

# CEO UPDATE

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION NEWS AND EXECUTIVE CAREERS

Volume XXXIII, Number 797, November 4, 2022

CEOupdate.com

## Making member newsletters smart with artificial intelligence

*AI can tailor unique communications to thousands of users by watching clicks; advertisers will know exactly whom they are reaching*

By William Ehart

Customized email newsletters to association members and prospective members are not new, but the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to automate such customization is growing. The technology exists to personalize your newsletter for each recipient, resulting in greater engagement and, potentially, advertising and sponsorship revenue.

“We’ve had a consistently very high open rate week over week, along with high engagement rates without us really having to do a ton of changes or testing or anything like that,” said Jonathan Nelson, senior manager of digital

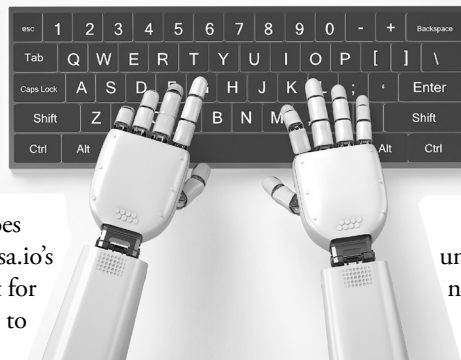
marketing and social media at the American Marketing Association.

The group has been working with software-as-a-service company rasa.io for the past few years on using AI to tailor its newsletter to different audiences within its membership of marketing professionals. My AMA Daily goes out to 100,000 people. Rasa.io’s platform scans the internet for relevant content to present to editorial teams, and it also

automatically personalizes newsletter content for each member or potential member.

AI has quickened the pace at which AMA can crank out content.

“It’s enabled us to do a daily newsletter,” Nelson said. “There was no way we could do one manually before. ... And everybody gets their own unique newsletter. There’s no way I can make 100,000



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## Associations join in national effort to end stigma around mental illness

*‘Grand Challenge’ envisions coalition working together for decades to achieve goal*

By Dan Tyson

More than a dozen associations are banding together to help launch a national movement aimed at ending the stigma around mental illness and substance abuse disorders.

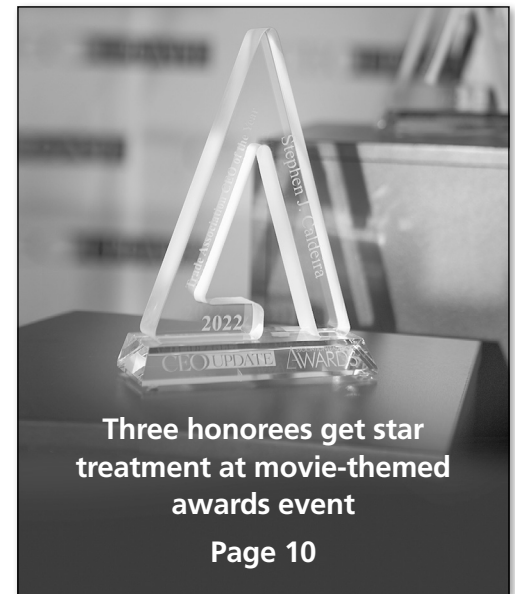
More than 175 mental health experts and leaders—from associations, federal and state governmental bodies, hospitals and higher education institutes—met in Utah last month to collaborate on long-term solutions. Their goal: eliminate attitudes that often prevent people

from seeking care for mental health disorders.

“We need to have a broad enough engagement to connect with people where they work, live and play,” said Jared Skillings, chief of professional practice at the American Psychological Association and a member of the national leadership steering team for the effort.

The collaboration is an initiative of the Huntsman Mental Health Institute at the University of Utah. The institute hired strategy

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Three honorees get star treatment at movie-themed awards event

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HOLDS CONTEST  
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**CHAVERN NAMED  
NEXT CEO AT  
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# Making member newsletters smart with artificial intelligence

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different newsletters for everybody.”

AI also helps fill the newsletter with content even when the association isn't producing much of its own, he said.

“It allows us to always have a full newsletter every single day,” Nelson said. “If we end up in a period where we're publishing less content, the newsletter itself doesn't necessarily suffer because of it. We're able to be more flexible on our production side. We don't have to produce just to fill a newsletter.”

ASIS International, a professional society for professionals in the security field, also has been a rasa.io client for a few years. Its Security Management Daily newsletter has been distributed for 20 years or so.

“(Using AI) is better for engagement,” said Nello Caramat, vice president of publishing at ASIS. “We have an open rate that is way above 50%. That's an awesome rate to have read the newsletter, particularly when it's a daily.”

“The newsletter actually curates itself to what the readers are clicking on. If you tend to click more on the financial security stories, most of the newsletter content in the future will be based on your clicks. It reads and recognizes what you're interested in,” he said.

“We do a lot of sponsored content for advertising revenue and that gets a lot of click-throughs, sometimes much more than the regular stories from The Washington Post, Huffington Post, etc., that are AI-driven. It's a good win for member engagement and it's also a really good revenue stream for us.”

Caramat said ASIS recently soft-launched another AI-powered newsletter for prospective members, which comes out weekly.

“Security Management Daily newsletter is actually member only,” he said. “We obviously have another part of the database, our prospects. We want to help them in their work.”

The second newsletter draws from the most

clicked-on stories from Security Management Daily in the prior week.

“Our prospects and the other people in the industry are actually getting involved in what our members are interested in, which probably is what they would be interested in as well,” he said.

## 'Human element' key

Rasa.io's client base is mainly associations, said COO Erica Salm Rench. Other clients include ASAE, the American Society for Microbiology and the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries. The company was spun out of association management software company Aptify when Aptify was sold to Community Brands, she said.

Newsletters can be with or without advertising and can be fully automated, though some level of human supervision is recommended, she said. Pricing for small and midsize organizations starts at \$140 per month, though greater services are available for larger associations.

“We believe that the human element and the AI element working together produce the best results,” Salm Rench said.

But the platform reduces staff time necessary to create, customize and distribute newsletters, either lowering labor costs or allowing employees to focus on other content.

Rasa.io doesn't get involved in producing the association newsletters—for that, a communications staff is required. For groups that need to outsource editorial help for their newsletters, rasa.io partners with Naylor Association Solutions, which offers newsletter and advertising sales services.

“A lot of the work is done on the front end (determining which news

sources to scan for articles),” said John Bacon, vice president of account management at Naylor. “Then it's almost autopilot. You update a few sources here and there as you go along.”

Naylor receives advertising and sponsorship revenue up to a certain threshold, beyond

which the association shares in the revenue. “You want to think about engagement before you think about revenue,” he said.

Segmentation by type of recipient helps advertisers know whom they are reaching.

“People now don't just want to know that their ads are in front of 1,500 folks,” Bacon said. “They want to know who those 1,500 folks are and what the open rates are.”

“A lot of associations simply haven't thought of this yet,” he said. “There's a ton of room for growth. What it boils down to is education.”

While AI powers much of the content, the newsletters have content blocks built in so associations can put their own content front and center regardless of recipients' past clicks.

## Other offerings

Longtime industry and association newsletter provider SmartBrief also uses AI in its process, but primarily to scour the internet for news sources. The company offers outsourced editorial staff—it employs 50 writers and editors—segmented into industry expertise to produce its newsletters. Client associations can add their own content.

“Our usage of AI is specifically to cast a wide net, to capture more than the human eye could at scale,” said Amanda Darman-Allen, chief B2B partnership officer at SmartBrief. “This allows us to capture the full breadth of coverage in a given industry.”

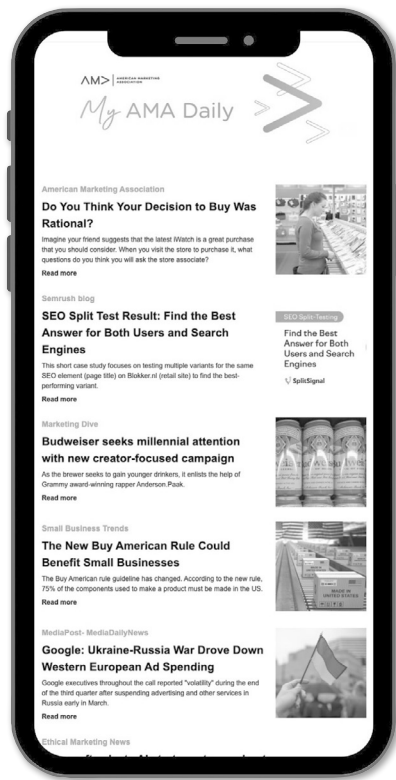
SmartBrief's platform, Curate, picks up the meta descriptions and editorial summaries of items from the web.

“We are scraping and using thousands of sources day in and day out as we produce newsletters,” said Melissa Turner, SmartBrief director of content said. “No human editor can reasonably sift through all that content.”

“Our expert editors and journalists customize each summary based on the audience and the association,” Darman-Allen said.

“If we let AI take over every aspect of what a reader sees, it no longer allows us to support the very important work of the associations,” she said. “Likewise, it starts to weed out content the reader may not know they need. We do the hard work for the audience, and ensure we are surfacing the type of content they may not see on their own.”

SmartBrief offers an advertising-based model to its clients, in which it shares ad revenue with them without any fees. But the company also has a fee-based model where clients pay annually. ■



The American Marketing Association sends AMA Daily to 100,000 people.