

GUARDIAN & TRIBUNE

Partnership

Project Kookaburra is an independent research program designed and run by Megan Brownlow and Simon Crerar, with participation from Mediality (formerly AAP Studio), in partnership with the Google News Initiative. Project Kookaburra worked with five independent regional publishers across Australia to try five new business models over a six-month period, from April to September 2020. The results were shared with publishers and journalists in a series of free 'lunch and learn' webinars in November 2020, hosted by the Walkley Foundation, Australia's leading organisation for celebrating and supporting Australian journalism. ([Walkley Foundation](#)). Megan Brownlow is a strategy consultant and non-executive director, who, as a partner with PwC Australia, ran the national technology, media and telecommunications practice. Simon Crerar is a strategy consultant and journalism start-up founder who was the founding editor and general manager of BuzzFeed Australia.

Overview

The Fassifern Guardian & Tribune has served Queensland's Scenic Rim since 1901. Today this family-owned business is run by proprietor Wendy Creighton and her son, Drew, who serves as editor. The newspaper bucked 2020's coronavirus-forced trends of closure and contraction by expanding aggressively both digitally and in print. In July they launched *The South East Journal*, a weekly email newsletter written by Drew. In August they added Tribune to their name as part of a restructure that saw the paper expand its reach into Ipswich, a city of 323,000 to its north. News Corp Australia had recently stopped printing The Queensland Times, the state's oldest regional newspaper, there.

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Using newsletters to drive online subscriptions

How Queensland's Fassifern Guardian & Tribune deployed a new weekly newsletter to help increase brand awareness and drive online subscriptions.

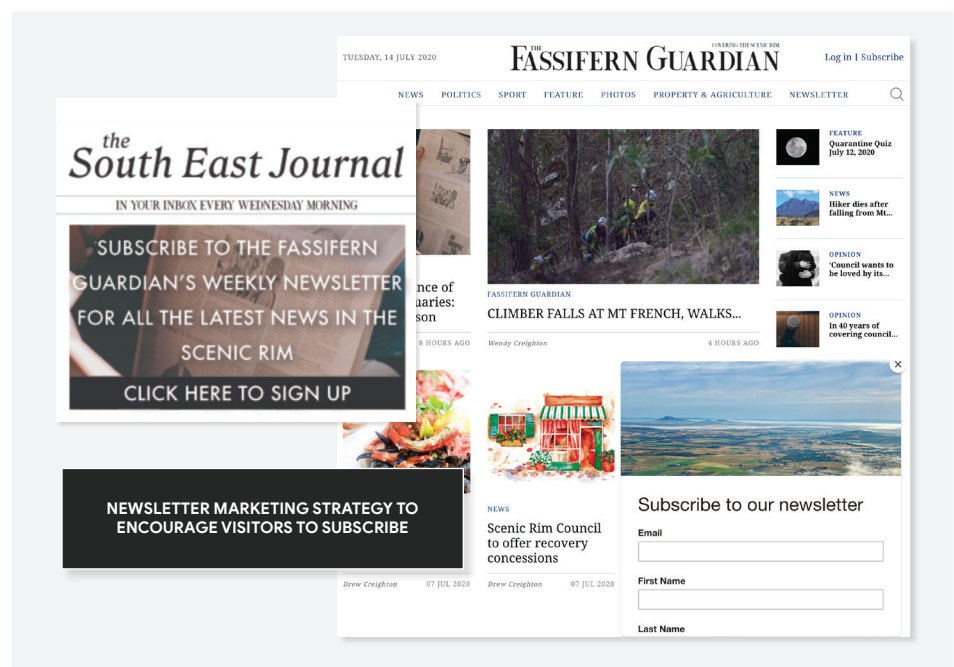
The Project

Build a personal connection with readers with a curated newsletter

The Fassifern Guardian & Tribune aimed to build a deeper relationship with readers by creating a concise, useful summary of the week's best content, infused with the personality of its editor, Drew Creighton. The goal of the newsletter, called *The South East Journal*, was to emphasise the role the paper plays in serving its community and connecting readers and local businesses.

Introduce the brand and its offerings via an email welcome series

Prior to launching, the team assessed global best practices in email newsletters, looking at successful products from international publishers such as Axios and Morning Brew.



Track content performance by monitoring open rates and engagement

They also developed a detailed newsletter marketing strategy. The team used acquisition techniques including pop-up sign-up boxes, in-article links, house ads and site-wide navigation changes to encourage visitors to subscribe. They also set up a four-email welcome series to introduce new subscribers to their brand, establish a strong relationship, and build trust.



The Results

The *Fassifern Guardian & Tribune* launched their email newsletter in mid-July, initially sending it to existing subscribers. Over the next three months, with increased onsite marketing, newsletter subscriptions grew by 109%.

Engagement was well above the industry average, with a 49% open rate for their weekly email, compared to the media and publishing average of 22% (averages via MailChimp). The 15.2% click through rate was also well above the industry average 4.62%, suggesting the newsletter was not only useful as a standalone product, but also drove readers to the paper's website.

A key goal with the newsletter's launch was to give the FG&Ts expanding brand a cohesive voice as they grew their horizons beyond the newspaper's traditional home on the Scenic Rim.

RESULTS IN THE FIRST EIGHT MONTHS SINCE IMPLEMENTATION

109%

Growth of newsletter subscribers after initial launch

49%

Average open rate

15%

Average click through rate

58%

Open rate for welcome series vs. industry average of 16%

To that end, the team experimented with the content mix in the newsletter's first weeks to fine-tune the product. And they cultivated a useful feedback loop with readers by asking them to share their own perspectives.

With the success of *The South East Journal*, the team at *Fassifern Guardian & Tribune* demonstrated that regional audiences are eager to embrace more digestible ways of receiving local news. The project also highlights how email newsletters can offer a relatively simple route to quickly growing an engaged audience.

“The idea with the Journal newsletter was to make a relevant product for the wider region, contextualizing the world for a regional Queensland. We've found that the newsletter has really helped us refine our digital workflow, and sparked great two-way communication with our readers, who have really responded to the medium.”

DREW CREIGHTON, EDITOR, FASSIFERN GUARDIAN & TRIBUNE

Learn more at www.fassifernguardian.com