

## Building Better Newsletters

One of the best tools a business can use to bring customers back regularly is a newsletter. Producing a good newsletter requires careful planning that considers content and presentation.

Content is the information you want to convey. Presentation includes editorial style and the layout (design) of the newsletter. Both are equally important. A newsletter that has a good look but contains nothing of interest to the reader will wind up in the wastebasket only seconds after being distributed. Similarly, a newsletter filled with material of interest but so poorly designed that readers struggle with it will never keep anyone's interest. There are two broad classes of newsletters: company newsletters and promotional newsletters. Company newsletters are internal publications intended for employees, while promotional newsletters are external publications aimed at a company's customers or prospects. Some companies produce both types; others, only one. And although they differ in content, each type of newsletter goes through the same production steps.

### Company Newsletters

Company newsletters are used to inform, entertain and draw employees into the company culture. A company newsletter often contains informational material (revisions in company policies, worker guidelines or job openings), corporate events (employee picnics or parties), and personal information about employees (promotions, employment anniversaries or birthdays).

Company newsletters may have either a corporate look with a layout almost like a newspaper – headlines, columns of information and a few relevant photographs or tightly drawn graphics – or a more informal layout with lots of photographs. Both have the same requirement: to convey information quickly. Accordingly, the writing style is generally succinct and to the point with few embellishments.

### Promotional Newsletters

Promotional newsletters are selling and informational tools. Their purpose is to provide information (such as updating investors) or education (such as this newsletter on the topic of newsletters) or to sell products and services. Unlike company newsletters whose readership is guaranteed, promotional newsletters must appeal visually to the reader. Therefore, the overall design is often more informal, colorful and includes space for graphics. In some cases promotional newsletters will include a catalog section featuring sale items, specials or even contests designed to provoke response from the readers.

### The Editor's Job

If you are responsible for getting out your company's newsletter, you are the editor and you have several distinct tasks. The first is to determine the overall theme for each issue; the second is to develop a list

of articles to be included; the third is to write the copy; and the fourth is to plan the design. To illustrate the workflow, let's pretend you are the editor of a promotional newsletter for a hardware store. Because one of your suppliers (a paint manufacturer) is running a promotion on house paint, you decide that this month's theme will be home improvement.

Articles may include:

- preparing walls to receive new paint, including removing old paint and stripping wallpaper;
- protecting moulding and windows from paint splatter;
- up-to-date paint colors and how color works to convey mood;
- the difference between paint finishes and when each is used.

Draft copy may be supplied by your manufacturer, by your trade association, or by employees that have specific areas of expertise.

As editor, you will receive the draft copy and edit it so that the writing style is consistent.

When editing copy, remember your theme. If you try to cover too many unrelated topics in a single newsletter, you won't be able to cover any of them well and your readers will quickly lose interest.

### **Designing the Newsletter**

Designing your newsletter to look interesting to the reader doesn't mean you have to be trained as a graphic designer. It does, however, mean that you need to adopt some techniques used by graphic designers to organize and order articles. The elements you have to work with include:

*Headlines:* A headline tells the reader in a few words what the article is about. Headlines are typically in a larger font size than the body copy, often have a different weight and may even be in a different typeface. Display typefaces, for example, are designed to be used in headlines.

*Body copy:* This is the content of your newsletter, the actual words that make up each article or story.

*Graphics:* Graphics can include photographs, drawings, charts and graphs, lines, tints and reverses.

*White space:* It is important to consider white space as a graphic element. White space can keep your newsletter from resembling a block of concrete and can be used to highlight important concepts or ideas.

*Paper:* The choice of paper is affected by the overall style of the newsletter and also by its content. A newsletter with many photographs, particularly of products or people, is best printed on a paper with a smooth finish with good ink holdout—a printer's term that means the ink is not easily absorbed into the paper. When using a colored paper, consider how the color may affect readability.

*Ink:* It is an axiom of marketing theory that color sells. Using colored ink is a great way to add color at a very small cost. Also, by incorporating tints into the design, one color of ink can appear to become two.

### **Putting It All Together**

As the editor, you may find that you must prepare the newsletter for reproduction (layout, selecting typefaces, scanning photographs

and line art). There are many popular desktop programs such as Quark XPress, Adobe PageMaker, and Microsoft Publisher that can be used for this purpose. Each program has different features and capabilities, including whether the program was designed primarily for desktop laser output (Microsoft Publisher) or to go into print (Quark XPress and PageMaker).

If you have a choice of programs, call us to discuss which is the best one to use for your particular newsletter application. Call us even if you don't have a choice, so we can advise you on how best to use your program's features to produce a print-ready file.

Of course, we'd be happy to take over the newsletter preparation task for you. Call us to discuss your requirements and to ask for a quote.

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