newspaper I was working for, for more than 20 years, and from the passion for journalism. And newsletters was the major tool that we used to build up a news outlet in Brasília. I'm going to show you a very quick video of the whole operation, and then I'm going to concentrate more on newsletters just right after this, which is only 1 minute and 40 seconds.

[Video plays. Some music and visuals play with captioning at the bottom.]

*Captioning: the best informed newsletter from Brasília
exclusive information for decision makers and political geeks
1,100 paid subscribers in March 2018
Drive Premium
30+ journalists covering economics and politics
peerless coverage direct from Brazil's capital, with nationwide reach
coverage in all government branches and agencies
Presidency
House
Senate
Supreme Court
Federal Police and attorney general
Ministry of Finance
Central Bank
Infrastructure
Poder360
news portal connected with Brazil's elite and decision makers
36 million unique visitors expected in 2018
9,500 stories published since November 2016
polls on national context, elections and marketplace
Data Poder360
scientific tool to consistently map trends in society
Poder360 Ideas
Events with top officials in Brasília
Seminars, lectures and social gatherings, with key players in national
politics, journalists and businessmen
Data Poder360 Mercado
branded content
content produced under Poder360's guidance with the same values
and credibility
Poder360 in the news [scrolls quickly through news content]
the only Brazilian media outlet with access to the Paradise Papers
Poder360 global relevance
mentioned as a leading model for innovation in journalism
Poder360
Drive Premium, Poder360 Ideas, Data Poder360, Poder360 Mercado
journalistic relevance.
public interest.*

[End of video.]

Well, thanks. Well, um, when I... Minutes after it was public that I was leaving the newspaper I worked for, I got a phone call from some friends. Rosental was one of them. He told me, "This is the wrong time for you to start something digital. Only something new in Brazil, in Brasília."

Brasília is the capital of Brazil, and it has a particular idiosyncrasy, as compared to all the countries in the world the size of Brazil or with a similar landscape. We don't have, in the capital of the country, no media outlet with national relevance, national influence, independently, in terms of finance and editorial.

So, I decided I should do something and build up something in Brasília with the help of some friends. Of course, that was very difficult at that time. It is still today. I am sort of a geek in terms of reading stuff about the media industry. And I read a lot about Politico before I started this. Axios was not around at the time three years ago. And I remember Politico had a private investment fund behind it. We tried with some friends to find out something like that in Brazil. It was not possible.

Then, at that time, it was the end of 2014, beginning of 2015, I received so many emails from friends and also from the sources I had in Brasília. And I noted, well, I might well have the private email, the g-mails were from many congressmen, from ministers, from people in the government, from people in the opposition parties, even from eight of eleven of the Supreme Court Justices in Brazil. They were all emailing me. I said, "Well, why not start something as a newsletter first?"

So, I invited two friends who were already working around, and we started the newsletter Drive once a day. Also, there was this guy, this very good friend of mine, Manoel Fernandes in San Paulo who ran this consulting company called Bites. And he had this idea of using the stuff that I was already producing in my previous job as a newsletter. So, we started once a day with three people. And how could we build up an audience without a website [and] without having any big company behind us?

Well, first of all, I picked up all my agenda my[self], the list of emails that I had, and I gave [these] to the sources, congressmen, senators, ministers, supreme court justices, lots of people that hang around important people from the opposition to government, and gave them a pro bono subscription. I don't charge them at the beginning, and I still don't charge them to date. It was a paid newsletter, but we decided that in Brazil it would be very complicated to have some business that was based upon public money. So, we run away from that.

And then I hired someone in San Paulo who was doing the commercial side of the business, and the paid subscriptions started to pour in. To make a long story short, we started up with three people three years ago. We have now more than 30 people working on this business. Some of them are already getting equity in the business. And Poder360 has 1,100 approximately paid subscribers. And that is enough to sustain not only the newsletter business, but also the other verticals of

the news outlet, which are the website, a division of opinion polls, and an events operation that we have with dinners, social gatherings.

When we have the sources coming in, we invite, of course, the whole media as well. They are open events. They are reserved in the sense that there are limited seats, but they are entirely open, and they are, of course, they get a lot of media coverage the next day. So, that's very good for us as well.

What else should I say? Why did we not start as a free newsletter and selling ads inside The Drive, the newsletter we now have as a paid newsletter? It would be very difficult to mass—to have a massive audience for a newsletter that was just beginning. Now, we have a new one, which is already being sent free of charge to anyone who goes to the website and puts his or her email there. But The Drive is still the—in terms of revenue stream for us—the top of the list for our business. It gets—it gives us around 80% of the revenue of Poder360.

And one of the tricks that I have.... I have lots of things that I've noted here, but one of the tricks that I wanted to share with you was that this decision to have the newsletter being sent pro bono, without charging the sources in Brasília, eventually resulted in building up some sort of a private social network for that environment of the powers that be in Brasília. Everybody reads The Drive nowadays.

Yesterday, I was here for the first day of ISOJ. And I spent probably a few hours exchanging emails and messages with the team in Brasília and also with the Speaker of the House in Brazil, because there was one small note that he was not happy with that. He was complaining about it. It was this huge discussion. And this is all about a newsletter that has only 1,100 subscribers. Which means that we are—we became relevant to the point that when we publish something, someone is not happy with that, they will call us. And the subscribers that pay to us a premium price for having access to The Drive are happy with that, because they don't have that service being given to them by the mainstream media. The mainstream media in Brazil, of course, that's not news. Everybody knows that. As in every other country, it's facing a lot of problems, difficulties, lots of layoffs, to the point that, in Brasília, our newsroom nowadays is one of the largest in the capital.

So, that's basically it. Thank you very much. I hope I can explain a little more. Thank you.

[Applause.]