Subject: Analysis of email alerts, Jan-June 2020
Date: Tuesday, July 28, 2020 at 12:46:10 PM Pacific Daylight Time
From: Nick Eaton
To:

Attachments: image001.png, image002.png, image003.png, image004.png, image005.png, image006.png, image007.png, image008.png

Hi all,

I've completed an in-depth analysis of email alert data from the first six months of 2020. I've got an enormous Excel workbook that parses the available data from just about every angle, and you can view it all here: https://seattletimescom-my.sharepoint.com/personal/neaton_seattletimes_com/Documents/2020%201st%20Half%20Alerts.xlsx?web=1

My goal was to identify readership patterns and opportunities that can inform our daily alert planning and workflow. As such, this analysis did not venture into qualitative attributes, such as how an alert is written, the length of the text, if an alert "hides the pickle," etc. If you have specific questions that I don't address here, give a shout and I can take a look at the data for a possible answer. We will also talk about this more at an upcoming Warp & Woof Producers Meeting.

For now, here are **five quick takeaways** that can inform our daily alert planning.

TL;DR summary:

1. We should aim for 6-8 total alerts daily
2. We should send more alerts on weekends
3. People will read alerts whenever we send them
4. People will respond to quick action on breaking news
5. Our balance of Breaking News and Don't Miss alerts is working well

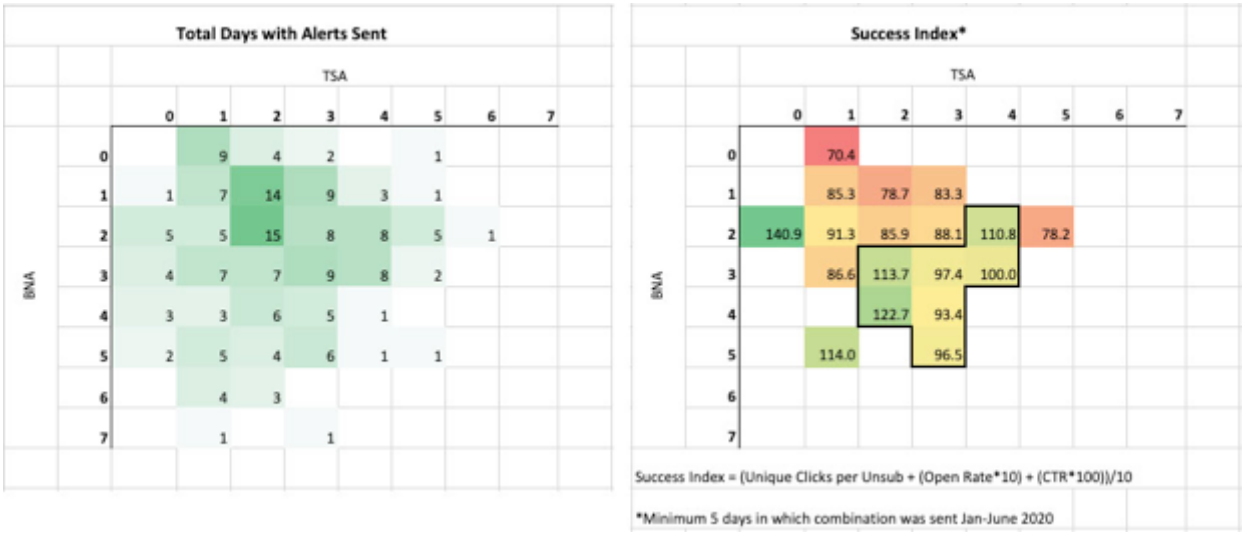
More details:

(Note that Don't Miss Alerts are labeled as TSAs, or Top Stories Alerts, in all of these charts. BNAs are Breaking News Alerts. I did not include Sports Alerts in this analysis.)

1. Data suggests we should shoot for a combination of BNAs and DMAs totaling 6-8 daily alerts

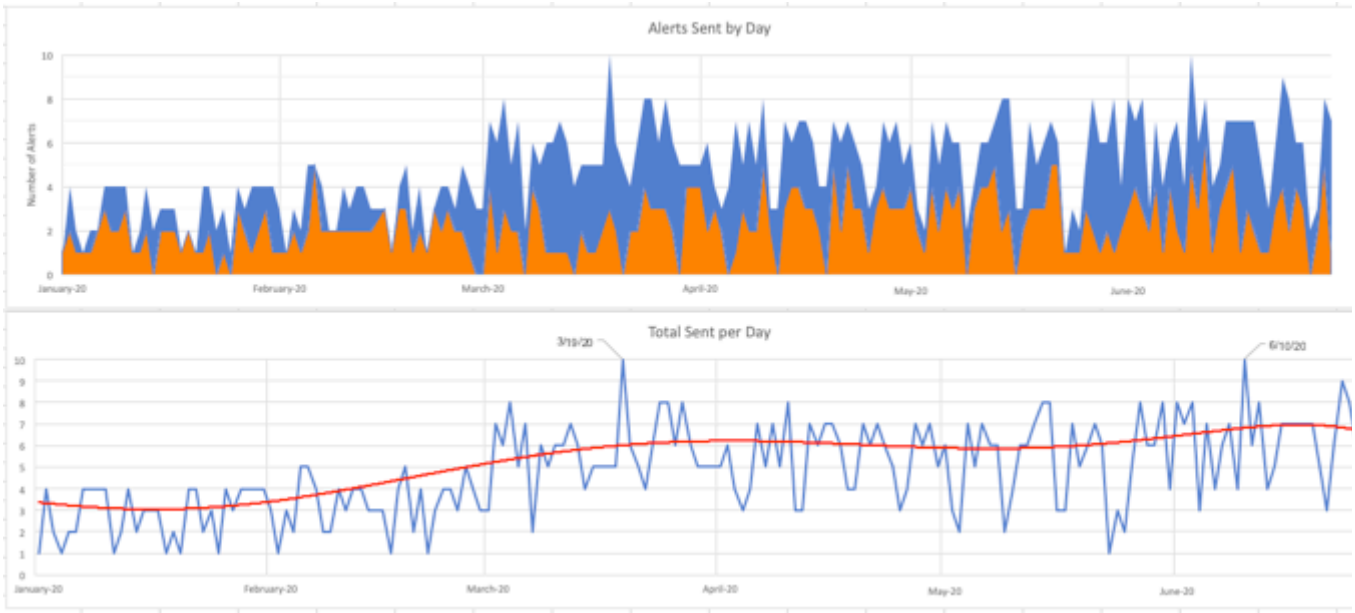
I looked at the unsubscribes, unique clicks, open rate and click through rate for every daily combination from January to July 2020. In the first matrix, you can see the number of days we sent each combination of BNAs and DMAs. For example, there were 8 days in which we sent 2 Breaking News Alerts and 3 Don't Miss Alerts.

The second matrix takes the data above and combines it into an overall “success” index. The best combinations jumped out, and I outlined them. As a guideline, we should strive to send 3-4 of each type of alert each day.



2. We should double our efforts to plan for and send weekend DMAs

The chart below shows how many BNAs (blue) and DMAs (orange) we sent daily. You can see the numbers bounce around quite a lot, with particularly fewer sent over the weekends. While we have little control over how many BNAs we send out, we do have control over our DMAs. I would like us to work on smoothing out the orange part of this chart by sending more DMAs on the weekends, and that will take more robust planning for weekend content.



In fact, on average, the alerts we have sent on weekends had higher click through rates than on weekdays. This may be partially because we have sent fewer alerts on those days and generally to our spotlight content, but there’s clearly an opportunity.

Number of Alerts by Day - All Alerts

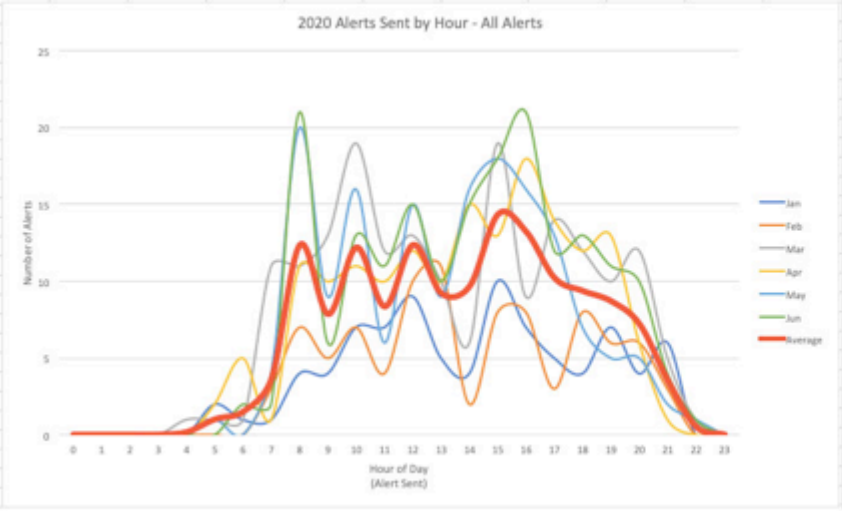
Hour	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Average
0								
1								
2								
3								
4				1				1.0
5			2	3	1			2.0
6	2	3	2		1	1		1.8
7	1	7	3	5	4	1	1	3.1
8	17	9	11	10	12	13	2	10.6
9	5	6	4	6	8	10	8	6.7
10	1	10	15	13	11	17	6	10.4
11	7	7	9	10	8	7	2	7.1
12	6	14	10	13	12	13	6	10.6
13	6	8	7	9	11	9	5	7.9
14	9	9	5	13	10	7	5	8.3
15	5	15	13	10	15	16	12	12.3
16	7	14	12	18	13	7	8	11.3
17	9	7	10	11	10	6	8	8.7
18	7	7	7	14	4	15	2	8.0
19	4	9	11	7	8	10	3	7.4
20	3	6	8	9	6	5	6	6.1
21	1	4	5	2	5	4		3.5
22		1	1				1	1.0
23								
Total	90	136	135	154	139	141	75	

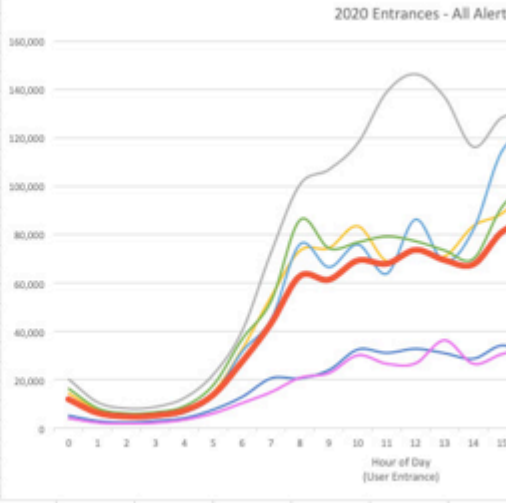
Click Through Rate by Day - All Alerts

Hour	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu
0					
1					
2					
3					
4				5.60%	
5			4.87%	5.01%	6
6	7.91%	4.56%	4.93%		2
7	5.15%	5.08%	5.35%	4.97%	5
8	3.82%	3.88%	3.77%	4.12%	3
9	6.77%	5.42%	3.75%	5.88%	4
10	7.92%	5.67%	4.58%	4.96%	4
11	6.23%	7.99%	5.53%	6.57%	4
12	5.03%	3.52%	5.58%	4.69%	5
13	4.56%	3.67%	4.69%	5.22%	5
14	5.78%	5.81%	3.81%	4.05%	4
15	6.17%	5.92%	5.83%	4.14%	4
16	5.03%	5.05%	4.04%	4.46%	4
17	6.43%	8.15%	8.55%	6.23%	4
18	8.60%	4.73%	5.23%	5.64%	3
19	8.29%	5.22%	5.31%	5.91%	5
20	11.17%	5.10%	5.85%	7.17%	4
21	2.25%	6.51%	8.36%	2.88%	3
22		12.80%	8.57%		
23					
Average	6.32%	5.83%	5.48%	5.15%	4

3. People will read alerts whenever we send them

Going into this analysis, I expected to see higher alert readership in the mornings, slowly decreasing as the day went on, like our website traffic. Instead, I saw a relatively flat graph for website entrances by users who came via email alerts – even slightly growing throughout the day. You can also see how the bumps correspond to our average daily sending pattern, which shows spikes in alert sends around 8, 10, noon and 3-4 (that last window skewed by the daily DOH alerts). Meanwhile, in the next chart under #4, you'll see that alert click through rates are mostly consistent no matter what time we send them.

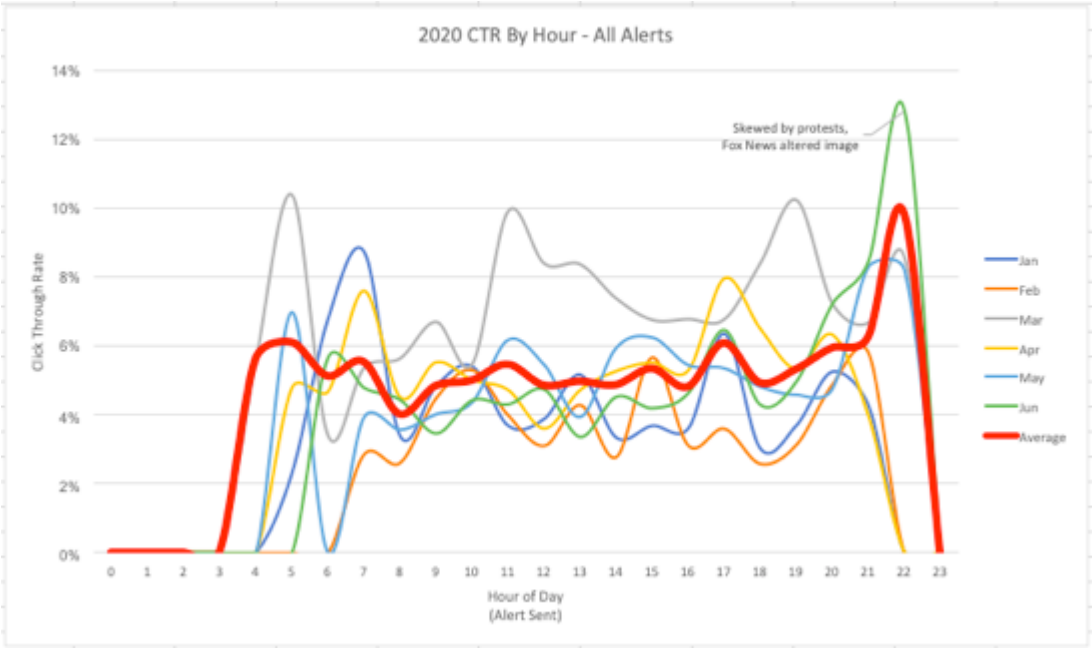




4. People respond to quick action on breaking news

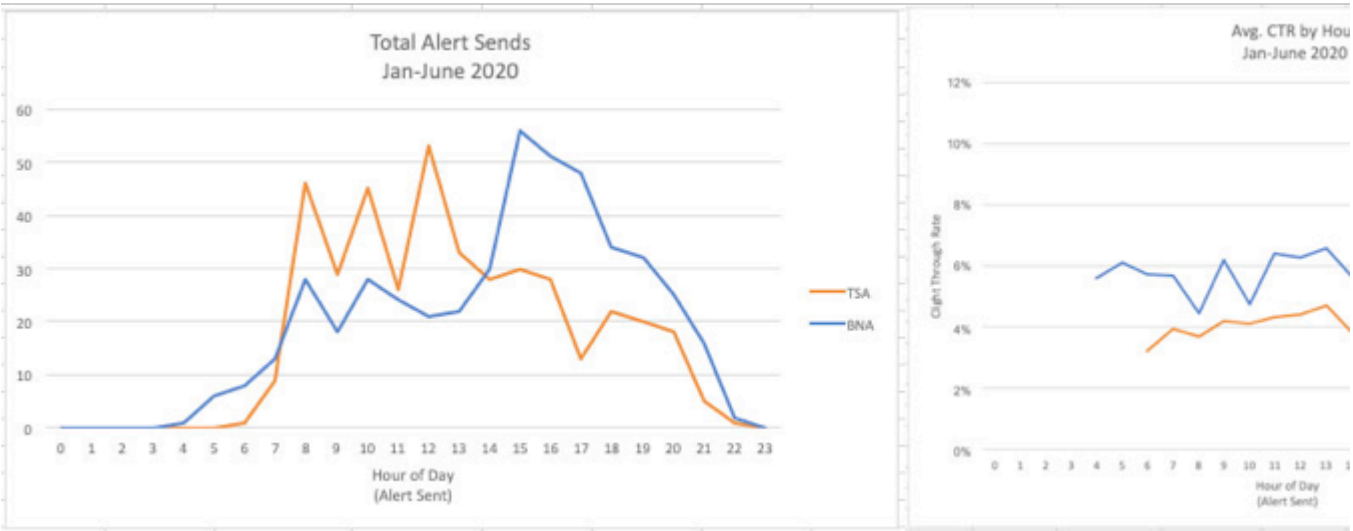
During this period, we made fantastic and successful efforts to send an alert around 8 a.m. each day. These alerts perform as well as any other. So do alerts we send even earlier! And later! Many of our early morning and late-night alerts were for breaking news – usually national wire in the mornings and protest developments at nights. This shows that people are interested in breaking news no matter the time of day; even if people aren't up yet or have already gone to bed, they will respond to an alert whenever they see it.

So don't shy away from late alerts on breaking news, and let's keep an eye out for more opportunities for early morning alerts. And, in all cases, strike while the iron is hot and try to send that alert ASAP.

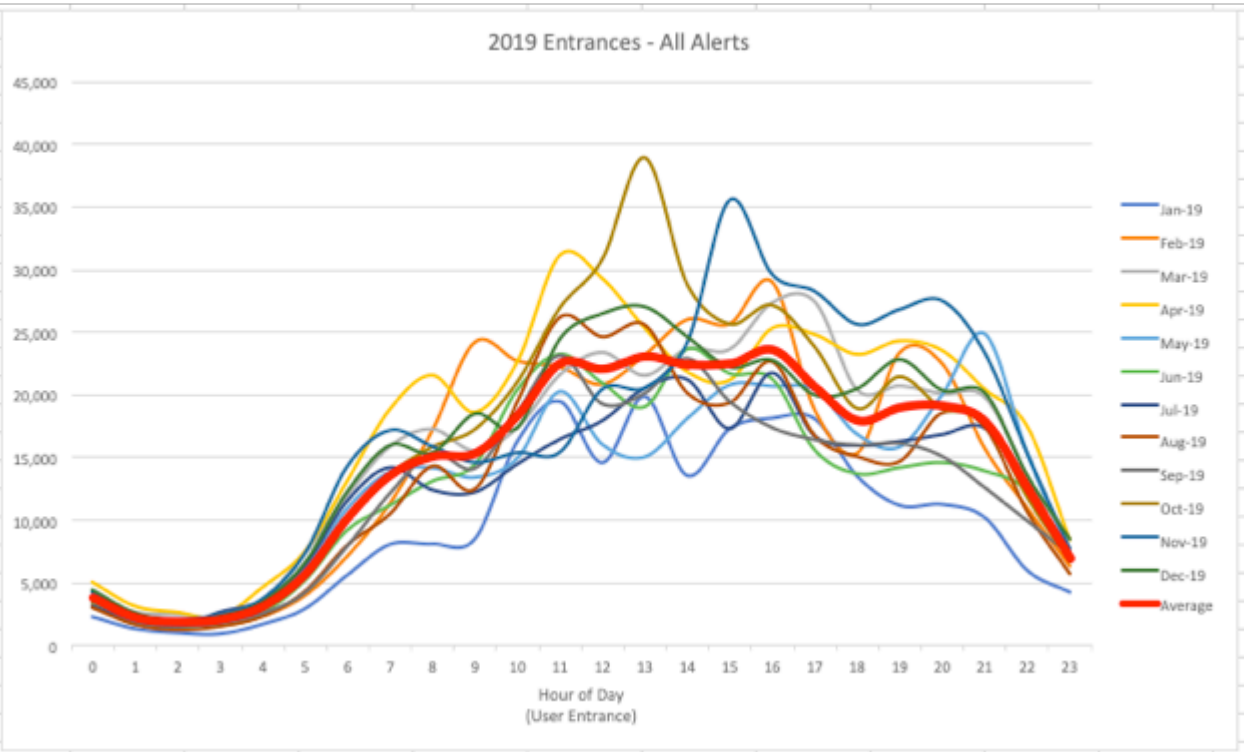


5. Our timing balance of BNA and DMA timing has worked well

We sent a majority of Breaking News Alerts in the afternoons/evenings due to the news cycle. Meanwhile, we have sent a majority of Don't Miss Alerts in the mornings. This balances things out well. This does not mean we should hold on to BNAs until afternoons; we should send BNAs ASAP when news breaks. Also, in general, BNAs had higher click through rates than DMAs no matter what time we sent them.



Also, for your reference, here are entrances by month for all alerts in 2019. You can see the difference in traffic patterns versus 2020's increased breaking news in the afternoons (coronavirus) and evenings (protests).



Cheers,
Nick

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