Expand Your Outreach with Print Newsletters

"Print is still the most portable medium for most people, and it's the preferred way to read large documents (three or four pages and up). Print also gives you total control over the look and feel of your message, which is extremely important when image is a critical component of your program."

Don Sadler / BrainTrust

One of the oldest and most effective ways to stay in touch with your existing customers, prospects, and members is with printed newsletters. Arriving by snail mail, they contain valuable, information-rich content and are an effective complement to online promotions. They also serve niche markets where print is a preferred format. Due to the decrease in postal mail, print newsletters stand out, unlike online newsletters that tend to get lost in email boxes.

Many businesses understand the value of direct mail as a marketing tool. But have you ever considered the value of a newsletter as a sales-related publication? A newsletter can help your business or non-profit organization generate new business or increase membership, cultivate customer and member loyalty, increase repeat sales or continued giving, and boost referrals.

How can a newsletter accomplish all these objectives? By communicating useful information in an easy-to-understand format. And when we say *useful information,* we mean not only facts, tips, and expert advice, but also new product or service information.

So what does it take to launch a customer-focused newsletter? In this issue we'll provide some guidelines and suggestions to help you take advantage of a newsletter as a selling tool.

Newsletter Size

A fundamental decision about starting a newsletter is how it will look. A very popular newsletter format is an 11 x 17 inch sheet of paper, folded in half to produce four 8.5 x 11 inch pages. To create a longer newsletter, include additional 11 x 17 sheets. Each 11 x 17 sheet will yield four more newsletter pages. The additional sheets can be stapled after folding to create a booklet-like effect for the newsletter.

The same technique can be used with an 8.5 x 11 sheet – fold it in half, and it becomes a four-page newsletter that measures 5.5 x 8.5 inches. Add more 8.5 x 11 sheets, and the newsletter page count increases to 8, 12, 16 or more pages.

The popularity of these newsletter sizes – 5.5 x 8.5 or 8.5 x 11 – is linked to the fact that 8.5 x 11 and 11 x 17 are readily available, ream-wrapped papers. There is a wide variety of colors, finishes, and thicknesses that allows a newsletter editor a good measure of creativity in selecting paper.

But let us offer a suggestion for 11 x 17 paper: instead of folding the sheet in half, fold it in thirds, creating a finished size of 5.625 x 11 and a six-page newsletter. Alternately, trim the 11 x 17 sheet to 8.5 x 14, then fold in half. Now you have created a four-page newsletter with a finished size of 7 x 8.5. The benefit of these suggestions is that they take advantage of the standard sheet size and yet produce a newsletter that is an unusual size, making your newsletter stand out from others.

For a truly unusual newsletter format, consider a post card newsletter. You will be amazed at the amount of information that can be included even in a small post card. The key lies in careful design and reducing the newsletter content to its essential elements.

Newsletter Copy

How much copy does it take to fill a newsletter? Typically it takes 400-600 words per 8.5 x 11 sheet. This count assumes there are a few graphic elements as well as the text – one or two photographs, sidebars, illustrations, graphs, charts, or callouts – on each page.

Most adults who are not professional writers can compose at the rate of about 200 words per hour, so allow between two and three hours per 8.5 x 11 page for original writing. You may have experts in your company or organization who can make valuable contributions to the newsletter, but who may not have the time or desire to contribute original writing. Rather than forego the benefit of their knowledge, conduct an interview and write the first draft yourself. Often it is easier to edit than to write something original.

Recurring Elements

Every newsletter has elements that recur each issue. The two most common are the *nameplate* or *banner* and the *masthead.* The nameplate is at the top of the first page and contains the name of the publication plus information about the issue (date of publication, volume, and issue number).

The nameplate is often mistakenly called the masthead; the masthead is actually the listing of the publisher, editorial board, staff names, contributors, and other information about who produces the newsletter. It may also contain subscription information. A masthead rarely appears on the front page; more commonly it is located on the second or last page of the newsletter, usually in the same position every issue.

Other recurring elements of a newsletter could include:

- Message from the president or other executive
- New product announcements
- Customer testimonials

Design

We believe there is one overriding consideration for newsletter design: a successful design appeals to the audience and is consistent with the graphic identity of your company or organization. If you are intending to design the newsletter template yourself, we urge you to give much less weight to the opinions of co-workers, executives, and

owners than to what you know about the preferences of your audience. Good design – and especially design that helps convey a sales-related message – follows basic rules of organization and artistry.

Regardless of the page size for your newsletter, we recommend that the information be presented in columns rather than a line length that runs the entire width of the page. The reason for this is columns allow you to create a more interesting layout. Suppose you are using a three-column underlying organization structure (or *grid*). Your layout can vary the geometric blocks of type, photographs, and drawings to span one, two, or three columns. In addition, you'll be doing your readers a favor by not making them move their eyes across each line of type. Reading is faster if the eye can move vertically from line to line rather than moving first horizontally then returning to the left margin before going down to the next line.

Keep in mind that columns don't have to be of equal width. In a two-column grid, one column can be twice as wide and produce a pleasing layout. Similarly, a three-column grid could have two columns of equal width and one very narrow column.

Newsletter Schedule

After good design, the next best thing you can do to promote the effectiveness of a newsletter is to publish it on a regular, recurring basis. The function of newsletter editor or coordinator can be added to other job responsibilities, but does require a firm commitment to maintaining a schedule.

To determine the schedule, start by picking the date you want the newsletter distributed and work backwards. For this example, we'll assume a monthly newsletter to be mailed on the first working day of each month. Subtract five working days for printing and mailing services; subtract one business day for final approval and release to press; subtract two business days for final proofing; subtract three business days for preparation of first proof; subtract five business days for gathering stories, artwork, photographs, and writing copy; subtract one business day for planning the month's issue (*i.e.*, determining what stories to include and making writing assignments).

Add all this up, and you will need 17 business days from the time you begin working on the monthly issue until it is in the mail. Therefore, to mail on the first of each month, you'll need to begin the first step (planning) in the middle of the first week of every month.

a vocabulary of the graphic arts

Body: the text of a newsletter, excluding headlines and graphics. The newsletter content.

Byline: a short phrase or paragraph indicating the article's author. Can be located between the headline and start of the article, prefaced by the word *by*, or may appear at the end of the article.

Caption: a phrase, sentence, or paragraph describing the contents of an illustration or photograph. Usually placed directly above, below, or to the side of the picture it describes.

Deck: one or more lines of text between the headline and the body copy that elaborates or expands on the headline and topic of the accompanying text.

Headline: the title or caption of a newsletter article. Often is printed in larger type and/or a different font than the body copy.

Jump-line: a line of type that indicates where an article is continued to or continued from. Also called *continuation line.*

Kicker: a short phrase set above the headline that introduces the article or identifies a regular column.

Masthead: a listing of the name of the publisher and other pertinent information such as staff names, contributors, subscription information, and publisher contact information. Typically appears on the second page.

Nameplate: the banner on the front of a newsletter that identifies the publication. Usually contains the name of the newsletter, logo, and publication information (volume and issue or date).

Pull quote: a small selection of text "pulled out and quoted" in a larger typeface. Used for emphasis or as a graphic element.

Running head, header: repeating text located on each page or every other page. The publication title is commonly in a running head, as is the page number.

Subhead: a kind of headline appearing within the body copy to divide the article into smaller sections.

Swipe file: a repository for topics, ideas, or actual articles that you notice and suspect may be useful for your newsletter. Include anything that catches your eye without evaluating its applicability.

Table of contents: a listing of articles and special sections of a newsletter and the page numbers where they can be found. Often appears on the newsletter's front page.

THE idea CORNER

Newsletter Templates

Newsletter experts agree on the importance of good design to engage and hold a reader's attention. If you don't have the software tools to make the layout task manageable or lack the time or interest in newsletter design, we suggest that you let us prepare a design template for you.

There are many advantages to a design template. Foremost, we will be sure it follows the rules of good design, with an underlying column grid and the correct use of typography. We will anchor the recurring elements – nameplate and masthead – and provide for optional recurring elements such as the president's message, new product announcements, or staff spotlights. We will design the nameplate to be interesting and eye-catching.

A design template also makes it easier for you to prepare copy for each issue. Ask all contributors to submit their articles in a digital format. You'll know from the design template exactly how many words to assign to each writer. Then copy can be edited and corrected easily in the word processing program before being pasted into the newsletter template for easy page layout.

We can tailor the design template to fit your preferred production method, printing specifications, and available software programs. If you would like to learn more about our design template service, including a cost estimate, give us a call.

Group Photo Tips

Most newsletters include group photographs both for design interest and to illustrate a narrative. No matter who in your company is responsible for taking photographs, everyone should be using the same guidelines for getting the best shots.

When taking photos of groups, consider the goal of including the photograph in the newsletter – for readers to be able to recognize individuals. When a group photo includes more than ten people, it is nearly impossible to size the photo so all faces are recognizable. When a group includes more than ten, consider ways you can organize individuals into subgroups – the Western Region sales staff, for example.

Insist that everyone in the group stands close together, and consider arranging the individuals yourself. If people are standing, place them so their shoulders are overlapping, not side-by-side. When arranging people by height, start with the tall people rather than the shorter ones, as most people then won't notice you are arranging by height.

Once the photo is taken, use judicious cropping to remove extraneous background or foreground images. Besides allowing you to change the focal point of the photo to the people, you may be able to enlarge the photo, and in doing so, make people's faces larger.

Q. What is a bleed, and how do I indicate one in my file?

A. A bleed is any printed element on the page that extends beyond the edge of the page. A *full bleed* means the printed elements extend beyond all four edges of the page.

We do not print to the edge of the paper; instead, we print 1/8 of an inch beyond what will be the final size of the newsletter, then trim off the excess ink and paper. This is called *trimming to the bleed.* Naturally, this means that the press sheet must be larger than the finished size of the newsletter.

If you want to include a bleed in your design, you must extend the image by 1/8 inch (0.125) and indicate the trim lines on your layout. Please remember that because we are trimming to the bleed, the press sheet must be larger than the finished size of the newsletter. If you want to use a bleed in your newsletter design, check with us to be sure we can accommodate an oversized sheet.

questions and answers