

論文

Investigating the Effects of Changing the Position of a Popular Evergreen Post in an NPO Email Newsletter

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■Abstract

Email newsletters are one important way that NPOs engage their audience and showcase their activities. To retain subscribers, the newsletter content must be seen as useful. One way to measure engagement is with click through rates, defined as the number of subscribers who click on links in the newsletter. Sometimes, a particular announcement proves to be both highly engaging and “evergreen” (continually relevant to the subscribers), so it is repeatedly included in the issues of the newsletter. This paper reports on an investigation into the effects when a popular evergreen post is moved from a prominent position to a less-prominent position.

メールマガジンは、NPOが読者を惹きつけ、その活動をアピールするための重要な手段の一つである。購読者は、ニュースレターの内容が有益であると考えなければならない。購読者のエンゲージメントを測定するには、ニュースレター内のリンクをクリックした購読者の数として定義されるクリックスルー率を測定する。時には、あるお知らせが非常に魅力的で、かつ「エバーグリーン」（購読者にとって継続的に関連性のある）であることが証明され、ニュースレターの号に繰り返し掲載されることがある。この研究論文では、人気のあるエバーグリーンな投稿を目立つ位置から目立たない位置に移動させた場合のクリック率への影響について調査した結果を報告する。

Key Words: A/B test, email newsletter, public relations, PR

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

NPO JALT (the Japan Association for Language Teaching) is a non-profit professional organization for language teachers in Japan. The author is currently JALT’s Director of Public Relations. One of my duties is to create a monthly email newsletter of announcements. This newsletter is titled *JALT Talk*.

One of the main purposes of a newsletter is to help “maintain a prominent presence” with the subscribers, “potentially prompting further engagement” with them (Shukla, 2020). The subscribers include JALT members as well as ex-members and non-members. Our goal is to encourage readership of our publications, participation in our events, use of our resources, and ultimately, to showcase the benefits of being a member of the organization. Along with JALT’s social media posts, this newsletter is how the Director of Public Relations helps JALT to achieve this goal.

1.2 Newsletter Details

Each month, a call for announcements is put out through JALT’s internal communications channel to all our chapters, Special Interest Groups (SIGs), and committees. As NPO newsletters should strive to provide valuable information for the subscribers (Das, 2023) and to “hone a relationship by engaging in personal and topical information relevant to the subscriber” (Bernius, 2017), the *JALT Talk* newsletter typically contains information about recent publications within the organization, current calls for papers and conference presentation submissions, opportunities such as grants and upcoming events, and news from JALT and other language teaching organizations with which we are affiliated.

The email newsletter software is Sendy, “a self-hosted email newsletter application that lets you send bulk emails via Amazon Simple Email Service (SES)” (Sendy, 2024). Sendy provides reports on each newsletter that is sent. Here is data from the *JALT Talk* newsletter sent December 29, 2023:

1)

- Recipients: 8,004 subscribers
 - 59.76% opened the newsletter (4,775 unique users, opened 10,442 times)
 - 3229 subscribers did not open the email
 - 7.7% clicked a link (612 unique clicks)
 - 0.19% unsubscribed (15 people)
 - 0.01% marked it as spam (1 person)
- (Pellowe, 2023, p. 24)

1.3 Open Rate and Click Through Rate

Those figures cited above are typical for the *JALT Talk* newsletter. The open rate (defined as the percentage of subscribers who open an email) of nearly 60% is high. For email campaigns, “a good email open rate should be between 17-28%” (Campaign Monitor, 2022). For email newsletters from nonprofit organizations, the average open rate varies between 26.6% (Campaign Monitor, 2022) to 37.84% (Smith, 2023).

The click through rate is the number of subscribers who click on a link. “Unique clicks” is the number of subscribers who clicked on a link, regardless of how many times each subscriber clicks on a link. The average click through rate for nonprofit organizations is 2.7% (Campaign Monitor, 2022), so *JALT Talk’s* click through rate of 7.7% is above average.

1.4 The Jobs Post

Starting with the March 31, 2022 issue, the announcement at the top of the newsletter has been for a job posting page on the JALT Publications website, where employers seeking teachers can post information about open positions. Here is the full text of the jobs post:

Job listings

JALT receives a number of job advertisements each month. If you’re looking for a new position, please check out our job posts on our JALT Publications site: <https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/career-development-corner/jobs>

Prior to this March 2022 issue, *JALT Talk’s* click through rate averaged about 4%. The March 31, 2022 click through rate jumped to 8.1%, with 57% of those clicks going to the job posting page.

Since March 31, 2022, the jobs post has been an evergreen feature of the newsletter. “Evergreen” refers to content that is “continually relevant” to subscribers

without requiring updates (Nicole, 2023). Even though the employment positions that are advertised on the JALT Publications site are ever-changing, the jobs post which advises the subscribers about this resource does not change at all from issue to issue of the newsletter. Since becoming evergreen, this post has consistently been the most-clicked post of every issue.

2 Research Question

It is well-known that links near the top of an email newsletter receive more clicks than those placed further down (Kumar & Salo, 2016), and this is surely one reason for the success of the evergreen jobs post. I wondered, though, if this wildly successful post was distracting attention away from the other content of the newsletter. As the main purpose of the newsletter is to inform our subscribers about news within the organization, an evergreen post should not subvert that purpose. Therefore, there are two research questions:

- Q1. Will moving the evergreen jobs post affect its click through rate?
- Q2. Will moving the evergreen jobs post from top position to bottom position increase the clicks to the other announcement links?

3 Methodology

3.1 Randomizing and Splitting the Recipients into Groups for A/B Testing

A/B tests of email newsletters are randomized trials where one set of subscribers (group A) receives the usual newsletter, while another set (group B) receives the same newsletter, with one element changed (Gallo, 2017). Then, the results between the two groups are compared to see if the change had an impact.

Unlike other popular email newsletter applications (e.g., Mailchimp, 2024), the Sendy mail application does not have a built-in A/B testing function, so splitting the audience had to be done manually.

First, the list of current subscribers was exported (downloaded) from Sendy. Next, subscribers were deleted from this list if their status indicated that they had unsubscribed from the newsletter, or if their emails were bouncing (i.e., the email address is one which does not exist). This resulted in a subscriber list of 7,996 current subscribers.

Next, the inactive subscribers were exported from Senty. An inactive subscriber is one who has never opened or clicked an email sent to them. Recent subscribers (added during the previous 2 months) were removed from this inactive list, and then these inactive subscribers (n=716) were tagged as inactive on the list of current subscribers.

Finally, the active users were randomized, and placed into two groups, A (n=3640) and B (n=3640), with inactive users (n=716) put into a third group, C.

3.2 Creating the A/B Test

Even though Senty does not include an automatic A/B testing feature, the subscriber list can be grouped into “segments,” and an email can be sent only to a specific segment rather than the entire list of subscribers.

A custom field was added to the subscriber list, called “Group.” The subscriber list was then updated with the new group classifications, with active users in groups A and B (n=3,640), and inactive users in group C (n=716).

The newsletter was prepared as usual, with the jobs post in the top announcement position. There was a total of 52 links in the newsletter. This newsletter (see Pellowe, 2024 (a)) was sent to Group A. Then, the newsletter was copied to create a second version. The jobs post was moved to the bottom position in the newsletter. No other changes were made. This newsletter (see Pellowe, 2024 (b)) was sent to Group B.

(Although beyond the scope of this paper, group C, which consisted of subscribers who have never opened a newsletter before, received the same newsletter as group A, with a different title: “Open this *JALT Talk* Newsletter for conference details and more.”)

4 Results

4.1 Initial data

Data was collected a week after the newsletter was sent out. I waited one week in order to allow time for more subscribers to see the email, since collecting data too soon can cause mistakes in the results (Gallo, 2017). The number of recipients of both versions was equal (n=3,640), and the open rate was very similar, though there was a decrease in the number of unique link clicks (Table 1).

First, to establish that Version A is representative of previous newsletters, let us compare Version A with the issue before that one (December 2023). In both Version A and in all previous editions, the evergreen jobs post (with identical wording) was the top post. To see if our randomly-selected group of subscribers in Group A (n=3,640) are indeed representative of the entire group of active subscribers (n=7,280), a chi-square test of independence was performed comparing the click through rate for the jobs post for the previous edition of the newsletter (December 2023) and Version A (January 2024) (Table 2). There was no significant difference at $p < .05$, $X^2(1, N = 7120) = 0.83$, $p = .363$. The randomly-selected members of Group A did not behave any differently than the full list of subscribers. Since Group A is representative of the entire group, it follows that Group B will also be representative.

4.2 Research Question 1

The jobs post received far fewer clicks when placed in the bottom post position, and accounted for a lower percentage of the total unique clicks (Table 3). Despite this, the jobs post ranking out of 52 links was high, the third-most clicked link in the newsletter (Table 3).

A chi-square test of independence was performed to

Table 1 January 2024 Newsletter Data Report

	Recipients	Opened	Unique link clicks	Unsubscribed	Marked as spam
Version A	3,640	64.42% (n=2,345)	7.80% (n=284)	0.14% (n=5)	0% (n=0)
Version B	3,640	63.39% (n=2,306)	5.96% (n=217)	0.19% (n=7)	0% (n=0)

Table 2 2x2 Contingency Table for Top-Position Jobs Post Clicks Comparing December (Full) and January (Version A)

	Unique link clicks on jobs post	Not clicked on jobs post (opened minus clicked)	Row Total
January 2024 (half list: A)	150 (159.08) [0.52]	2,195 (2185.92) [0.04]	2,345
December 2023 (full list)	333 (323.92) [0.25]	4,442 (4451.08) [0.02]	4,775
Total	483	6,637	7,120 (Grand total)

Values:
Observed total (Expected total) [Chi-square statistic]

Table 3 January 2024 Clicks on the Job Post (A vs B)

	Unique clicks	Total clicks	% of unique clicks	Unique click rank (1-52)
Version A (top post position)	150	253	52.8%	1
Version B (bottom post position)	48	59	22.1%	3

Table 4 2x2 Contingency Table for January 2024 Jobs Post Clicks

	Unique link clicks on jobs post	Not clicked on jobs post (opened minus clicked)	Row Total
Version A (top post)	150 (99.83) [25.21]	2,195 (2245.17) [1.12]	2,211
Version B (bottom post)	48 (98.17) [25.64]	2,258 (2207.83) [1.14]	2,306
Total	198	4,453	4,651 (Grand total)

examine the relation between the position of the jobs post, and the number of people who clicked on the post (Table 4). The relation between these variables was significant, $X^2(1, N = 4651) = 53.11, p < .00001$. People who opened the email were more likely to click on the jobs post when it was in the top position.

So, the answer to RQ1 is yes, the click through rate was negatively affected, but the post remained among the most popular links to click, despite being at the bottom of the newsletter.

4.3 Research Question 2

To investigate the effects on the other links, the jobs post data was removed from the data set prior to analysis.

Performing a Shapiro-Wilk test between the two data

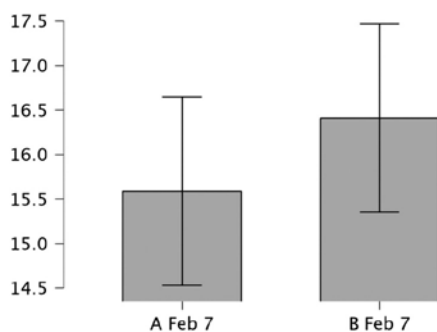
Table 5 Comparing Link Clicks Between Newsletter Version a and B

Test of Normality (Shapiro-Wilk)				
			W	p
A Feb 7	-	B Feb 7	0.883	<.001

Note. Significant results suggest a deviation from normality.

Table 6

Descriptives (all links)					
	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
A Feb 7	51	15.59	12.97	1.82	0.83
B Feb 7	51	16.41	15.14	2.12	0.92



sets excluding the jobs post (Table 5) shows that the results are not normally distributed ($p < .001$), so the data was analyzed with the Wilcoxon's signed rank test, a non-parametric independent test.

Descriptive statistics and plot (Table 6) show that there was a slight increase overall in the number of clicks in version B (Mean=16.41) compared to version A (Mean=15.59), with a higher variability. A Wilcoxon's signed rank test (Table 7) shows the difference was not significant over all the links ($p = .675$).

For some individual posts, though, significant differences can be seen. For example, this newsletter announced JALT's upcoming annual conference, the major event of the year for this organization. The link to the conference information (link ID 5 in Appendix 1) performed much better in version B (Table 8). This link was near the top of the newsletter, only two positions below the jobs post in version A, so clearly the absence of the jobs post in version B had an effect on the click through rate for this announcement.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between the number of people who clicked on the conference URL when it was close to the jobs post (Group A) and when it was not near the jobs post (Group B) (Table 9). The relation between these variables was significant, $X^2(1, N = 4,651) = 6.40, p = .0115$. People were more likely to click on the conference announcement link when the jobs post was not above it.

5 Discussion

Even though the change in click through rates over all the links was not statistically significant, the overall data shows that some announcement posts, such as the announcement of the annual JALT conference, benefited from being less close to the popular evergreen post. This

Table 7 Paired Samples T-Test

Paired Samples T-Test (all links)						
Measure 1	Measure 2	W	z	p	Rank-Biserial Correlation	SE Rank-Biserial Correlation
A Feb 7	- B Feb 7	499.500	-0.448	0.657	-0.076	0.168

Note. Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

Table 8 Click-Through Rate on the Conference Announcement (January 2024)

Version	Unique Clicks	Total Clicks	Rank	Percent Unique
A	30	49	7.5	10.6%
B	52	81	2	24%

Table 9 2x2 Contingency Table for January 2024 Conference Post Clicks

	Unique link clicks on conference URL	Not clicked on conference URL (opened minus clicked)	Row Total
Version A	30 (41.34) [3.11]	2315 (2303.66) [0.06]	2,345
Version B	52 (40.66) [3.17]	2254 (2265.34) [0.06]	2,306
Total	82	4,569	4, 651 (Grand total)

shows that at least some readers were distracted by the jobs post. In the future, when there are announcements that are vital to the organization (such as the approaching deadline for pre-registering for the annual conference), the evergreen jobs post should not appear above these posts.

However, moving (or removing) an overly popular evergreen post would be counterproductive if subscribers began to perceive the newsletter as less useful, so for now, the jobs post has returned to its usual position for all newsletter recipients. In the future, though, I may experiment with placing it more towards the middle of the newsletter.

Also of note is that even though the jobs post performed significantly less well when it was the bottom post, it still managed to attract quite a high number of clicks (22% of the unique clicks). This indicates that even though a post’s position at the top or bottom of the newsletter has a significant effect, posts in bottom position are not doomed to perform worst overall.

Finally, this experiment showed the feasibility of doing A/B testing with Sendy. Even though compiling and analyzing the data is far less convenient than newsletter applications with that function built in, the ability to investigate and thus improve the newsletter makes the effort worthwhile.

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Statistics

Chi square tests were performed with the online Chi-Square Calculator at https://www.socscistatistics.com/tests/chisquare/default2.aspx#google_vignette

Other statistics were performed using JASP (download: <https://jasp-stats.org>)

Appendix

The jobs post is link ID 3. Please note that the “Percent unique clicks” column shows the percentage of the people who clicked on that link out of the total number of people who clicked on a link. The column does not add up to 100 because many people clicked on more than one link. For newsletter version A, of all the people who clicked on links in the newsletter, just over half of them clicked on the jobs post link. In newsletter version B, fewer than a quarter of the people did.

Link ID	Newsletter Version A					Newsletter Version B				
	Link Position	Unique Clicks	Total Clicks	Rank Unique Clicks	Percent Unique Clicks	Link Position	Unique Clicks	Total Clicks	Rank Unique Clicks	Percent Unique Clicks
1	1	60	83	2	21.1	1	67	92	1	30.9
2	2	38	59	3	13.4	2	36	61	5	16.6
3	3	150	253	1	52.8	52	48	59	3	22.1
4	4	28	78	11.5	9.9	3	38	91	4	17.5
5	5	30	49	7.5	10.6	4	52	81	2	24
6	6	29	92	9	10.2	5	35	87	6	16.1
7	7	27	43	14	9.5	6	31	51	9.5	14.3
8	8	24	61	17	8.5	7	27	79	16.5	12.4
9	9	25	39	15.5	8.8	8	31	50	9.5	14.3
10	10	31	45	5.5	10.9	9	29	46	13	13.4
11	11	32	52	4	11.3	10	34	53	7	15.7
12	12	31	48	5.5	10.9	11	29	50	13	13.4
13	13	30	50	7.5	10.6	12	29	47	13	13.4
14	14	25	41	15.5	8.8	13	30	48	11	13.8
15	15	19	28	23.5	6.7	14	28	46	15	12.9
16	16	23	33	18.5	8.1	15	32	50	8	14.7
17	17	28	41	11.5	9.9	16	19	28	21	8.8
18	18	28	93	11.5	9.9	17	27	59	16.5	12.4
19	19	20	30	21.5	7	18	20	29	20	9.2
20	20	19	28	23.5	6.7	19	18	26	22.5	8.3
21	21	28	38	11.5	9.9	20	23	31	18	10.6
22	22	23	32	18.5	8.1	21	18	28	22.5	8.3
23	23	21	47	20	7.4	22	22	47	19	10.1
24	24	14	22	28	4.9	23	16	23	27	7.4
25	25	13	40	29	4.6	24	17	43	25	7.8
26	26	17	26	25	6	25	13	20	30	6
27	27	15	24	26.5	5.3	26	13	29	30	6
28	28	20	29	21.5	7	27	17	25	25	7.8
29	29	15	27	26.5	5.3	28	14	23	28	6.5
30	30	4	5	38.5	1.4	29	13	22	30	6

31	31	3	4	44.5	1.1	30	1	1	47.5	0.5
32	32	4	4	38.5	1.4	31	10	18	32	4.6
33	33	6	6	32	2.1	32	2	2	41	0.9
34	34	3	4	44.5	1.1	33	2	9	41	0.9
35	35	2	3	47.5	0.7	34	2	9	41	0.9
36	36	5	7	34	1.8	35	0	0	51.5	0
37	37	4	9	38.5	1.4	36	3	4	35.5	1.4
38	38	3	6	44.5	1.1	37	3	5	35.5	1.4
39	39	1	2	50.5	0.4	38	2	2	41	0.9
40	40	2	2	47.5	0.7	39	2	3	41	0.9
41	41	6	7	32	2.1	40	2	3	41	0.9
42	42	4	4	38.5	1.4	41	7	8	33	3.2
43	43	6	7	32	2.1	42	3	3	35.5	1.4
44	44	4	5	38.5	1.4	43	1	1	47.5	0.5
45	45	1	1	50.5	0.4	44	1	1	47.5	0.5
46	46	4	4	38.5	1.4	45	2	2	41	0.9
47	47	3	4	44.5	1.1	46	1	1	47.5	0.5
48	48	1	4	50.5	0.4	47	0	0	51.5	0
49	49	4	4	38.5	1.4	48	1	1	47.5	0.5
50	50	4	5	38.5	1.4	49	1	1	47.5	0.5
51	51	7	9	30	2.5	50	3	4	35.5	1.4
52	52	1	2	50.5	0.4	51	17	2	25	7.8