



SUBSCRIBERS FIRST, POLISH LATER

The Local Newsletter Playbook

What you need to know to own your town.

Hi, I'm Alex. I'm LocalTrophy's founder, and also its first customer.

I've been a digital nomad for years, moving to a new city about once a year. As a head of content I've worked on newsletters of every size, from 2 million sends a day down to small boutique lists. I also built and sold my own media company.

But this isn't about me. This is about you. I want you to own your audience. Stop renting it from Facebook, Instagram and X, and stop hoping the algorithm doesn't change while you're sleeping.

Here's what I learned. Getting subscribers is one piece of the puzzle. Writing something worth opening every single week is a full-time job.

This guide covers both.

Alex

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Every number in here is labeled: a real result, a rule of thumb, or an assumption. Platform features change, so check current docs.

The map is already *drawn*.

Ask a founder what the hardest part of a business is and, once they stop talking about their logo, you'll get the same answer: finding customers.

Most businesses have to work out who their customer is, where that person spends time, and what it costs to reach them. A local newsletter skips most of that. Your reader lives here. Your ad platform will happily show ads only to people who live here. The map is already drawn, and it has a county line on it.

That leaves a short loop:

- 1 Run cheap ads aimed at one town.
- 2 Collect email addresses.
- 3 Send those people something worth opening.
- 4 Sell space in front of them to local businesses.

That's the business. The rest of this guide is detail, and most of the detail exists to stop you doing step three before step two.

THE FLIP

Most people build the newsletter, then go looking for readers. This playbook runs it backwards. You find out whether your town wants the thing before you spend a month making the thing.

WHY IT MATTERS

If nobody signs up for a promise, a beautiful first issue won't save it. You'd rather learn that on a Tuesday afternoon than three months in.

You haven't made progress until you have subscribers. Everything before that is a hobby with a color palette.

01

Why local is the easy mode

Small towns included.

The pitch for local newsletters usually comes with a photo of Austin or Brooklyn. Big metro, rich advertisers, a coffee shop on every corner fighting for attention. Lovely. You don't need one.

A workable floor is a market of about **50,000 people**. You can go smaller, it just gets tighter. Somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 residents is a comfortable place to start: big enough to fill an ad audience, small enough that nobody's covering it properly.

The Roswell test

To prove the point, the test we keep coming back to picked Roswell, New Mexico. Just under 50,000 people. Best known for a 1947 incident involving either a weather balloon or visitors, depending on who's buying the drinks. Not a rich market. Not a trendy one.

If a local newsletter can work in Roswell, it can work almost anywhere. It had real subscribers inside an hour and a half. (Chapter 5 has the receipts.)

Pick the place and move on. The best town is the one you'd want to write about every week, because you will.

RULE OF THUMB

50,000 people is a floor, not a law. A tight suburb of 30,000 with a busy main street can beat a sprawling 120,000 that nobody identifies with.

BAD SIGN THAT ISN'T

The local paper shrank to two reporters and a puzzle page. That's an opening.

SIGNS IT'S THE WRONG TOWN

- **It's really two towns** that don't like each other. Pick one, or name it after the thing they share.
- **Everything happens 20 minutes away.** If locals drive to the bigger city every weekend, cover the bigger city.
- **Nobody advertises.** No billboards, no Facebook ads, no sponsor banners at the ballpark. No sponsors later, either.
- **You'd be bored by week three.** You're writing this every week. Pick somewhere you're curious about.

Score your town in *ten minutes*

Before you spend a dollar on ads, run the town through five checks. Two points if it clearly passes, one if it's close, zero if it doesn't.

CHECK	PASSES WHEN	HOW TO CHECK	SCORE
Size	About 50,000 people live in the area locals call home.	The Census Bureau's QuickFacts page for the city or county.	012
Stuff happening	You can find 15 or more events in the next two weeks.	The city's event calendar, Eventbrite, and the Instagram accounts of the three busiest venues.	012
Advertisers	Plenty of local businesses already pay for ads.	Search the town's name in Meta's Ad Library and count the local advertisers.	012
Thin coverage	Nobody sends a good weekly roundup.	Search "[town] newsletter." Look at how often the local paper still publishes.	012
Identity	People say the name out loud when asked where they live.	Look for an active "[town] community" Facebook group with thousands of members.	012

8 TO 10

Go. Start the ads this week.

5 TO 7

Go, with a sharper angle: food, families or local business instead of everything.

0 TO 4

Score the next town over before you commit.

Big city? Pick a neighborhood.

In a metro of two million, "Atlanta" is too broad to promise anything. A neighborhood or a cluster of suburbs gets you what a small city has: a clear identity, its own businesses, and nobody covering it well. Meta lets you target by zip code, so the ad side still works.

OUR RULE OF THUMB

A middling score is normal. It usually means you need a sharper angle, not a different town.

02

The math, on a napkin

Spoiler: it's mostly multiplication.

Newsletter ads are usually priced on **CPM**: cost per mille, which is French for "we needed an acronym." It's the price per thousand people who see the ad. In a newsletter, "see" usually means "opened the email."

So revenue per send is just opens, divided by a thousand, times your rate. Here it is with round numbers:

Subscribers	10,000
Open rate	50%
Opens per send	5,000
Sponsor rate (CPM)	\$50
Revenue per send	\$250

Illustrative. 50% opens is healthy for a local list that people asked to join. \$50 CPM is a placeholder. Your real rate is whatever your first sponsor agrees to pay (chapter 10).

SAY IT LIKE A LOCAL

Sponsors don't care what CPM means. Tell them "5,000 neighbors open this every Thursday." Same math, better sentence.

WATCH THE OPENS

Apple Mail inflates open rates by preloading images. Treat opens as a rough signal, and lean on clicks and replies when you can.

More sends, more inventory

Every send is another slot you can sell. Same list, same rate, different schedule:

WEEKLY

\$250

a week, about \$1,080 a month

3X A WEEK

\$750

a week, about \$3,250 a month

5X A WEEK

\$1,250

a week, about \$5,400 a month

The catch: the more you publish, the more you have to write, and the more sponsors you have to find, chase and invoice. **Start weekly.** You can always add a send. Quietly dropping from five to one looks exactly like what it is.

What one subscriber is *worth*

Flip the math around and you get the only number that matters for growth: what you can afford to pay for one email address.

The rough version goes like this. One subscriber earns about **50 cents a month** in ad revenue. They stick around for about **24 months**. That makes them worth around \$12 over their lifetime.

Ad revenue per subscriber, per month	\$0.50
Months they stay	× 24
Lifetime value	\$12

Pay \$1 to get that subscriber and you're looking at a 12x return on ad spend. Pay \$2 and it's 6x. That's why the target in this playbook is **\$1 to \$2 per subscriber**.

It's a good story. Now check it, because the whole model leans on it.

REVENUE, NOT PROFIT

LTV here is gross ad revenue. Your time, your platform bill and the occasional sponsor who pays in "exposure" all come out of it.

24 MONTHS IS GENEROUS

People move, change email addresses and get bored. Plan for some churn every month and be pleasantly surprised.

THE NUMBER EVERYTHING RESTS ON

That 50 cents assumes you send almost every day.

Use the example from the last page: 5,000 opens at \$50 CPM, spread over 10,000 subscribers, is 2.5 cents per subscriber per send. Multiply by your schedule:

5 sends a week (about 21.7 a month)	\$0.54 / month
1 send a week (about 4.3 a month)	\$0.11 / month
Weekly, over 24 months	about \$2.60

So on a weekly schedule, a \$1 subscriber returns about 2.6x in ad revenue, not 12x. Still worth buying. Just budget like an adult. And notice the trap: the economics get good at high frequency, which is exactly the workload that burns people out. Hold that thought until chapter 8.

03

Advanced forms of procrastination

They feel like work. They aren't.

Starting a newsletter produces a wonderful amount of satisfying, low-stakes busywork. None of it tells you whether anyone in your town wants to read the thing.

FEELS LIKE PROGRESS

- Picking a logo
- Choosing between two nearly identical fonts
- Building a website
- Planning an editorial calendar through next spring
- Tuning every setting in the platform
- Researching audience demographics
- Writing three "practice" issues

ACTUALLY PROGRESS

- A live signup form
- An ad running in your town
- A subscriber count above zero
- One reply from a real reader
- A sponsor saying yes. Or no. Either one is data.

Do the one big thing first

Every new business has one task that, once done, makes everything else either easier or pointless. Here it's proving people will sign up. Do that first. If it works, the logo will still be there next week. If it doesn't, you just saved yourself a logo.

Take the quick wins

Early on, momentum beats polish. A boring name that's live today beats a clever one you'll launch next month. You can rename it later. It's fine.

FRICTION CHECK

Before you add anything, ask whether it makes it easier or harder for a stranger to subscribe. If harder, it waits.

THE TEMPLATE

Use your platform's default. It's been tested on millions of inboxes. Your custom one has been tested on you.

Sell it before you write it

Yes, before.

The responsible move is to write a first issue, then go find readers. This playbook is irresponsible on purpose. You put the newsletter in front of your town before it exists, see who raises a hand, and then write the first issue for those people.

Nobody's being tricked. Readers sign up for a promise: *what's going on in your town, in your inbox, every week*. You'll keep it. You're just declining to build the whole thing for an audience of zero.

Ask for less

For a free newsletter, ask for an email address. That's it. No name, no phone number, no zip code, no "how did you hear about us." Every extra field costs signups, and right now signups are the only score that counts.

Yes, some of those people will be lower intent. Some will never open a thing. That's fine. They'll unsubscribe or go quiet, and you'll clean them out later. You can't clean a list you don't have.

MOMENTUM OVER PRECISION

Lead quality is a problem for people who already have leads. Get the list first, sort it second.

THE PROMISE

Write it in one line and say the town's name in it. If the line needs a second sentence, it's not a promise yet.

THE WHOLE LAUNCH KIT

- **A newsletter account.** beehiiv works well here. Whatever you use, make sure it has a referral program.
- **A name that says the town.** "Roswell Weekly" is fine. Truly.
- **A Facebook page** with the same name. Meta ads need one to run from.
- **A one-line promise.** See the margin.
- **A welcome email.** Chapter 6 covers what goes in it.
- **No website.** The signup page your platform gives you is plenty.

Name it, promise it, *launch it*

You need three things before the first ad runs: a name, a one-line promise, and a signup page that doesn't leak. None of them should take more than an afternoon.

Four name formulas

[Town] Weekly

Roswell Weekly. Boring, clear, easy to search for. Underrated.

The [Town] Brief

Sounds like news. Works well for business-minded readers.

Landmark plus beat

The Pier and the Pulse, in St. Pete. Locals get it instantly.

Wordplay

The Charlotte Harlot. Memorable, and a risk. Run it past three locals first.

The promise, as a fill-in-the-blank

TEMPLATE

Every [day], the [number] best [things to do / openings / deals] in [town], in [minutes] minutes.

Every Thursday, the five best things to do in Roswell this weekend, in four minutes.

"News for Springfield" is too broad to spread. A promise with a day, a number and a town is something people can repeat to a friend, and that's how word of mouth starts.

The signup page

Instant forms live inside Facebook, but every other channel in this book (groups, QR cards, referrals) sends people to your signup page. Your platform gives you one. Fix it before you send anyone there:

- One headline that states the promise.
- One line on what they get and how often.
- One email field, and nothing else.
- A screenshot of a sample issue, so they know what they're signing up for.
- Check it on your phone. That's where most local traffic comes from.

BEFORE ISSUE ONE

No sample issue yet? Mock up the first one in your platform's editor and screenshot it. It only has to look real enough to show the format.

REALISTIC EXPECTATION

A decent local signup page converts 30 to 50 percent of the people who land on it. If you're under 20 percent, the headline is vague. The traffic is fine.

05

The ad that does the heavy lifting

Meta, a phone, and about 16 seconds.

Paid Meta ads are the engine of this playbook. Facebook and Instagram are still where your neighbors scroll, and Meta lets you draw a circle on a map and pay only to reach the people inside it.

OBJECTIVE	Leads. You're not selling anything. You're collecting email addresses.
FORMAT	Instant form. People sign up without leaving the app. Fewer steps, more signups.
FORM FIELDS	Email only. See chapter 4. Every field you add is a toll booth.
LOCATION	Your town, plus a radius that matches how locals define it. Leave out the next town over if residents would be offended to be lumped in.
WHO	Leave age, gender and interests broad. Let Meta find who actually signs up. Your guess about who reads a local newsletter is probably worse than its data, and it'll prove that within a week.
BUDGET	Spend heavy on day one, around \$100, so the system gets enough signups to learn what a subscriber looks like. Then cut to an amount you can keep paying.

EXPECT THIS

Your first emails might cost **\$5 to \$15 each**. That's the algorithm learning. It isn't the verdict yet. Give it a few days before you panic or celebrate. Both are premature on day one.

DON'T BABYSIT IT

Every edit sends the campaign back to learning. Change one thing at a time, and not every hour.

The creative: *shorter than you think*

Short talking-head videos tend to win for this. Your phone, decent light, you talking to the camera like a neighbor rather than a news anchor. Fifteen to twenty seconds. Editing should take minutes. If you're color grading, see chapter 3.

The hook that works is local FOMO: good things are happening near you, and you're missing them.

CAPTIONS ON

Most people watch with the sound off. Burn in captions so the hook lands on mute.

SAMPLE SCRIPT, ABOUT 16 SECONDS

"Every week something great happens in Roswell, and most people find out about it the Monday after. New spots, events, the stuff your neighbors are talking about. I put it all in one free email every Thursday. Tap below, drop your email, done."

Copy what's working

Meta's [Ad Library](#) is public. Search other newsletters and local brands, and look for ads that have been running for months. Nobody pays to keep a bad ad alive that long, so the long-runners probably work. Probably. Borrow the structure, not the words.

Let the robots draft

Ask ChatGPT or Claude for three headlines, primary text and descriptions, then switch on Meta's text variations and let it test. AI is a speed tool here. It writes ten okay headlines in four seconds and the platform finds the one your town likes. Neither of them knows your town. That part's you.

Three hooks worth testing *as separate ads, same campaign*

FOMO	Insider	Utility
"Most people in Roswell find out about the good stuff the Monday after."	"I read every city council agenda so you don't have to. Here's what's coming."	"One free email every Thursday. What's open, what's on, what's new."

WHAT HAPPENED IN ROSWELL

8

leads for about \$9, within minutes of going live

\$1.15

per lead, as Meta reported it at that point

1h 22m

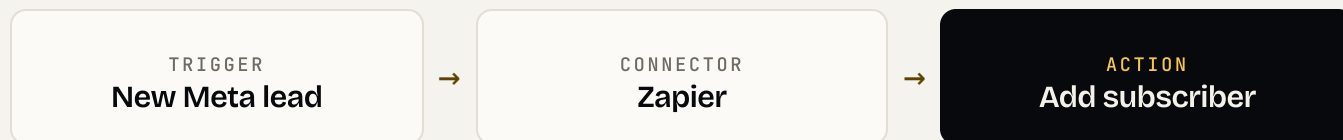
from a blank screen to a launched newsletter with subscribers

Result vs. forecast. Those numbers came from a tiny sample in the first hour. The claim that costs fall to 40 or 50 cents per subscriber is a forecast. Plan on \$1 to \$2 until your own numbers say otherwise.

Plumbing

Boring. Mandatory.

Leads from an instant form don't land in your newsletter on their own. They sit inside Meta, waiting, while their interest cools. Wire them in on day one.



Every automation is a trigger and an action. That's the whole concept.

Tag where they came from

Tag every subscriber with their source: *facebook-ad, referral, boost*. In three months, when you're deciding where to spend, you'll want to know which channel brought in people who actually open. Without tags, you'll be guessing, and you'll guess in favor of whatever you enjoyed setting up.

Test it like a stranger

Fill out your own form from your phone. Check that you land in the list, carry the right tag, and get the welcome email. Then do it again tomorrow, because connections break quietly.

The welcome email

It's the most-opened email you'll ever send. Say what's coming and when. Then ask one question, which is the whole of the next chapter.

NATIVE OPTIONS

Zapier is the well-worn route. Platforms keep adding direct Meta integrations, so check yours before paying for a connector.

SPEED MATTERS

Someone who signed up two minutes ago remembers why. Someone who signed up four days ago marks you as spam.

The welcome email, *already written*

Copy this, swap in your town and your day, and turn it on before your first ad goes live.

Subject You're in. Here's what happens Thursday.

Hey,

Thanks for signing up for Roswell Weekly.

Every Thursday morning you'll get one email with what's worth knowing in Roswell: what's on this weekend, what just opened, and anything that changes your week. It takes about four minutes to read.

One quick question so I can make it useful. What do you want most?

Local deals

This weekend

News that affects me

Places to try

Just tap one.

If you know someone who'd like this, forward it to them. That's how it grows.

See you Thursday,

[Your name]

P.S. You can reply to this email any time. I read every one.

DAY, TIME, LENGTH

Tell them exactly when it arrives and how long it takes. People keep opening what they expect.

ONE-TAP POLL

Your format comes from these answers. Chapter 7 covers what to do with them.

ASK FOR REPLIES

A reply tells their inbox you're someone they want to hear from. It also gets you tips.

BEFORE THE FIRST AD GOES LIVE

- A test lead from your phone shows up in your list within a minute.
- It carries the right source tag.
- It gets the welcome email. Some platforms only send it to people who sign up on the site, unless you switch it on for imported subscribers.

Three more automated emails, once the first one works

Day 3: your best issue

New subscribers haven't seen an issue yet. Send them the one you're proudest of.

Day 10: the referral ask

Point them to the referral program and the one-referral reward (chapter 9).

Day 60 of no opens

Ask if they still want it. If they don't open that either, remove them. A smaller list that opens beats a bigger one that doesn't.

Let readers write the brief

They'll tell you. Ask.

You don't know what your town wants from a newsletter. Neither do we. Your subscribers do, and they'll tell you for free.

Ask at signup, while they still remember why they clicked. One question, multiple choice, one tap to answer.

Then take the **top three answers and put all three in every issue.** That's your format. You didn't brainstorm it. You were told it.

KEEP ASKING

A one-click poll at the bottom of each issue costs nothing and stops the newsletter drifting toward whatever you personally find interesting.

WELCOME EMAIL, QUESTION ONE

What do you want most from Roswell Weekly?

- ☐ Local deals and discounts
- ☐ What's happening this weekend
- ☐ News that actually affects me
- ☐ Stories about people who live here
- ☐ Hot takes on the new roundabout

What to do with the answers

- **Lead with the winner.** Whatever wins goes at the top of every issue.
- **Watch for a split.** If deals and news tie, you might have two newsletters. Note it, don't act on it yet.
- **Read the replies.** Some people reply instead of clicking. Those are your future sources and sponsors. Re-ask every few months, since the answers change as the list grows.

More questions worth asking later

Where do you get local news?

Shows who you're really up against.

Which place deserves more fans?

Free story ideas from locals.

Do you run a local business?

Your sponsor list (chapter 10).

Thumbs up or down?

One click. Read the down votes.

The treadmill

Where local newsletters quietly die.

Here's the part the launch videos fast-forward through. Getting subscribers takes a weekend. Writing for them takes every week, forever.

The classic failure goes like this. Launch at five issues a week, powered by enthusiasm and cold brew. Hit week six. Miss a Tuesday. Miss a Thursday. Send an issue that's mostly apology. Readers forgive a schedule. They don't forgive one that keeps changing.

And remember chapter 2: the money gets good at higher frequency. So the business quietly pushes you toward exactly the workload that breaks people. Go in knowing that, and decide your schedule before the spreadsheet decides it for you.

PICK A DAY

Same day, same time, every week. Readers build a habit around you, and so do sponsors.

BANK ONE

Keep one evergreen issue in reserve for the week everything goes wrong. It will.

It's three to five jobs pretending to be one

A good local issue needs all of these, every time:

Sourcing

Finding the 40 things that happened this week.

Selecting

Deciding which six matter, and to whom.

Shaping

A structure readers can find their way around.

Writing

In a voice people want to open.

Checking

The event's still on and the restaurant didn't close Tuesday.

Most people are good at two of these. The other three go thin, late or generic, usually around week eight.

WHAT ONE WEEKLY ISSUE COSTS YOU

Sourcing and reading	2 to 3 hrs
Selecting and shaping	1 to 2 hrs
Writing	3 to 4 hrs
Checking facts, links, dates	1 hr

7 to 10

hours a week, by our rough estimate, for a solo operator doing six to eight items well. Before sponsor emails.

Where the stories *actually are*

Sourcing is where most issues go thin. Here's where to look before you write a word. Most of it is public, and almost nobody reads it.

City council and planning agendas

Posted days ahead. New developments show up here months before the ribbon cutting.

Health inspection reports

Openings, closings and the occasional drama. Public in many counties.

Venue and restaurant Instagram

Events and specials often get announced here first, and sometimes only here.

Chamber of Commerce calendar

Ribbon cuttings, mixers and new members. Also a list of future sponsors.

New business filings

Your state's business search shows new companies registered in town.

Liquor license and permit filings

A new restaurant usually files for both before anyone announces it.

School board agendas

Calendar changes and boundary fights. Parents read every word.

Eventbrite and Facebook Events

Filter to your town for the next two weeks. Then check the event is still on.

Facebook groups, Nextdoor, Reddit

What people are actually arguing about. Treat it as tips, never as facts.

Google Maps

Search "coming soon" and look for new pins on busy streets.

A WEEKLY ISSUE THAT WORKS

The opener	One line about the week, in your voice.	~50 words
The one big thing	The story that affects the most readers, and what it means for them.	~150 words
This weekend	Five picks, each with when, where and what it costs.	~200 words
New and gone	What opened, what closed, what's coming.	~100 words
Sponsor	One slot, clearly labeled. Never disguised as a pick.	~60 words
One useful thing	A deadline, a road closure, a tip.	~50 words
The poll	One question, one tap.	1 line

About 600 words, a three or four minute read. Keep the sections in the same order every week so readers know where things live.

Beware the *zombie newsletter*

AI makes the treadmill easier and worse at the same time. It can fill a local template for any city forever: five things this weekend, three openings, weather, sponsor. The result is a zombie newsletter: the town names are right, and nobody decided anything.

Your reader didn't subscribe for proof that information exists. They subscribed so somebody else would sort it.

AI'S ACTUAL JOB

Speed, summaries, first drafts. Picking what matters to your town stays with a person.

THE CITY-SWAP TEST

Take the lead item from your next issue. Replace your town with another town and change the venue names. If the advice still works, it wasn't local enough.

SURVIVES EVERY SWAP

"There's plenty happening around town this weekend!"

BELONGS TO ONE PLACE

"The farmers market moves to the courthouse lot Saturday because of the parade. Park on Fifth, not Main."

Five details that make an item local

When to go

Not just the date. The hour before the crowd.

What it costs

Including parking.

Who should skip it

Saves a reader a wasted Saturday.

Tickets or not

And whether it'll sell out.

Why this one

What made it beat the other options.

FULL DISCLOSURE

This is the part LocalTrophy does for a living, so we're biased.

We build the source maps, pick the stories, shape the issue, write it in your voice and have a human check it before it goes out. You keep the list, the sponsors and the credit. We take the Thursday-night panic. Do it yourself or don't, the standard's the same: every issue passes the city-swap test.

localtrophy.com



Growth that doesn't need Meta

Your readers are a channel too.

Paid ads get you started. They shouldn't be the only way people find you. Most newsletter platforms now ship growth tools that cost little or nothing. In beehiiv, they live in the Grow section.

Recommendations

You recommend other newsletters to new signups and they recommend you. Swap with publications your readers would also like: the regional business brief, the food writer two towns over. Not your direct competitor. Obviously.

Boosts

A paid marketplace that runs both ways. Other publications pay you to recommend them to your readers, or you pay to be recommended to theirs. It's a way to earn, or a way to buy subscribers without touching Facebook.

Referral program

Reward readers for sharing. Trackable links, automatic rewards. The detail that matters most is the first milestone, so it gets its own box below.

Magic links

Links that let a reader subscribe to a recommended newsletter in one click from inside your email. Same idea as recommendations, less friction.

SET THE FIRST REFERRAL REWARD AT ONE

One referral. Something everybody can hit: a shoutout in the next issue, a sticker, an entry into a monthly drawing for a sponsor's gift card. The first milestone teaches people the program exists. Ten referrals for a tote bag teaches them to ignore it.

REALISTIC EXPECTATION

Referral programs mostly reward the readers you already have, so they get stronger as the list grows. Expect a trickle at a few hundred subscribers and a real channel at a few thousand.

The first 1,000, *by hand*

Ads do the heavy lifting, but the cheapest subscribers come from showing up where your town already gathers. None of this scales. In a town of 50,000 it doesn't need to.

Facebook groups and Nextdoor

Your town has active groups. The trap is dropping a link and getting removed by a moderator. Do the opposite: answer questions people are already asking. Someone wants things to do with kids this weekend, so you post three real answers, then mention you round these up every Thursday and add the link. Be useful first. The link is the P.S.

Message a couple of group admins directly and offer them a free feature in exchange for an approved post.

REALISTIC EXPECTATION

A few genuinely helpful posts a week can add 20 to 60 subscribers a week early on.

Swap with local businesses

Find businesses that talk to your readers without competing with you: the coffee shop, the gym, the library, the youth league. You feature them, they mention you. Local owners help each other, so this works more often than you'd think.

REALISTIC EXPECTATION

One strong partner with an engaged audience can send 30 to 100 subscribers over a few weeks.

Subject Quick swap idea

Hi [name], I run Roswell Weekly, a free Thursday email that [number] locals read. I'd like to feature [business] in an upcoming issue. In return, would you mention us once to your list or on Instagram? I'm happy to write the blurb for you.

Go outside

Print a card with a QR code that goes straight to your signup page. Leave a stack at the coffee shop you featured this week. Bring a clipboard to the farmers market. National newsletters can't do any of this. You can.

TRACK IT

Give every channel its own source tag (chapter 6), so you know whether the clipboard beat the Boost.

10

Getting paid

Your sponsors are already on the list.

You don't need a sales team. Look at who signed up.

In a town of 50,000, a few thousand subscribers will include the gym owner, the realtor, the HVAC company, the new bakery and at least one dentist. Your sponsors are your subscribers. They already read you. They already know the audience is real, because they're in it.

So you skip the cold pitch. When you're ready (a few hundred engaged readers is enough to start) you send one email.

WHEN TO START

Before you feel ready. A sponsor at 400 subscribers pays less, but it teaches you how to sell, which pays later.

THE ONLY SALES EMAIL YOU NEED, AT FIRST

"Quick one. We're opening a few sponsor spots in Roswell Weekly. If you own a local business and want to be in front of 2,400 neighbors who open this every Thursday, hit reply and I'll send details."

Swap in your real number. Never round up.

Price until someone says no

Sell the first slot for \$50. Then \$100. Then \$200. Keep raising it until people start turning you down. Now you know your price. You'll feel like you're overcharging right around the point where you're still undercharging.



Who buys, and *what to charge*

The businesses that pay are the ones that need local customers and already spend money to get them. If they buy Facebook ads, mail postcards or sponsor the youth league, they'll understand a newsletter slot.

Real estate agents Live on local visibility. Budgets tied to commissions.	Med spas and dermatology High margins, repeat customers, a defined area.	HVAC and home services Plumbers, roofers, landscapers. Seasonal spend.	Gyms and studios Always chasing new members.
Dentists and law offices Family dentistry, estate and injury law all buy local reach.	Banks and credit unions Community-minded, with real ad budgets.	Restaurants and cafes Good for a featured-spot slot. Smaller budgets.	Skip Anyone who sells nationally online. They can't use a local reader.

Rough starting rates

One primary sponsor slot, per issue. Our rule of thumb, not market data.

Under 500 subscribers	\$25 to \$75
500 to 2,000	\$75 to \$250
2,000 to 5,000	\$250 to \$600
5,000 to 10,000	\$600 to \$1,500
10,000 and up, with strong opens	\$1,500+

FLAT, NOT CPM

Under a few thousand subscribers, sell a flat price per issue. Local owners think in "how much for the ad," not cost per thousand.

SELL A MONTH

Offer four issues at 10 to 15 percent off. You lock in a month instead of chasing one-off buys.

ABOUT CHAPTER 2

These ranges work out higher per reader than the \$50 CPM in chapter 2. That's on purpose: chapter 2 is the cautious case. A 3,000-subscriber list at 55 percent opens can earn the top of its range. A 5,000-subscriber list at 20 percent opens can't.

Beyond the *sponsor slot*

Sponsorships are the base. Once you hold the attention of a town, other income stacks on top.

Ad marketplaces

Platform-run ad networks fill the slots you haven't sold yourself. Lower rates, zero chasing.

A paid tier

Early event access or members-only nights for a few dollars a month. Most readers stay free. A few happily pay.

Merch

Town pride sells. People will put their area code on nearly anything.

Affiliate links

The event tickets, the reservation, the local product you were going to mention anyway.

Events

A meetup you host is sponsor inventory, content and a reason to subscribe, all at once.

Your own businesses

Once you know what a town wants, you can launch it straight to the people who open your email.

Over time the newsletter turns into a launch channel for whatever you do next, aimed at a town that already trusts you.

ORDER OF OPERATIONS

Don't build any of this until sponsors are working. Merch at 300 subscribers is a garage full of T-shirts. A paid tier before anyone loves the free one is a paywall in front of an empty room.

The sponsor one-pager

When a business replies "how much?", send one page. Not a deck. It needs six things:

Who reads it

Subscriber count and the town, in one line.

Who opens it

Average opens per issue. The real number.

When it lands

Day and time. Sponsors plan around it.

What they get

A screenshot of the slot with a sample ad in it.

What it costs

One price. Maybe a four-week bundle.

How to book

Reply to this email. That's the whole process.

The playbook on one page

Print it. Tape it somewhere annoying.

Day one

- ☐ Pick the town. Don't overthink it.
- ☐ Open a newsletter account and keep the default template.
- ☐ Make a Facebook page with the same name.
- ☐ Write a one-line promise with the town in it.
- ☐ Record a 15 to 20 second phone video.
- ☐ Launch a Leads campaign: instant form, email only, geo-targeted, broad audience, about \$100 for day one.
- ☐ Connect Meta to your platform and tag the source.
- ☐ Write the welcome email with one poll question.
- ☐ Sign up yourself to test it.

Week one

- ☐ Cut the budget to an amount you can sustain.
- ☐ Track cost per subscriber. Aim for \$1 to \$2.
- ☐ Read the poll results. Keep the top three sections.
- ☐ Send issue one, on the day you'll send every issue.
- ☐ Turn on referrals with the first reward at one.
- ☐ Run the city-swap test on your lead item.

Month one

- ☐ Send weekly. Same day, same time.
- ☐ Put a one-click poll in every issue.
- ☐ Set up recommendations with two or three friendly newsletters.
- ☐ Compare open rates by source tag.
- ☐ At a few hundred engaged readers, send the "who wants an ad?" email.
- ☐ Price the first slot at \$50. Raise it until someone says no.

The four numbers to watch

Cost per subscriber

Target \$1 to \$2. Check it weekly, not hourly.

Opens by source

Compare your own channels, not industry averages.

Poll results

The top three answers are your format.

Sponsor answers

Every yes means raise the price. The first no tells you where it is.

NEVER

Redesign the logo before you have 1,000 subscribers.

You bring the town.

We'll bring the issue.

LocalTrophy builds done-for-you local newsletters: sourcing, story selection, structure, writing, editing, and a human review before every send. You keep the list, the sponsors and the relationship with your readers.



ST. PETERSBURG, FL
The Pier and the Pulse



SCOTTSDALE, AZ
Scottsdale Select



CHARLOTTE, NC
The Charlotte Harlot

READ THE FLAGSHIPS, SEE PRICING

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