#116 – How to Write Emails That Get Opened and Read

Andrew: On today's podcast, we are talking about email marketing. We are going to cover things like what to write to get people to take action. We're going to talk about do you need a professionally designed template, or is a simple layout or template better. And the emails that Heather and I both personally open and read.

Hey everybody, this is Andrew McCauley, welcome to Podcast #116. We are talking about how to do email marketing. Email marketing is one of those things that is not going away, despite people saying that it's dead and it's not going to be around much longer. We think that it's going to be there forever. We'll tell you why, very soon.

Heather Porter, you are here to talk about email marketing. Hello.

Heather: Hello. How's it going?

Andrew: I am groovy. How about you?

Heather: I'm good. You know what? I just have to quickly add one thing on that comment about email marketing. Here's the thing. Here's how you know it's not going anywhere. What do you use to sign up for a social media account? And what do you use to have your password reset?

Andrew: That's right.

Heather: Still there.

Andrew: Exactly. How do you log in to your iTunes account? Apple Pay, with an email address. It's there.

Heather: Yes.

Andrew: This is a topic that you and I both spend a lot of time digging in to and in fact it's also one of the most trafficked blogposts to our website AutopilotYourBusiness.com.

Heather: Yes, that's why we brought it up. We are listening to you guys and we're thinking well, if you want to know a little bit more about email marketing and how it all works, we're going to help you out. I think I'm actually excited to hear the point we're going to cover at the end of the session about which emails we both personally open and read. I'm wondering if we have similar traits with what catches our eye.

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Andrew: Yes.

Heather: So what have you been up to? Anything interesting that you've learned or come across?

Andrew: You know what just launched last week and it's hit the news fairly big time? I don't know if you've seen this or not, but we've spoken about live streaming and video streaming with Periscope and Meerkat and MeeVee and all these other ones -- Blab -- but Facebook Live has finally launched out to everybody. Everybody's got the ability to use Facebook Live. The F8 Conference is just about to happen, but when you're hearing this podcast, we would have had our Facebook Live out for a few weeks. The cool thing about Facebook Live is that now you can stream live video to groups inside Facebook.

Heather: Oh.

Andrew: So think about this. We've got our own Digital Traffic Institute group and I'm about to do one of those videos for them tomorrow. We can stream live videos just to members of a group. How cool is that? So no-one else gets to see it; it can be part of your offering if you have a membership site -- Hey, join our Facebook group and get a live video from inside the group. You can also stream life to events. So if you create events on Facebook, you can now stream live to that event page as well. So only people that are going to the event get to see it.

So there are some really cool features that are happening with Facebook Live and I'm going to be interested to see how people take up Facebook Live, because it's going to be very, very cool. There are also a couple other things you can do on it right now, is draw pictures or doodle even on the video, too.

If you're doing a screen shot or a screen share or whatever it is, you can actually write some things on there so people get to see it. Of course you can interact and write comments and if anybody watches a replay of that particular live stream -- let's say the video goes for ten minutes and you are watching it, Heather -- and you write a comment to me at five minutes in, when somebody watches that replay, they'll get to see that comment pop up at the five minute mark.

Currently all you get to see is all of the comments at one time when you start a stream from other platforms such as Periscope and Blab. So it's going to be pretty interesting to see how Facebook Live really changes things.

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Heather: How exciting. Oh my gosh. I know I've had it on my personal profile. It's still not on my business page though. So when you were looking into that it's still not on all business pages, right?

Andrew: Try on your mobile app. Here's how important this is for Facebook. On your mobile app where they used to have Messenger -- Messenger is a separate app, Messenger is the most downloaded app on the iTunes store even though it's got a one-star rating, but it's still the most downloaded app -- if you go into Facebook on your phone -- and this is true of the iOS device; I'm not sure of Android; I'm guessing it's the same -- but if you go into your app on your phone, instead of where when you go to put a new status update, it will now say "share a live video." The Messenger part has disappeared.

So they're really spending a lot more time getting people to make a new live video. So it's pretty cool.

Heather: It's cool. The war between YouTube and Facebook.

Andrew: Yes, big time. So watch this space for the streaming. It's going to be cool.

Heather: Exciting.

Andrew: How about you? What's been going on with you? I know you've been hard to track down lately.

Heather: Hard to reach.

Andrew: Yes.

Heather: It's like anything in business, I know everybody can relate to this. It kind of comes -- I was going to say ebbs and flows, but more crazy, really, all the time -- but there's something that I want to bring up to everybody that has a business, which I know is most of you guys, is the whole thing about boundaries.

What's been interesting is a couple of previous clients that purchased packages from over a year ago are just surfacing now saying, "I need it!" and then "I want it tomorrow."

Andrew: Yes.

Heather: I know that some of us are guilty of doing this but also some of us are guilty of allowing people to do this. Right? I think what I've learned is

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you're never too busy to set boundaries but also to create really good solid systems.

So if you're selling something that's a service or a product, create a way of protecting your time or respecting your time and your boundaries. Whether that is seriously a checkbox that says "I accept these terms and conditions" and then you actually have terms and conditions...

We've been caught in this, because we've moved so fast for certain things, where we've had people and products where the terms and conditions are so bad it's embarrassing. It's like, "click this box to accept the terms and conditions" and a little pop up says, "We'll give you a money back guarantee" and that's it.

Then some people are coming back for refunds. We didn't protect ourselves, did we?

Andrew: Nope. Not at all.

Heather: So I think two things out of that that I've learned or that had been presented to me as a theme is with your products and your services that you're selling, make sure that you are very, very clear on how that's going to be delivered if there's an expiration. If there's a refund policy, how does that work? Then don't be scared to refer back to that in the future if somebody's coming to you and asking you "can I have a refund?" or "I want to start" two years later. It's important for everybody. It's respectful of your time, your boundaries and also will help set expectations with your clients.

Andrew: -- unless they go straight to PayPal and ask for a charge back, but that's a different story. We won't go there.

Heather: We already talked about that one a few episodes back.

Andrew: Yes, I know, I know.

So you said there are some boundaries being pushed and limited. What's your next step for making that doesn't happen again?

Heather: That's a very good question. It's going to be... I can't go back and change things that have already happened. It's just going ahead, it's like every "yes" or business relationship or client or service or transaction that happens from here on out I would just want to make sure it's tightened down and expectations are more clearly outlined from both sides. I think your job as a business owner working with a client is to manage the

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client's expectations. Often times we get angry and mad because they're coming back wanting and wanting. That's human nature to keep taking until somebody says -- Piss off!

Andrew: Really. But you're right and they do it and if you keep letting them do it, they'll keep doing it even more so it is an important thing to stop them in their tracks before it gets too far down that track.

Heather: So enough about boundaries.

Andrew: Email marketing. Tell us about email marketing and where it is right now and then we'll dig into a few key points. Where's email marketing, 2016?

Heather: I think it's still there. I think it's getting noisier and noisier out there with Gmail a while back putting in their different tabs where you have the primary tab and you have promotions tab, where for me, I have this promotions tab now that's so full of emails and marketing emails it's getting harder to stand out. It really is. It's still there; it's still important; it's a big part of your business. Your list is your asset because you can communicate with people on permission. But it's getting harder to stand out. What do you think?

Andrew: I've got some stats here for emails for 2016 and they're pretty interesting. The specific ones are about mobile emails. 53% of emails are opened on mobile devices. That tells me that you don't want to have those ridiculously long emails and those that are full of pretty pictures and stuff just don't seem to work. Because when you're on a mobile device, you don't want to... You're quick; you're reading an email in line; you're reading an email when you're in a hurry. You don't spend a lot of time on your phone generally so people are reading these just to get the gist of it at the start.

They say 23% of readers who open an email on a mobile device open it again later.

Heather: Interesting.

Andrew: They don't say whether it's later on their laptop or back on the mobile device. How's this one -- 75% of Gmail's 900 million users access their accounts via mobile devices. So that's pretty big, right? That's just some interesting stats about some email.

But automation -- and we'll talk about automation as well -- but 95% of companies are using marketing automation are taking advantage of email marketing.

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Heather: There you go.

Andrew: So one of the highest automation pieces a company is using right now. It's not changing. I don't think it's changing. I think people are getting smarter. We're getting smarter in what we're delivering to people because it's more relevant to them rather than a blanket approach. The ones that are still living five years ago are not going to make it very well.

What I did notice though, in doing some study for this, was that the average open rates are around about 20% still. I think they have risen a little bit because people are starting to get smarter about openings of what they're sending people. So the open rates seemed to have jumped up a little bit, which is pretty encouraging.

Heather: I like using a tool like Campaign Monitor or MailChimp which are email marketing platforms and they have little charts that tell you industry averages from all their different email accounts that they have -- open rates. It changes quite dramatically. It's anything from 20% to sort of 30% depending on if you're a financial adviser versus if you are a personal development person. The range is quite dramatic.

Andrew: Touching on that -- information that's being sent to people in a relevant format there is segmented and targeted emails generate 58% of all revenue.

Heather: I love that stat.

Andrew: Yes, I thought you would.

Heather: You know why I love that stat? Because we're so big, obviously, in Digital Traffic Institute in what we do about segmentation. When we work with people we're always saying "how can we segment or divide your email lists into different groups?" We do that straight away at the beginning of one of our entry points into our email list. We actually ask people. We say, "Hey, are you an established business, new start up, an employee..." We actually ask them in the email and then we segment and tag and group data based on employees or start-ups. So we know that the majority of people in our email list right now are start-ups. They've literally had their business less than two years.

Andrew: Campaign Monitor even said that marketers have noted a 760% increase in revenue from segmented campaigns. So that's important; take notes. 760% increase. Pretty crazy.

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Let's dig into some of the meat of it today. What do you need to write to really get people to pay attention these days?

Heather: I love this, because the one common theme that I'm going to start out with is you need to simplify your messaging and limit what you actually say. What I mean by that is if you look at a newsletter -- think about this, guys, from your own behavior when you're opening emails -- if you see a newsletter that has like five different panels or boxes and different stories, for me personally, I go, I'm way too busy to look at this. There's way too much going on. Ain't nobody got time for that! -- Ain't Nobody Got Time For That [dance party ensues] -- Seriously, I'm like, wow I'm outa here...

Andrew: Yes.

Heather: So I'm going to tell a little story. There's a study done in a grocery store in the States. What they did is they one day had a huge shelf unit up at the front of the store where they had 100 jars of jam, all different flavors. The next day they had a very small shelf with about five jars of jam. Which of those two days, Andrew, do you think sold the most jam?

Andrew: I think I know the answer.

Heather: That would be the five-jar day, because a confused mind never buys or takes action. When there's too much going on, too many options, then instead of doing anything at all, you don't do anything. You don't buy anything; you don't do anything; you don't take action. Same with emails. So if you have loads of different -- "do this, go here, go look at this, here's another article" it's too much; people are just not going to actually do anything.

Andrew: It's interesting that you say that. It was an interesting study, because if they're not sure what's going on, they're like, "Ah, I think I'll just sit down and think about it more."

Heather: They're on your list because they want you to tell them what to do. Just leave it like that. They came to you as an expert. They signed up because they want you to tell them what to do and if you're trying to tell them to do five things in one email, they're like, "wow, this is too much." Your job as an expert or a business owner is to simplify, filter through the information and then just provide the little morsels that help people's lives and businesses improve.

Andrew: People will say, "I've got so many things to offer. I've got so many things that they could possibly want. I want to make sure I'm covering all of

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their bases."

I'll share a little story that's not related to emails, but it's the same -- not related to jams -- but when I was managing hotels, I started up in a nightclub and we'd have 1500 people there and the bar was packed. A normal bar, imagine the bar was about 30-40ft long with seven staff working behind the bar. We had everything you could think of to drink -- all sorts of wines, coolers, mixes, beers, you name it, mixed drinks, spirits, it was all there. But it was busy; it was four deep, five deep at the bar all night and it wasn't good for making money because there were people trying to give you money but we couldn't produce enough speed for the staff to go through all of those clients.

So I said, "Let's go and get a table with a little cash register on the side, on the other side of the room where people don't have to go to the bar; they don't have to line up five deep, but they can go and there was only five choices. There was high premium beer, like a proper crown lager premium beer, there was a ready-to-drink Jim Beam Black in a stubby, in fact all of these items, there was a Bacardi Breezer, there was a wine and there was one other thing. We only had five items, that was it.

This little bar charged a dollar more per unit than the actual bar did itself. But people, when they go to the bar, they were like, "well, I know what I want to buy." I don't have much of a choice. I either line up or I buy something to drink right now and I was telling them what they wanted because I didn't have to give them a choice. That bar was selling a ridiculous amount, in fact we became the biggest Jim Beam Black seller in Australia, just because of this one little bar. We're just taking ridiculous amounts of money for what we wanted to tell the customer.

People weren't getting there and confused because we'd get people to come to the bar and they'd be, "Oh, I don't know if I want this or this," and it was taking the barmen a long time to create all these drinks for them if they're buying three or four at a time. Where as such a little thing as like, "Here. Don't get confused. You've only got five options. Let's get in, get out, job done." It was great.

Heather: Freaking brilliant. That is so important though. Because this is just human psychology and I feel like, with email marketing, people copy people and they don't do it well. They make assumptions that if these big companies send out these newsletters with lots of things going on, that's what I should be doing too, without actually just stepping back and thinking -- what do you read? What do you look at? What is giving you the most benefit?

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Less is more when it comes to this stuff.

So what else about how to write to get people to take action? I want to throw one other thing in there. Conversational, for sure. I want to give a couple of little examples. Andrew and I have an email that goes out and when we decided to go into business together, we were in Egypt and we were running events for this other speaker and we were there and we took this hilarious photo of ourselves at one of the temples.

Andrew: Horace.

Heather: Horace. A horace. It's a little inside joke.

It was a bird, a large statue of sort of bird or god and we put an email together with a photo of us in front of it and we said, "Here's Andrew and I with the original Twitter bird." We tell a story about what we got up to and the shenanigans on the road running events and we get emails back saying, "It's so cool to be let into your life like that. Thank you so much," or, "Wow, I didn't know that about you guys." So we're telling a story -- key -- that's important; we've talked about that in a previous episode with Bret Thomson about copywriting and stories.

Andrew: Yes.

Heather: So go listen to that if you want to get some ideas about writing better copy as well. Bret Thomson. The other thing is, so telling stories, but we also are conversational and we're being real. Andrew, just the other day we sent out an email to our email list. Those of you guys that are on there wanting to get our podcast updates and it was about our LinkedIn one. I wrote a story about how I was looking for an accountant and this one referral came to me and then I went on to the LinkedIn profile and then it was like old and dodgy and you know, 1980s dodgy photo and I thought I don't trust this dude with my money. I wrote that in the email. Then we got people -- guess what -- yes, responding back to an email that's a marketing piece that said basically, "Oh my god I have to go and fix my profile; thanks for telling me that."

Andrew: Yes. That's right. We've even had people responding to those emails which is as you said. But it's just as if it's a conversation between us and them and not the rest of the people that are on our list. I think it's really important to don't be so stiff; don't be so regimented when you're writing this stuff. Just be you and let your personality shine through.

Heather: Totally. The other thing on what to write is, when you're writing your subject line, make sure that it feeds into the rest of the email as well.

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There's been people that try and get all tricky and fancy and write marketing headlines and then the email itself has nothing to do with that headline; it's... What do they call it? Bait and switch?

Andrew: Yes, bait and switch.

Heather: Don't do that. I find that if you're inviting people to events, sometimes writing the word invitation in there or "you're invited" can actually work. You don't want to trick people. It's your job to prequalify with your emails. If people are interested in an event with you, then put that at the top of your email, that it's an invitation somewhere. Be conversational and make it about them and simplify your messaging.

Andrew: Yes. Very good. What else?

Heather: What else? This is a big one. Do you need a professionally designed template? We're saying one of those newsletter templates with the header and the footer and all the different bells and whistles. Or will a nice simple letter template with maybe just your logo and a -- Hey there firstname -- and then a email body with maybe your signature, work better? What do you think Andrew?

Andrew: Well, I'm looking at one right now that is from a pretty well respected content marketing company and there seems to be lots of images and bells and whistles on it and I'm like -- I could not remember one word they're talking about on here. You know what? The heading got me; I really like the heading so I opened it up and now I'm looking at it going -- I'm bored; I'm already bored because it's too much.

So I personally would rather have short, sweet text-based emails so I can read them and do what I want with them, whether I file them or trash them.

Heather: We actually tested this in a couple of areas of our business. We tested with our own email list; we had a newsletter that went out that had three distinct panels in it; we had our podcast, our latest from the blog and a tip of some sort. We sent that and then we'd sent another one that we were testing this using what we said to you guys earlier where we had the very simple letter template. The one that came out ahead was that one. It was the simple letter template. Inside of that we normally put one image. Actually we have two; we have our logo and the signature or at the top, depending. Then we have an image in the middle that represents the thing that we're giving them. So whether it's a video... So if it's a video, we actually take a screen grab of the video and put a play button on the top so they know that we're giving them a video. If it's a blog post

or a podcast update, we put an image of that particular blog post so they can click into the image. Or if it's a webinar it's an image that represents the webinar. It's real simple. It's a letter; it's -- hey, here's what's going on; here's a little story; here's conversation and then click here on this image. That worked better all the time.

Also, in Digital Traffic Institute, our members were testing that with our members and they always opened the ones that are much more basic and one option, one thing to click on; one thing to do.

Andrew: So there you go. Don't be fancy. Make it simple and easy to consume and then you probably see an increase in open rates and click through rates as well.

Heather: You know what, Andrew, I'm thinking we are going to give you guys little presents.

Andrew: Yay.

Heather: This is all about how to do email marketing and we have this amazing little script that we put together. I should say it's a template that we give away inside of Digital Traffic Institute. It's basically what to do in your first eight email auto-responders. So if somebody comes to your website and they sign up for a free lead magnet or a newsletter or something where they're opting in, this is what's called "a nurture sequence." It's literally just a sequence where you're getting to know the person and they're getting to know you and you're offering them value and it's amazing.

Here, I have to fill you in on a couple stories. We used to give it away in little hidden secret places every now and again, like we're doing right now for you guys.

Andrew: Mm-hmm.

Heather: -- and I was giving it away at one point or another and one of the events I went to... I speak at a group called the Entourage here in Sydney, Australia and it's for entrepreneurs. One of the women that came up to my table -- I was doing like a mentoring circle -- she sat down and she's said, "I have to tell you something Heather, I feel really bad." I'm like -- OK, what's going on? I didn't even know her. She's like, "I got your little auto-responder sequence thing and I used it with all my coaching clients. It's so good and it works so well and they're all just blown away and amazed by it." Just the other day somebody else said the same thing to me. She's like, "I can not tell you the improvement that my emails have

gotten by just following that." So I'm framing that for you guys because this is valuable and we are going to give it to you and it's going to be a link that's in aybpodcast.com. You need to go to podcast episode #116. Go there, you guys, it's going to be right towards the top. There's going to be a nice big button that says, "Download Your Bonus Auto-responder Template Here." Get it. Click it. It's worth it. It will change how you think about emails.

Andrew: Yes. Very good.

Tell me, what are the emails that really grab your attention? If you're looking through your boxes of hundreds of thousands of unopened emails, what grabs your attention to open emails?

Heather: Definitely is a couple things. It's first of all the From name. I tend to open emails that are from a name versus a business name. That's just me, then we'll compare notes. Number one is that. Number two is, I look at the subject line and then use the subject line to... I'll generate interest in there. I'll look to see is there something in that subject line that I want to learn? If there is, if there's a topic that I want to learn then I'll go into the email and then I'll scan the first couple of sentences from there. I really do respond to the letter, the written emails more than the newsletters. To be honest, I actually see a big fat graphically designed newsletter and I actually will just chuck it into the bin straight away. I put it straight into my trash. That's me. What about you?

Andrew: Pretty much the same thing. Definitely names first. I'm seeing some from, like this person from this business, like Kevin from Buffer. So that generally, because I know these people would give good information so I'll look for connections as far as I've seen their content before and I liked what they have so I'll read it. But then I'll look at things like GameStop news. I'm not even going to open; I'm not even going to waste my time. Or Digital Hill -- I don't care who you are; don't want to know about it. SalesForce connections -- really? I don't want to know that sort of stuff. So I really look for people that I recognize then I'll look at the subject line and if I see things like, "don't risk missing out," I'm like -- really? Such a lame, lame title. As I said, I usually respect this person but I'm like, wow, really? If that's working for you then keep using it but you're not going to get me opening that line because it's just done to death.

I really look for subject lines that are actually interesting to me. Someone says, "Does the word 'technology' give you a fright?" Well, if you really knew who I was or where I came from, you'd know that technology doesn't give me a fright so you've already lost me. I look at them and go, you have no idea who I am; you're blanket-emailing your people. I need

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to unsubscribe to your list quickly.

Heather: That's back to segmentation, right? We talked about that earlier.

Andrew: Totally.

So that's pretty much me in a nutshell. I do have many emails unread which I need to go through every couple weeks and delete massively. I think you have the record for the amount of unread emails. But that's...

Heather: That's another story.

Andrew: That's basically how I do it.

Heather: Another thing I look at too. I just bring this up. I think it's important to say, based on the stats you gave earlier about people reading emails on mobile devices. I look actually for the phrases that are hyperlinked. I think using a sentence that says, "Get my five things to do this in your business," and then if you hyperlink that whole sentence, it's telling me that if I click on that that's what I get, rather than using the words, "Click here!" and then just hyperlinking those. I think the use of phrases is important. Because when I open those emails, I'll have a little read of the subject line and I'll scan through and my eyes just go to the links. So I'm looking to see if what I need, is that a benefit to me, and I see that in the link. So if I ever get emails that say, "click here," I generally just toss them as well. I think links are important.

Also mobile devices, too, if you just hyperlink a word, "click here," that's way harder to click with your finger on your phone rather than a full sentence as well.

Andrew: Yes. Very good, very good.

Me, I don't think I miss too many emails with my quick scanning, now that I'm used to it. But I don't think I miss too many. I'll always go back every month or so, make sure I've covered everything but I think you get into your own little system and what you should do is start looking at what works for you because if that works for you, you may want to start implementing that so people use that when they're opening your emails.

Heather: Yes. Completely.

I also have a recommendation for you guys when you're getting emails coming in from the lists you are part of. Anything that you open, copy and paste the subject line and keep a little swipe file, just a little

document on your desk. So keep a swipe file of subject lines. If you're opening them, there's something in that. So pay attention to that and then when you're writing an email, you can go back to that document and go, "that's one that I really liked; I can just use that and tweak it for my own messaging."

Andrew: Yes.

Heather: So there you go. Anything else on the email marketing front that we should bring up?

Andrew: No, I think we've covered it. I can't believe this time has flown once again.

Heather: I'm going to leave you guys with one thought. Whether you use... There's so many different email marketing platforms out there and -- like MailChimp, there's Constant Contact, Campaign Monitor, there's ONTRAPORT, Infusionsoft, you name it -- I've heard a lot of people get hung up thinking, oh my gosh I need to get the Cadillac, I need to get the Infusionsoft or whatever when I'm just getting started. Not really. We're talking about email marketing. You just need to have a system that's going to allow you to put forms on your website and then send out emails like we're talking about. In all these platforms you can either do beautiful graphic ones life we've discussed, or just simple letter ones. I don't want you guys getting hung up on the system that you use, just get a system that's affordable for you. All of these systems out there now days let you do this sort of stuff that we're talking about.

Andrew: I had that question today, again. Should I get Infusionsoft or should I stick to MailChimp. My answer is -- you know what? -- because this person was starting out I said -- you wouldn't go and buy a Ferrari to drive across the road to buy some milk if that's all you're going to use the Ferrari for. That's what people get hung up on. They want to go and buy Infusionsoft and ONTRAPORT where they're paying hundreds of dollars a month to do something where they could easily pay 20 dollars a month and get exactly the same result. So courses for courses; use what you need to. Then when you grow, then yes, look at Infusionsoft and ONTRAPORT for when that time comes.

Heather: Absolutely. Good advice.

Andrew: Alright, H. Thank you very much. Thank you everybody.

Heather: I want to wrap up with what we covered really quick for you guys just so you can have a few key takeaways.

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Number one, what we covered is, what to write to get people to take action. Remember, one message. Keep it simple and keep it conversational.

Then we talked about do you need a professionally designed template or is a simple letter template better. What we discovered was simple is best. So one topic and then also a simple design.

What else did we cover? We talked about the emails that Andrew and I both open and personally read and hopefully you guys got some good little pointers in there on what to do with your emails to improve them.

Andrew: Awesome. That's it. We are done.

Heather: That's a wrap. We'll see you on our aybpodcast.com episode #116 for that little bonus download. Remember, come on over and grab it. It's a good one.

Andrew: OK. Thank you. See you later.