

LAUNCH YOUR LOCAL NEWSLETTER IN 90 DAYS

The strategy playbook, and operator's checklist for going from idea to 1,000 subscribers and your first paid sponsor.

90-DAY PLAYBOOK / CHECKLIST

Build your Newsletter with **beehiiv**

READ THIS FIRST.

This document does two things. It walks you through strategic decisions you have to make before you launch, and it gives you a step-by-step, 90-day operating plan to follow once you do.

You can absolutely skim it – but I'd suggest you really spend time thinking through each step. There are many different models and operators in the local media space, the ones who are intentional often create the most lasting, impactful, and profitable businesses.

Two patterns kill new local media companies faster than anything else. The rest of this document is built around preventing both of these.

THE TWO CARDINAL SINS.

1. UPCYCLED GENERIC CONTENT.

This is the biggest reason new local media companies fail. If a reader could get the same information from a Google search, an existing news source, or a facebook page, you haven't built a newsletter – you've built an aggregator. Aggregators don't get love. There is no magnet to keep subscribers around nor is there a moat to build a defensible business.

2. TOO MANY SENDS. NOT ENOUGH VALUE.

The second-biggest killer. Operators add cadences to chase advertiser inventory (aka trad-monetization). The moment you prioritize the advertiser over the subscriber, the open rate falls, the unsubscribes climb, and the advertisers eventually leave anyways. CAC is extremely low in local media but that won't matter if you can't stop the churn.

TARGET: Start with a single cadence a week. Craft your voice, your content strategy, and the anatomy of your newsletter before considering cadence expansion.

PART 1.

THE LAUNCH WORKBOOK

Work through every section. Don't skip ahead to Part 2 until every field is filled. These eight decisions become the foundation of everything that follows.

01. NAME YOUR MEDIA CO.

A great local newsletter name does three things. It tells a stranger what the newsletter is about in under two seconds. Why I named my local media company, I knew I didn't want it to be news, I wanted it to be rooted in community – hence **CATSKILL CREW**.

- AVOID: anything with "**Daily**" or "**Weekly**" in the name – locks in your cadence forever.
- AVOID: a name that is just the town name + "News" – generic and limits your content.

WORKING NAME:

THREE ALTERNATES TO TEST:

WHY THIS NAME (ONE SENTENCE):

WEBSITE DOMAIN:

SOCIAL HANDLES:

O2. DEFINE YOUR MARKET.

This is the decision that determines your total addressable market. Traditional local media was built around subscriber scale and a blend of ad revenue as well as premium subscriptions - that is one option, the other is to pursue depth and creative monetization.

SINGLE MARKET VS. MULTIPLE MARKETS

- Single market – one city, town, region, or defined geography. This is led with unique content where you know the market.
- Multiple markets – a network of related geographies. This is a model that often opts for surface level content.

[Segments] If you go the multiple-markets route, Segments let you tag subscribers by geography and send geo-relevant editions or ads to each market from one publication instead of running separate newsletters.

MARKET SIZING RULE OF THUMB.

If you are running a purely ad driven model, your addressable population should be at least 25,000 people in the immediate area, with a clearly defined identity (people self-identify as being from there). Smaller – the ad market won't sustain you. Larger, like a major metro – and you're competing with established players from day one so ensure you have a unique take so you can create your own lane.

PRIMARY MARKET (CITY, TOWN, REGION):

POPULATION OF THE IMMEDIATE ADDRESSABLE AREA:

WHAT DO LOCALS CALL THIS PLACE WHEN THEY DESCRIBE WHERE THEY'RE FROM? (HELPS WITH BRANDING):

NEAREST COMPETING LOCAL PUBLICATION AND ITS WEAKNESS

(There are likely many more than you think—that's fine. When I launched, there were dozens in my market.)

03. SET YOUR CADENCE.

Pick the lowest cadence you can commit to for 90 straight days without missing a single send. You can always add more later. It's harder to cut back without it looking like the business is struggling.

CHOOSE ONE

- Weekly (1x). Recommended for the first 8 weeks. Lets you over-deliver on every send.
- Twice weekly (2x). Only if you have a clear content engine.
- Thrice weekly (3x). Personally, I do not recommend this at launch. The risk for burnout and forced content sends is significantly higher.

THE CADENCE TRAP.

Advertisers want more inventory. The temptation to go from 1x to 7x per week to sell more slots is the single fastest way to destroy an emerging newsletter. More sends with thinner value tank open rates — and a dropping open rate is the only metric advertisers actually care about. Earn cadence with engagement, not the other way around.

[Post Scheduling] Whatever cadence you land on, schedule editions ahead of time rather than sending live — you can queue up all four launch-month editions in one sitting and know exactly when each one goes out.

LAUNCH CADENCE:

SEND DAY(S) AND TIME:

O4. PICK YOUR CONTENT PILLARS.

Pick three to five. Anything outside your pillars is a guest pass, not a recurring feature.

- ☐ Local events (what's happening this week)
- ☐ Food & drink (restaurant openings, reviews, hidden gems)
- ☐ Local business (new shops, expansions, behind-the-scenes)
- ☐ News & happenings (curated and contextualized, never just rehashed)
- ☐ Politics & civic life (handle with care)
- ☐ Sports (high school, college, professional)
- ☐ History (deep dive moments in time and stories that connect)
- ☐ Nature & the outdoors (trails, wildlife, and recreation)
- ☐ People profiles (local folks worth knowing)
- ☐ Real estate & development (what's being built, what's on the market)
- ☐ Arts & culture (galleries, music, theater)
- ☐ Other: (get creative)

ANTI-PATTERN ALERT.

If your pillar list is "all of the above," you have no pillars. You have no true content strategy. Pick the ones where you can deliver uniquely valuable content — original reporting, commentary, lists, and insights. Anything you can't make uniquely valuable, leave to someone else. Your content will naturally evolve and shift as time goes on but you must launch with content pillars — then test, measure, and see what works for you and resonates with your audience.

[Analytics / Content Tagging] Tag each edition by pillar as you publish. Once you've got a few months of data, your analytics will show you which pillars actually drive opens and clicks — useful for deciding what to double down on before you ever ask a subscriber.

O5. PICK YOUR MONETIZATION APPROACH.

Contrary to what many believe, you can begin monetizing on day one. You do not have to wait for 10,000 subscribers, perfect open rates, or any arbitrary milestone. Let's take a moment to select which revenue streams you want to integrate — this may change as you scale your newsletter.

[Ad Network / Products / Paid Subscriptions] These three paths map almost directly to three native tools: the Ad Network for traditional sponsor slots, Digital Products for creative revenue (guides, merch, event tickets), and Paid Subscriptions for a recurring membership layer. You can turn any combination on without switching platforms as your model evolves.

CHOOSE YOUR FIGHTER

Traditional Monetization – This approach pairs well with an ad slinger multi-market model. More cadences. More markets. More revenue. Tread carefully if this is the path, there is a reason why traditional local media is collapsing. To execute, you create paid sponsor “slots” via fixed or flexible inventory and rate card. Featured stories, events, together with logos, etc.

Creative Monetization – Good for brand builders and community-oriented local media companies. Your monetization can come from event partnerships, ticket sales, digital products, physical products, or even a local holding company where you own what you advertise.

Hybrid (recommended) – This offers the most flexibility. You can opt in or out of working with traditional advertisers and do not **REQUIRE** their revenue to survive.

06. DAY-ONE SPONSOR PLAYBOOK.

You can land your first sponsor before edition #1. Here's the move:

- Identify warm or hot local business connection(s) you have in-network.
- If you can charge – charge. Even \$100/month is a mental revenue unlock and forces you to take the business more seriously out the gate.
- Pitch the connection with excitement about the new company you are building, show them a sample pre-release, talk about the growth trajectory over the coming months via ad spend
- Educate them of brand placements (logo at top, featured section, etc). Offer them a “discounted rate”, locked in pricing regardless of growth during the duration of the campaign. Push for a minimum 1 month commitment. \$100-\$1,000 is a fair monthly rate range.
- If they decline – give the slot away, you will use it as a case study and confidence builder. You're not begging; you're trading inventory for a results story and a relationship. You are playing the long game.
- Subscribers are local business owners themselves. When they see a real sponsor in your newsletter, they visualize themselves in that slot. The first sponsor becomes a sales tool for the next sponsor.
- The brand looks bigger than it is. That's the point.

[Website / Custom Pages] Once you've got even one sponsor, build a simple media kit page right on your beehiiv site (subscriber count, open rate, audience snapshot) — it's the same asset every future sponsor pitch will point to, so it's worth setting up on day one instead of rebuilding it later in a slide deck.

OPENING SPONSOR RATE (CHARGED OR COMPED):

THREE LOCAL BUSINESSES TO PITCH IN WEEK 1:

07. YOUR GROWTH CHANNELS.

Growth is the easy part. Shocking, I know. Don't overcomplicate it. These are the only growth channels you need for launch.

CHANNELS

- **Instagram** – feature local businesses and tag them; post stories about local events with a CTA to subscribe.

Additionally, integrate MANYCHAT. You can quickly build a new follower automation sequence to drive newsletter subscribers (~5 minutes to set up).

[API / Zapier Integration] If ManyChat is feeding new followers into your list, route them through a beehiiv subscribe form via its API or a Zapier connection — new sign-ups land with the right acquisition source tagged automatically, so you can see which channel is actually working.

[Subscribe Forms / Landing Page Analytics] Every subscribe form and landing page tracks its own conversion rate, so if you're running the same CTA on Instagram, a QR code, and your website, you'll know which placement is actually pulling weight, worth checking before you sink ad spend into a channel that isn't converting.

- **Meta ads** – geo-targeted and optimized for email signups. Target CAC: \$0.25 or lower.
- **Facebook groups (local)** – post about the launch and provide link
- **Reddit (local subreddits)** – high friction, low scale, very loyal, could have issues with the moderator.
- **Personal network blast** – text + email everyone you know on launch day

PAID AD BUDGET CAP

\$5 to \$100 per day

O8. SET UP THE BUSINESS

Most operators put this off. Don't. A newsletter is a business from edition #1

THE NON-NEGOTIABLES

- ☐ LLC formed in your state (or sole prop with a DBA — talk to your accountant and legal counsel)
- ☐ EIN obtained from the IRS if necessary (free, 10 minutes online)
- ☐ Business bank account opened (separate from personal)
- ☐ Business credit card opened (track expenses, build credit, earn rewards)
- ☐ Bookkeeping system in place

[Stripe Payouts] Ad Network and paid subscription revenue both settle through Stripe, so payouts land in the same business bank account you just opened — one less manual reconciliation step for your bookkeeping system.

- ☐ Media liability insurance quote obtained (optional)
- ☐ A simple contractor agreement template for the day you hire a photographer, designer, or writer (Knock knock Claude)

PART 2.

THE 90-DAY PLAYBOOK.

Four phases. Twelve weeks. Each phase has a goal and a checklist of must-haves before you move on.

PHASE 00 — PRE-LAUNCH (WEEKS -4 TO 0).

Goal: arrive at launch day with a name, a tech stack, 100+ pre-launch subscribers, and three editions written but unsent.

TECH STACK

Selecting your platform is a big decision. Switching costs are burdensome and platform capabilities can vary widely.

There are many options — but I along with the majority of operators in The Newsletter Club opt for beehiv.

It's an all-in-one platform for monetization, growth, analytics, referrals, ad networks, communities, and so much more.

Alternatives: substack, kit, ghost.

[Platform Overview] It's the only option on this list built to grow, monetize, and manage the business side (analytics, segments, payouts) in one place — so you're not stitching together three tools plus a Zapier workflow just to see how a send performed. Free to start, and every feature in this workbook lives on the same platform as you scale.

DELIVERABILITY SETUP

(DO THIS BEFORE EDITION #1)

Disclaimer: Many newsletter platforms handle most of these settings automatically, so you may be able to skip some of the steps below.

If you send from a generic Gmail or skip domain authentication, your editions land in spam and your open rate is a lie. Fix this before launch.

- Purchase a custom domain (e.g., yourname.com; alternatives: .co, .news)
- Configure a sending domain in your email service provider (ESP) (use a subdomain like mail.yourname.com)
- Add an SPF record to your DNS
- Add DKIM records to your DNS
- DMARC policy set to at least p=none (then escalate after 30 days)

[Deliverability / Domain Authentication] Connect a custom domain and the SPF, DKIM, and DMARC records get generated for you — you're pasting values into your registrar, not hand-rolling authentication from scratch. The unsubscribe link and mailing address footer are already built into every template, so CAN-SPAM compliance isn't a separate task.

- Inbox warm-up plan: ramp sends slowly over the first 2 weeks, not all 100 subscribers at once.

[Sender Reputation] Sending reputation is shared across the platform's infrastructure by default, which is part of why a brand-new sender can still land in the inbox — but the warm-up advice above still applies. Ramp gradually even with good infrastructure underneath you.

- "From" sender name set to the newsletter brand, not your personal name
- Use a monitored Reply-To address (never noreply@)
- Include a CAN-SPAM footer with your physical mailing address and a working unsubscribe link in every email

BRAND KIT

(KEEP IT SIMPLE)

I use Canva for all my branding needs and then carry over that same branding to the newsletter. The goal is to create a cohesive brand from the very beginning.

- One headline font + one body font (free Google Fonts are fine)
- One logo (a clean wordmark is enough — don't over-invest)

THE NEWSLETTER.CLUB

[Publication Branding / Theme] Your subscribe page, website, and every edition template pull from the same brand settings — set your colors, logo, and fonts once and they carry across all three instead of re-applying them by hand in multiple tools.

- Default photo treatment (any consistent filter, crop ratio, or border)
- A one-line tagline that appears in every edition's header

PRE-LAUNCH CHECKLIST

- ☐ Domain, ESP, and landing page are live.
- ☐ Design your newsletter template in the platform of your choice.
- ☐ Landing page has ONE message and ONE CTA: enter email.

[Subscribe Page] The default subscribe page is already built around a single email field and CTA — you're customizing copy and colors, not building a page from a blank canvas.

- ☐ Write your welcome sequence (you can launch with one email, but a sequence of 1 to 5 is recommended—see the Welcome Series section below).
- ☐ Draft your first edition (don't send it yet—this helps you learn the platform and start developing your voice and content pillars).
- ☐ Pin your content pillars and voice guidelines somewhere you'll see them every time you write.
- ☐ Build a pre-launch list of 25–100 subscribers from your personal network and in-person asks.
- ☐ Identify three to five potential sponsors (warm contacts are preferred).
- ☐ Claim your social handles: Instagram (required), Facebook (recommended), Threads/TikTok (optional).
- ☐ Finalize your social bios with one CTA: your newsletter subscribe link.
- ☐ Create a simple content production system for ideas, drafts, and reviews (Notion works well, but a notebook is fine too).

[Post Editor / Drafts] Drafts autosave and live in one place with your send history, so 'where do drafts live' has one answer by default instead of needing a separate doc or Notion workspace bolted on just to track versions.

- ☐ Decide on your newsletter send day(s)—and stick to the schedule.

I'LL SEND MY NEWSLETTER OUT ON:

PHASE 01 — LAUNCH (WEEKS 1-4).

Goal: ship four consecutive editions on schedule, hit 1,000 subscribers and introduce engagement mechanisms that drives participation — ask for responses on a question, have polls, etc.

WEEKLY RHYTHM

- Plan the week's edition — confirm the content and map it out in stack.
- Reporting and original sourcing. This is where the "uniquely valuable" content gets created. No upcycling. If you opt to feature existing news from a credible local source, add your own editorial around it.
- Write, edit, schedule. Send a test to yourself and one trusted reader. Preview on desktop and mobile. Ensure links works and format is right.
- Create a compelling subject line and supportive preview text.

[Subject Line A/B Testing] Run two subject line variants as an A/B test on a portion of your list before the full send goes out, useful in the first few editions while you're still learning what your specific audience responds to.

- Generate a meta title and description for SEO (tip: copy paste all your copy into LLM of choosing and have it generate output)

[SEO Fields] SEO fields are part of the post settings on every edition, so this isn't a separate step tacked onto publishing — fill it in right where you're already scheduling the send.

- Send. Immediately post to Instagram and stories with a screenshot or pull-quote and a clear subscribe CTA. Tag any businesses featured for reshares. You are looking to ride the coat tails of established businesses to fast track growth. I was able to get **1,000 subscribers in 10 days using that tactic alone.**

[Web Version / Shareable Links] Every edition gets a shareable web link automatically, so the Instagram post can link straight to the full edition instead of just a screenshot — gives people who see the repost a real way to subscribe, not just something to look at.

- Reply personally to every reader who replies. This is the most valuable time of your week. Don't outsource it, build connection.
- Open rate / click rate review. Note what worked. Refill the idea bank. We are looking for a 65%+ open rate at this stage and a target of 50%+ as time goes on.

[Analytics Dashboard] Open rate, click rate, and click-by-link breakdowns are all in the analytics dashboard by default — no separate reporting tool needed to run this weekly review.

WELCOME SERIES SUGGESTION

(5 EMAILS DRIPPED OVER 14 DAYS)

[Automations] Build this once as an Automation triggered on "new subscriber," set the day-2/5/9/14 delays, and it runs itself for every person who joins from here on out. Email 1's inbox-placement ask is worth pinning at the very top since it's the single biggest lever on whether email 2 onward even lands.

Email 1 (Immediately): "You're in."

- Send a warm welcome.
- Explain what subscribers can expect.
- Tell them when they'll receive editions.
- Ask them to move your email to their Primary inbox to avoid spam.
- Include a new subscriber survey to learn more about your audience.
 - Copy I use:
 - Reply "HEY" to this email.
 - Gmail (Mobile): Tap the three dots → Move → Primary.
 - Gmail (Desktop): Drag this email into the Primary tab.
 - Apple Mail: Click my email address and select Add to VIPs.

[Polls / Surveys] Drop a native poll block into email 1 for that survey — responses attach to the subscriber's record automatically, so you're building your audience snapshot from day one instead of retrofitting it at day 60.

Email 2 (Day 2): Tell your story.

- Why this newsletter exists.
- Why you're the one writing it.
- Keep it personal and concise.

Email 3 (Day 5): Share your best content.

- Highlight a past edition or signature piece.
- Show your value instead of describing it.
- Add on this as you build a content library.

Email 4 (Day 9): Ask one question.

- Find out what subscribers want more of.
- Use the responses to shape your future content and prepare for your day-60 survey.

Email 5 (Day 14): Ask readers to refer a friend.

THE LAUNCH SEND.

Treat send #1 like a soft launch, not a moonshot. The goal isn't to go viral. The goal is to prove to yourself, to your first readers, and to your first sponsor — that you can ship something great and deliver on time. Do that four weeks in a row and the rest of this guide gets a lot easier.

LAUNCH CHECKLIST

- ❑ Send Edition #1 on your scheduled day and time.
- ❑ Send Editions #2, #3, and #4 on the same schedule—don't skip a week.
- ❑ Launch and test your welcome series using a fresh subscriber.
- ❑ Measure your open rate (target: 70%+ for a new list of this size

[Analytics Dashboard] Both numbers are on the same dashboard as your subscriber growth chart, so this checklist item is really just "open the analytics tab" rather than a separate export-and-calculate step.

- ❑ Measure your click rate (target: 5%+ on at least one link).
- ❑ Reply personally to every reader who responds.
- ❑ Publish Instagram posts on the same day as each newsletter and tag relevant businesses.
- ❑ Grow your subscriber list to 1,000+.
- ❑ Initiate your first sponsor conversation (whether it's a complimentary partnership or a paid opportunity—see the Day-One Playbook).
- ❑ Refine or add two voice rules based on what resonated most with your audience.

PHASE 02 — GROWTH (WEEKS 5-8).

Goal: 0 to 1,000 subscribers. Sustainable CAC. A repeatable growth strategy you can dial up or down.

THE META GROWTH LOOP

Highest-leverage organic move for a local newsletter. Costs nothing, compounds, and builds local relationships at the same time.

- Every business you feature in the newsletter gets featured on your Instagram and or Facebook the same week — a photo, a sentence of context, and a tag.
- Events you cover gets a story post with the date, the place, and a link sticker that says "subscribe to know what's happening every week."
- Tagged businesses repost. Their followers see it. A percentage convert to subscribers.
- Goal: 3+ tagged posts and 3+ tagged stories per week.
- The CTA is always the same version: subscribe to the newsletter. Not "follow us." Not "check out our link." Subscribe.
- Post in Facebook local groups.

THE CAC TARGET.

For a local newsletter just starting out on Meta (Facebook + Instagram), target customer acquisition cost is \$0.25 per subscriber or lower.

Above \$0.25 at this initial phase is a signal that your media, copy, or targeting are not working. Below \$0.25, you can pour money in confidently.

Optimize for geo-tight, lookalike-driven signup ads. Test creative aggressively in the first two weeks. 5 ads. After 7 days turn off the worst performer. Duplicate the best and refine with updated copy and media. Once you find a winner, Zuckerberg will scale it on your behalf.

Revisit every few weeks to improve. CAC will get higher as you scale.

[Boosts / Referral Program] Boosts lets you pay to get recommended inside other newsletters in similar categories, and you only pay for verified subscribers who actually confirm — a nice complement to the Instagram loop because it taps other publishers' audiences instead of cold Meta traffic. Turn on the built-in Referral Program at the same time and your best subscribers start doing the sharing for you at \$0 CAC.

[Acquisition Source Tracking] Every subscriber's acquisition source — Meta ad, Instagram bio link, QR code, referral — is tracked automatically, so the weekly CAC math in this section doesn't require a separate UTM spreadsheet to calculate; the breakdown is already sitting in analytics.

AD CREATIVE THAT WORKS

- A specific local hook — a photo of a place subscribers recognize, with hero copy that addresses a pain point or value proposition. Free Weekly Guide, Looking to find out what's happening in [GEOGRAPHY], etc
- Use content pillars to offer clarity into what type of content people will receive.
- For video ads, walking past a local landmark with a voiceover about what's in your newsletter, speaking directly to the audience
- Native-feeling creative — looks like a friend posted it, not like an ad

GROWTH CHECKLIST

- ❑ Instagram cadence locked at 3+ tagged posts and 5+ tagged stories per week
- ❑ Meta ads campaign live with at least 3 creative variants
- ❑ CAC measured weekly; cut anything above \$0.50 after 7 day run
- ❑ Winning ad scaled — daily budget doubled once CAC stabilizes under \$0.25
- ❑ Referral program turned on inside your ESP (beehiiv has this built-in), long term this won't be a reliable growth mechanism

[Referral Program] You set your own reward tiers (extra content, merch, a shoutout) and it runs in the background of every edition — no separate referral tool or unique-link generator needed.

- ❑ Cross-promo arranged with other businesses, creators, newsletters

[Recommendations (free) vs. Boosts (paid)] This is worth distinguishing from Boosts: cross-promo/swaps can run through the free Recommendations network at no cost to either newsletter, while Boosts is the paid, pay-per-verified-subscriber version. Good early-stage move is to start with free recommendations before spending on Boosts.

- ❑ Hit 1,000 subscribers (stretch: 2,500)
- ❑ Open rate held at 60%+ as the list grew
- ❑ Integrate a sunset automation — keeps your list clean and metrics high

[Automations (Sunset / Win-back)] This is a built-in automation type — it detects subscribers who've stopped opening and either re-engages them with a win-back send or removes them from your active count, which keeps your open rate (and your sponsor pitch numbers) honest as the list grows.

PHASE 03 — MONETIZATION (WEEKS 9-12).

Goal: land your first paid sponsor (or convert a comp into a paid renewal), publish a rate card, build the inventory system.

THE FIRST PAID SPONSOR

If you took a comped sponsor in Phase 1 as a case study, this is when you cash it in. Walk into the renewal with: open rate, click rate, current list size, and any direct responses.

If you didn't take a comped sponsor — focus on three pitches per week, every week, until you book one.

Ensure your newsletter has one to three calls to action to partner. If you are creating good content, local business owners will reach out. I've closed 99% of my sponsor deals this way.

DAY-60 SUBSCRIBER SURVEY

Around day 60, send a one-question survey: what content readers enjoy most, what they want to see more of, or gather insights on who the audience is — that is gold for sponsor sales. "62% of our subscribers own their own homes" is a sentence that helps to close deals.

- Survey live by week 8 at the latest
- Results compiled into a one-page audience snapshot, this document stays up to date as time goes on
- Snapshot used in every sponsor pitch from week 9 forward

[Polls / Segments] Run the survey as a native poll block right inside the edition — responses tie back to the subscriber record automatically, so "62% of our subscribers own their own homes" becomes a live segment you can filter by, not a static stat you have to re-tally by hand every quarter.

RATE CARD STARTER MATH

GENERAL RULE OF THUMB EARLY ON — THERE IS A LOT OF NUANCE AROUND THIS

SUBSCRIBER COUNT	STARTING SPONSOR RATE (PER SEND)
500–1,000	\$50–\$150
1,000–2,500	\$150–\$400
2,500–5,000	\$400–\$800
5,000–10,000	\$800–\$1,500
10,000+	\$1,500+

[Ad Network / Paid Subscriptions] Once your rate card is live, the Ad Network can run alongside your direct sales to fill inventory you haven't sold yet with vetted advertisers, so slots don't sit empty between pitches. And when you're ready for a subscriber-only perk, Paid Subscriptions are built into the same platform — no separate tool needed to start charging your most engaged readers.

PRICING NOTE.

These are starting-point ranges for a single sponsor slot in a local newsletter with 50%+ open rate and a high-intent audience. Exceptional engagement means you can charge more. Weak engagement means you need to fix the product before raising the price. Offer discounts for longer duration campaigns and add premium for category exclusivity. We are not trying to maximize profit, we are trying to maximize long term partnerships.

THE SPONSOR PITCH (60-SECOND VERSION)

- Open: "I send a weekly newsletter to [N] people in [market]. They open it [X]% of the time, which is roughly [Y]x the industry average."
- Show: Forward them the last edition. Don't summarize it.
- Position: "Our subscribers are local business owners, decision-makers, and engaged residents — the exact people you want walking through your door."
- Offer: One specific slot, one specific week, one specific price. Make it easy to say yes.
- Close: "We can run an initial campaign to measure engagement, If it works, we'll talk about a recurring slot. If it doesn't resonate with the audience, we can adjust editorial, creative, or reassess the fit."

FOUNDING SPONSOR OFFER

Offer your first 3-5 sponsors a "founding sponsor" rate — 25-50% off the standard rate for X months, in exchange for a public testimonial and rate-lock. They get a discount; you get social proof and predictable inventory.

MONETIZATION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Rate card finalized as a one-page PDF (clean, brand-aligned, easy to forward)
- ☐ Insertion order template ready (simple one-pager: dates, deliverables, creative specs, price, payment terms)

[Ad Network Deal Management] If a deal comes through the Ad Network rather than a direct pitch, the platform tracks flight dates, creative specs, and delivery for you — worth using your own insertion order template only for the direct deals you're sourcing yourself.

- ☐ Three sponsor pitches sent per week, every week, with tracked replies
- ☐ First paid sponsor booked (any amount)
- ☐ Sponsor onboarding doc created (deliverables, deadlines, creative specs, optional)
- ☐ Performance recap sent to sponsor within 7 days of placement

[Analytics / Reporting] Pull the recap straight from analytics — opens, clicks, and link-level performance for that specific edition are already there, so the recap is a five-minute export rather than a manual tally.

- ☐ Renewal conversation scheduled before their booked slot runs out
- ☐ Public testimonial or quote captured from first sponsor (social proof for sponsor #2)
- ☐ Founding sponsor rate published for first 3-5 partners
- ☐ Open rate held at 50%+, list now 1,500+, unit economics positive

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Add these to your plan. None of them are glamorous. All of them save you from preventable problems in months 4 through 12.

BRAND & POSITIONING

- ☐ Brand kit documented (2 colors, 1-2 fonts, 1 logo, photo treatment)
- ☐ A founder story you can copy/paste into any pitch, podcast intro, or media inquiry
- ☐ A one-page press kit (logo files, sample editions, founder bio, audience snapshot)

[Website / Custom Pages] Build the press kit as a page on your own site instead of a static PDF — it's easy to keep the subscriber count and audience snapshot current, and it's the same link you can drop into every sponsor pitch and podcast booking request.

- ☐ Tagline locked and applied everywhere — website, every edition, social bios

COMMUNITY & LONGEVITY

- ☐ First IRL meetup planned within the first 3 months — small and free is OK
- ☐ A subscriber-only perk by month 6 — could be an event, a private list, etc.

[Paid Subscriptions] Paid Subscriptions can gate whatever that perk turns out to be — a private list, early access to editions, bonus content — behind a simple monthly or annual price, without needing a separate membership platform.

- ☐ Weekly time blocked for sponsor sales — not "when I get to it"
- ☐ Monthly time blocked for reporting (your numbers, sent to nobody but your future self)
- ☐ Burnout plan — designated time off, guest editors, contributors, or rerun strategy

MONEY DISCIPLINE

- ☐ All revenue and expenses run through the business bank account (no personal commingling)
- ☐ Quarterly estimated taxes set aside (rule of thumb: 25-30% of net into a separate savings account)

[Stripe Payouts] Ad Network and paid subscription payouts both come through Stripe with statements attached, which makes pulling quarterly revenue numbers for tax purposes a lot less painful than reconciling several disconnected payment sources.

- ☐ Sponsor invoices on a defined cadence (ex. Net 30)
- ☐ A simple monthly P&L review (revenue, expenses, profit, runway)
- ☐ Pricing reviewed every 3 months as the list grows

PART 3.

THE MASTER CHECKLIST.

Everything condensed. Print it. Tape it above your desk. Cross off as you go.

PRE-LAUNCH (WEEKS -4 TO 0)

- ☐ Name chosen and tested with three people
- ☐ Market defined; population sized; competitor weakness named
- ☐ Cadence locked
- ☐ Pillars chosen (3-5)
- ☐ Positioning statement written
- ☐ Tech stack picked
- ☐ Domain + ESP + landing page live
- ☐ SPF, DKIM, DMARC configured
- ☐ Welcome series (3-5 emails) written
- ☐ First edition drafted
- ☐ Pre-launch subscribers collected
- ☐ Three sponsor prospects identified
- ☐ Social handles claimed
- ☐ Brand kit documented
- ☐ Business entity formed; EIN, bank account, bookkeeping in place
- ☐ Editorial calendar 4 weeks deep

LAUNCH (WEEKS 1-4)

- ☐ Edition #1 sent on time
- ☐ Editions #2-#4 sent on time, no exceptions
- ☐ Welcome series live and tested
- ☐ Personal replies to every reader who responded
- ☐ Instagram post + stories the day of each send
- ☐ 250-500 subscribers
- ☐ Open rate 50%+
- ☐ First comped or paid sponsor lined up
- ☐ Founder story published

GROWTH (WEEKS 5-8)

- ☐ 3+ tagged Instagram posts per week
- ☐ 5+ tagged stories per week
- ☐ Meta ads live; CAC measured weekly
- ☐ Winning ad scaled; CAC at or below \$0.25
- ☐ Referral program on
- ☐ 1,000 subscribers
- ☐ Open rate held at 50%+
- ☐ Day-60 subscriber survey sent
- ☐ Cross-promo with at least one peer

MONETIZATION (WEEKS 9-12)

- ☐ Rate card finalized as a one-page PDF
- ☐ Insertion order template ready
- ☐ 3 sponsor pitches per week
- ☐ First paid sponsor booked
- ☐ Sponsor recap sent within 48 hours
- ☐ Renewal conversation scheduled
- ☐ Testimonial captured
- ☐ Founding sponsor rate published
- ☐ 1,500+ subscribers, positive unit economics

APPENDIX. FRAMEWORKS & REFERENCES.

THE UNIQUE VALUE TEST

APPLY THIS TO EVERY EDITION BEFORE YOU SEND:

- Could the reader have found this from a Google search? If yes – kill it or rewrite it.
- Could the reader have found this from the town's official channels? If yes – add the angle only you have.

THE CADENCE DISCIPLINE TEST

- Do I have a clear value reason for the second send, or am I doing it for ad inventory?
- Can I sustain this cadence for a year without dropping quality?
- Have my open rates held above 50%? If not – fix the product aka the content, not the cadence.

THE CAC MATH

TARGET: \$0.25 PER SUBSCRIBER ON META FOR A LOCAL NEWSLETTER.

MONTHLY AD BUDGET	SUBS AT \$0.25 CAC
\$100	400
\$250	1,000
\$500	2,000
\$1,000	4,000
\$2,500	10,000

DAY-ONE SPONSOR DECISION TREE

- Can I charge a local business at least \$50 for a slot in edition #1? → Charge. Small revenue trains the muscle.
- Can't charge yet? → Comp the slot. In exchange, get a quote, a case study, and a 90-day revisit commitment.
- Comp or paid, the sponsor exists for two reasons: (1) deliver real value to that business, (2) make the brand look bigger than it is for the next sponsor.

THE REPLY RITUAL

- Reply personally to every reader who emails for the first 90 days. Single highest-ROI activity of the launch period. Subscribers who get a personal reply become evangelists. Evangelists do your growth for you. Don't skip this. Don't automate this.

THE "DON'T DO THESE" LIST

- Don't add a paid subscriber tier in the first 90 days. You haven't earned it yet.
- Don't apologize for cadence misses. Simply don't miss.
- Don't take a sponsor that doesn't fit your audience for the money. The first off-brand sponsor costs more in subscribers than they pay in revenue.

This document is yours to mark up, fight with, and rewrite. The best operators take a playbook like this and make it their own within 90 days. That's the point.

NOW GO SHIP EDITION #1.

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