News Alert

Best Practices

Breaking

Breaking news occurs

Evaluate if it is worthy of an alert

Write alert
Tips for writing breaking news alerts that get read:
• Keep the alert brief; 10 to 12 words usually suffice.
• Use custom headlines, not the generic “News Alert” or “Breaking News.”
• Try not to repeat the same headline too often; it could look like a duplicate.
• Avoid using too many “news” words like “Developing,” “Urgent,” or “Update.”
• Follow headline case style.
• Don’t repeat a word in the body that is in the headline.
• Only use periods if you need to divide sentences.
• Use active voice.
• This is a good time to determine if your alert should push viewers live to air for breaking coverage.

Wait for more developments

When at proper time on schedule, evaluate alert content choices

Is alert material already written, perhaps by promotions teams, or those responsible for story?

Create an alert
Consider posting schedule based on when audience is active and open to alerts.
Things to consider:
• Be respectful of users’ time; don’t overdo it.
• Space out alerts; consider setting a limit such as no more than one per hour.
• Consider setting separate tiers of alerts that users can select, few, many, or unlimited.
• Send alerts when users are more likely to be engaged. 8 am and 8 pm tend to be good times.
• Severely limit late night and early morning alerts so as not to annoy.

Prep for delivery, including the addition of links where possible

Follow your editorial procedure for approval

Publish

Non-Breaking

Idea for story to alert

Is there a set schedule for publishing?

Create an alert
Consider posting schedule based on when audience is active and open to alerts.
Things to consider:
• Be respectful of users’ time; don’t overdo it.
• Space out alerts; consider setting a limit such as no more than one per hour.
• Consider setting separate tiers of alerts that users can select, few, many, or unlimited.
• Send alerts when users are more likely to be engaged. 8 am and 8 pm tend to be good times.
• Severely limit late night and early morning alerts so as not to annoy.

When at proper time on schedule, evaluate alert content choices

Is alert material already written, perhaps by promotions teams, or those responsible for story?

Write alert
Tips for writing non-breaking news alerts that get read:
• Use imaginative headlines that demand attention.
• Feel free to ask questions instead of just stating facts.
• Make sure the destination that you are linking to feels worthy of an alert.

Tips for writing non-breaking news alerts that get read:
• Use imaginative headlines that demand attention.
• Feel free to ask questions instead of just stating facts.
• Make sure the destination that you are linking to feels worthy of an alert.
Best Practices

Dos and Don’ts

Remember that your alerts ultimately go to people, not their devices. Use them to communicate as you might face to face:

- Be conversational, like you are talking just to that one user.
- Make content timely. Don’t alert something that is not going to publish or happen until the following day.
- Make content actionable, like urging tune in to an interview on a broadcast.
- Ask a question with an alert, such as, “Will you need an umbrella on your morning commute?,” link to latest weather forecast.
- Create a sense of urgency, “What you need to know before you head out the door this morning.”
- Pique curiosity and make users want to click through with writing style and word choice.
- For lighter fare, consider including an emoji or two, but don’t overdo it.
- Explore using rich media where technically feasible. A strong news image, weather map or even a GIF can really hook users.
- For breaking news, sometimes the alert itself is all the info a user needs. Don’t feel you always need to require or provide a click-through.
- If the alert is going out through SMS (vs. your app), put your organization’s name at the beginning. For example, “WXYZ News Alert”.
- Own local content. Heavy news alert users are probably getting national and world news alerts from large national news organizations.
- The speed of an alert is not as important to the user as you may think. Make sure the facts are straight and the desired action is available before sending alert.

Getting and keeping alert subscribers

It’s easier to convert your current users to loyal alert subscribers than it is to find new ones:

- Make it easy for your current audience to subscribe; efficient app onboarding and website prompts work best.
- Make it clear what they will receive, including how many per day. Provide tier options to let people choose the number if you can.
- Make it easy to change preferences or even unsubscribe. This will keep people happy with your brand even if they don’t want as many alerts.

How much is too much?

Most news organizations send only two or three alerts per day, with a range of one to five being most common. Err on the side of fewer, then add alerts as you get a feel for what works and how people are using them. Check your subscribes and unsubscribes on a regular basis and compare them to your alert frequency to paint a picture of how many alerts users really want.