

How To Write An Effective Newsletter



A newsletter is a popular and effective way to keep in touch with customers. It helps create *top of mind awareness* – having your company come to mind whenever a customer needs your product or service. It provides a way to talk about the benefits of new services, products or equipment. It allows you to showcase your expertise and become a source of useful information or valuable advice. And it definitely can help you find new customers or members.

To be truly effective, a newsletter must be published regularly, whether monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly; well designed, eye catching, and content-rich; and written to keep the audience's interest.

Each of these elements – regular publication, good design, and good writing – contributes equally to the effectiveness of a newsletter.

The objective: engaged readers

It has been said that there are only two kinds of newsletters – those that are read and those that aren't. Since your objective is to be the former, imagine that you are a member of the audience for the newsletter. What are you interested in? What would you like to read about? What do you want to learn? How much time can you devote to reading the newsletter? What will catch your attention?

Begin at the beginning: naming your newsletter

Take some time to develop an attention-getting name for your newsletter. Be sure the name tells your readers exactly what to expect from the newsletter .

Make a good first impression: the nameplate

The *nameplate* or *banner* contains the name of your newsletter and may also include a subtitle, brief slogan or mission statement, and the issue information. A nameplate does three things: it introduces the publication; it sets up the reader's expectation; and it establishes brand identity. Think of it as the way you greet your readers.

Because the nameplate has exceptional influence on your readers, good design is critical. Avoid cluttering the nameplate with unnecessary words like *the* and with competing graphic images (logos, decorative borders, odd typographic effects). Design the nameplate to be a distinctive, recognizable element that will attract your readers

Writing style: use the Fog Index

Writing style is a comprehensive term that encompasses word choice, grammar, punctuation, the way sentences are constructed, and the flow of paragraphs. For consistency, it is important to develop a writing style for your newsletter that fits well with your readers.

There is a very useful tool for analyzing written material for ease of comprehension: the *Fog Index*. An ideal Fog Index for most writing is 7 or 8; a level above 12 indicates that the writing is too hard for most people to read.

Here is how to compute the Fog Index of your writing. For best effect, select a sample that contains at least 100 words.

- Count the number of words in the sample.
- Count the number of sentences.
- Count the number of *big words* (i.e., those with more than three syllables).
- Calculate the average sentence length (number of sentences divided by number of words).
- Calculate the percentage of big words (divide the number of words into the number of big words).
- Add the average sentence length to the percentage of big words.
- Multiply the result by 0.4 to yield the Fog Index.

One way to signal your readers about the content of a specific newsletter article is to use a different writing style for each type of article. For example, an *inverted pyramid* style signals a news story while a narrative approach with a beginning, middle and end signals a feature story.

If you find that the Fog Index in your writing sample is above the desired mark of 7 or 8, here are some ways you can improve the writing style:

Write in short sentences. Look for punctuation like commas and semi-colons to indicate where long sentences can be broken into shorter ones.

Use active voice. “The wind blew down the tree” is active voice. “The tree was blown down by the wind” is passive voice. Active voice is considered more lively writing.

Eliminate unnecessary words. “Consensus of opinion” is wordy; “consensus” says the same thing. Avoid clichés, qualifiers (“very”, “often”, “hopefully”), redundancies (“more unique”, “hopes and dreams”), and phrases that can be replaced by a single word (“in the event that” for “if”; “in reference to” for “about”).

Use strong verbs. *To be* and *to have* are weak verbs. Using a strong verb that has a specific meaning will liven your writing style.

Avoid beginning sentences with there is or there are. Active writing tells who is performing an action. The word *you* can often be substituted for *there is* or *there are*.

Keep language simple. “Use” is a simple word that is a wonderful substitute for “utilize”; “many” says the same thing as “numerous”.

Explain acronyms. As a courtesy to your readers, spell out acronyms or abbreviations the first time you use them.

Kick it off with catchy headlines

Catchy headlines will establish a professional style for your newsletter. Well-written headlines make the point of the article succinctly with strong, active verbs and short, simple words. A good headline gets the reader’s attention, summarizes the article, and draws the reader into the article.

The rules for good headline writing are similar to those for good copywriting: use active voice and present tense; short, punchy words; and strong verbs. Headline writing is a learned skill; you may need to study and practice to attain proficiency.

Proofread to perfection

Typographical errors and mistakes in grammar and punctuation undermine the professionalism of your newsletter. A useful technique for proofreading is to use a two-person team. One person reads aloud while the other views the written copy. Reading aloud also helps identify sections that may need editing or rewriting.

Let us help

When it’s time to publish your newsletter, let us help! We offer a choice of digital output or offset printing, and we’ll be happy to advise on which method is best suited to your circulation and design specifications.

For an appointment, call us at 408-400-0223.



1205 Alderwood Avenue
Sunnyvale, CA 94089

(408) 400-0223 Fax: (408) 400-0267
www.expressprintingusa.com
email: info@expressprintingusa.com