

Seattle Times Digital Audience Team

Appraisal of Desktop Push Notification Workflow

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The task: Estimate how much additional time it would take newsroom producers to add desktop push notifications to their story-promotion workflow.

Background: Currently, producers aim for three planned news alerts per day, which are sent to either the Breaking News or Don't Miss email list alongside mobile-app push notifications. Additionally, producers send one to two unplanned alerts per day for breaking news, and the sports department sends one sports alert every two or three days to the Sports email list. As such, if our goal is to send five desktop push notifications per day to a general audience, I would expect little change to the overall number of alerts that are written.

Each pair of news alerts takes 10 to 15 minutes from beginning to send. In a typical case, mobile and email alerts are drafted by a section producer, hub producer or lab engagement editor. A mobile push alert consists of one or two sentences, with a maximum of 180 characters. An email alert comprises a subject (about 10 words), header (10 to 15 words) and body text (usually two sentences). In most cases, the producer will run their draft text by the story's editor and/or reporter for approval. Then, the producer will post the proposed alert text in the #hub Slack channel, where it gets more edits from digital audience colleagues and a copy editor. All alerts must get a green-light from a copy editor before sending. Once approved, the alert text is copy-pasted into the proper fields in WordPress and sent on both mobile and email platforms.

Scenario 1

5 general-audience desktop push notifications per day

Desktop notifications require two text fields written in different styles than the mobile and email alerts. This process would not be as simple as repurposing existing mobile or email language for desktop. Also, each desktop notification would optimally include an image, adding the operational complication of choosing, downloading, uploading and cropping a photo.

Based on the limited Pushly demo I've seen, and based on the existing steps above for email and mobile alerts, I would expect writing, editing, building and sending a general-audience desktop push notification to take about 10 minutes on its own. However, when incorporating a desktop alert into the mobile/email alert workflow, I would expect each "incorporated" desktop notification to add only about five minutes to the existing process.

We should also consider that some alerts -- for large enterprise projects, watchdog reports or stories on otherwise sensitive topics -- require extra attention from reporters, editors or newsroom leadership. Because of this, I'm adding 30 minutes per week to my estimates.

Estimated time: 30 min/day, 4 hrs/week

- 4 "incorporated" desktop alerts per day at 5 minutes = 20 min/day
- 1 solo desktop alert per day at 10 minutes = 10 min/day
- 30 minutes per week of extra attention = 30 min/week

Scenario 2

5 general-audience plus 3 targeted desktop push notifications per day

As stated above, I would estimate that each desktop push notification -- on its own -- would take about 10 minutes to write, edit, build and send. In the Pushly demo, it did not seem particularly difficult to target a notification to a specific segment of users, but the process could add around two minutes to the process. As such, I would estimate each targeted desktop alert to take about 12 minutes.

Estimated time: 66 min/day, 8.2 hrs/week

- 4 "incorporated" general-audience desktop alerts per day at 5 minutes = 20 min/day
- 1 solo general-audience desktop alert per day at 10 minutes = 10 min/day
- 3 targeted desktop alerts per day at 12 minutes = 36 min/day
- 30 minutes per week of extra attention = 30 min/week

Scenario 3

5 general-audience plus 15 targeted desktop push notifications per day

Estimated time: 210 min/day, 25 hrs/week

- 4 "incorporated" general-audience desktop alerts per day at 5 minutes = 20 min/day
- 1 solo general-audience desktop alert per day at 10 minutes = 10 min/day
- 15 targeted desktop alerts per day at 12 minutes = 180 min/day
- 30 minutes per week of extra attention = 30 min/week

Note on Sports

There is an important factor to consider if many targeted alerts are to be sports news updates. Most of these would, under current workflows, be written and sent by the sports producer. However, roughly one sports alert is sent every two or three days. Therefore, targeted desktop push notifications could disproportionately affect the existing workflow of the sports producer, potentially necessitating extra sports assistance from other producers.