

PRINTtips

A White Paper from Bart Nay Printing • 713-468-8602 • www.BartNayPrinting.com

Newsletters: A Practicum for Success

We believe strongly that for most small businesses and community organizations, the best way to sell products and services or to solicit memberships and donations is to publish a newsletter regularly – monthly if budget allows, and quarterly if not. A newsletter reminds customers and members of why they selected your business or organization to be affiliated with and introduces new products and services. For prospects, a newsletter creates name recognition and provides an alternative to the present service provider or product supplier.

Another benefit of a newsletter is that it can be tailored to any budget – literally. Naturally, we prefer a newsletter budget that is large enough to allow us to keep you on schedule by taking over all publication tasks, from design and layout to print and mail. But if your budget is modest, don't deny your company or organization the benefits of regularly publishing a newsletter. Contact Bart or Betty at 713.468.8602 with this information: the quantity of newsletters you'd like to distribute, how often you'd like to publish, and the amount that has been budgeted. We'll back into specifications to keep the newsletter within that amount.

Characteristics of a successful newsletter

All successful newsletters share these common characteristics: they appear on time, they are attractive, they are easy to read; and they provide useful information. Staying on schedule requires both commitment to consistency and an efficient newsletter production process.

Consistency

One key to consistency is to limit the number of pages in the newsletter. It is better to publish a single-page, two-sided newsletter each month than to publish a 4-page newsletter every other month or an 8-page newsletter quarterly. Remember that one benefit of a newsletter is creating top-of-mind awareness in your customers and name recognition in prospects. This benefit can only be gained by consistency and frequency; an overly ambitious newsletter that doesn't meet its publication deadline sacrifices this benefit.

Regardless of the number of pages, devote 75% of space to providing information that the audience will find useful and valuable. Your aim is to have people look forward to receiving



the newsletter and to linger with it long enough to notice the 25% of copy that introduces new products or services, provides testimonials, or invites inquiries.

Another use of the 25% could be items to entertain the reader such as employee or customer of the month, community news, business advice, recipes, crossword puzzles, jokes, riddles, poems and similar matter. This white paper reflects our preference for information. We believe that we have earned the right to speak authoritatively about printing and print-related matters and can convincingly offer expert information to customers and prospects. In contrast, you cannot be certain how your audience may react to items intended to be entertaining, particularly if you are sending your newsletter to prospects.

As the newsletter editor, you need to understand that you are writing for the readers of the newsletter, not for your company's staff and management. Limit internal review of newsletter copy to fact checking and conforming to other company marketing or sales collateral material. Resist pressure to include topics of interest to staff members unless they are also of interest to the newsletter audience. We recommend circulating a memo requesting newsletter topics from staff members and managers, then refining the list to provide a topic guide that has internal approval as well as reader interest.

Efficient Production

For consistency and production efficiency, the newsletter should be built as a design template. This means deciding whether to use a 2- or 3-column layout, the width of margins, whether columns will be fully justified or ragged right, and the space between paragraphs; the font to use for body copy and headlines; the point size for body copy, primary and secondary headlines, subheads, and captions; the location and size of the nameplate, masthead, mailing panel, page numbers, and recurring columns; and whether article continuation is allowed. If applicable, develop the rules for using accent color.

If your newsletter content is not tied to a specific month or time of year, consider foregoing a dating system for each issue and instead use a more creative designation. For example, differentiate an issue by its content (*Newsletter Issue*) or significant event (*Trade Show Issue, Anniversary Issue*). A numbering system – Issue 1, or Volume I, Issue 1 – will also increase newsletter shelf life.

Efficient newsletter production is a key element in publishing consistently. That's why we recommend limiting the page count and including photographs and graphics to cut down on the amount of copy that needs to be written for each issue. Remember that it takes 400-600 words to fill an 8 ½ x 11 sheet, assuming the page includes some graphic elements as well as the text.

Many newsletters are delayed awaiting copy from a contributor – the president, a committee chairman, or other important individual. To derive maximum benefit from the newsletter, it is more important that the newsletter be published on time than to wait for anyone's contributor. Therefore, be prepared with something you can substitute if a contributor is unable to provide copy on time. Or consider writing the column or article yourself,

and presenting it for editing.

For efficient newsletter production, first write and edit copy in a word processing program such as Word without trying to fit copy to the page. Following our guideline of 75% of the newsletter being devoted to copy, you'll be able to develop target word counts for articles in the newsletter. For instance, if you intend to include a president's message in each issue, assign a word count of 100 words to the president and explain it should take only about a half hour to write this many words.

After copy is written, edited and an accurate word count is available, you will find it much easier to do complete page layout. Look at the copy submission for the issue and prioritize by importance or interest to the audience. The most important article should include a photograph, graphic or other illustration for more reader interest. Look at article word counts and determine on what page each article should appear in the newsletter.

To begin layout, place the photograph or illustration that accompanies the most important article on the first page. The photograph can span all columns or just one or two. It is important that the edge of the photograph aligns with the column boundary and neither straddles two columns or extend partially into adjacent columns. Aligning photographs emphasizes the underlying structure of the newsletter and makes it easier to read.

Now lay the copy in, either to the side or underneath the photograph. Be certain that the reader won't be confused as to where the article starts. If needed, add a drop cap to indicate where the article begins. Adjust the amount of copy in each column to achieve balance (*i.e.*, the same amount of copy in each column) and decide whether to jump the article to another page. Some editors like to begin more than one article on the front page and

continue (hoping the reader will find more of interest on the front page); other editors like to conclude an article on the same page it begins.

If applicable, assign accent color then print a first draft of the newsletter pages. Hold them at arm's length and squint so you can't read individual words but instead see the shape of photos, blocks of type, white space, and other graphic elements. Fix any flaws you notice, then print a proof copy. (Note: proofing at this point is to find typographical errors or a "fatal flaw" that will compromise the newsletter information; it is not to re-write copy or re-design the layout.)

Call us for a quote

We invite you to call us for a quotation on designing, laying out, printing, and mailing your newsletter – or any one of the processes. As you can tell from our newsletter, we're the experts! Call Bart or Betty at 713.468.8602 today.

a vocabulary of the graphic arts

Antecedent: In grammar, the noun that a relative word or phrase refers back to. In the sentence “Sally was the cook who baked the cake”, *Sally* is the antecedent of *who*.

Banner: the area on the front of a newsletter that identifies the publication. Also called *nameplate*.

Continuation line: a line of type that indicates where an article continues to or from. Also called *jump line*.

Dangling participle: a participle that apparently modifies a word other than the one intended. A dangling participle often occurs at the beginning of a sentence. *Example:* “Working hard, the mountain top came in view of the hikers”.

Design template: a framework for page design that includes the geometric structure of the page (number and width of columns; width of margins; location of fixed elements) as well as font selection and type specifications and color scheme. Used as a basis to promote design consistency and efficient production.

Justified type: columns of type in which each line length is identical and type is aligned (*i.e.*, justified) on both the right and left margins. Type is justified by changing the spacing between individual words in each line.

Masthead: the section of a newsletter that lists the publisher and other pertinent data such as staff names, contributors, subscription information, addresses, logo. Typically found on the second page (though could be on any page).

Nameplate: the area on the front of a newsletter that identifies the publication. Usually contains the name of the newsletter, possibly graphics or a logo, and perhaps a subtitle, motto, and publication information including volume and issue number or date. Also called *banner*.

Present participle: a verb form characterized by the ending “ing”. In this form, a verb can operate as a noun and is then known as a *gerund*.

Ragged right type: columns of type in which the length of each line is different and word spacing is consistent. Ragged right type aligns type along the left margin but not along the right margin, leading to a more casual look.

Style sheet: in a document, the rules for using typography, color, punctuation and grammar.

T H E I D E A C O R N E R

Newsletter experts agree on the importance of good design to engage and hold a reader's attention. Elsewhere in this newsletter we've given you some design principles and techniques for organizing page layout. But if you don't have the software tools to make the layout task manageable or if you lack the time or interest in newsletter design, we suggest that you let us prepare a design template for you.

There are many advantages of 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 president's message, new product announcement or staff spotlight. 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 electronic format; you'll know from the design template exactly how many words to assign to each writer. Copy can be edited and corrected easily in the word processing program, then 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 program (MS Publisher, Adobe PageMaker, InDesign or Quark XPress). If you would like to learn more about our design template service, including a cost estimate, contact Bart or Betty at 713.468.8602.

TRICKS & tips

If the copy for your newsletter is being contributed by more than one writer, you will want to develop the skill of editing copy. A good copy editor can materially improve the writing style of the newsletter without altering the author's content or perspective.

Copy editing is the process of making diverse writing styles consistent by applying style rules that correct common grammar and punctuation errors. It may also include editing language to reduce it from complicated sentence structure to something simpler and easier to understand.

Some writers mistakenly believe that complex sentence structure is a sign of intelligence that will impress the reader. Ironically, high-sounding language often has the opposite effect – it drives away the impatient reader.

Here are some examples of language that will fatigue most readers:

- *Using a verb as a noun:*
His action caused the *terrorization* of his colleagues.
His action terrorized his colleagues
- *Using a noun as a verb:*
The liquid was *volumized*.
The volume of the liquid was increased.
- *Using unnecessary prepositional phrases:*
I have *made reference* to this before.
I have referred to this before.
- *Using platitudes:*
If I can be of assistance, do not hesitate to call.
We wish Barbara the best of luck in the future.
- *Using passive voice:*
Barbara was wished good luck by Donna.
Donna wished Barbara good luck.

Q. *I'll be doing most of the writing for our company newsletter. Can you give me some tips to keep my writing fresh?*

A. Newsletter editors who are also primary writers have a special challenge to keep copy fresh even when writing the same sort of story repeatedly, sometimes even in the same issue or even on the same page. Here are four traps to avoid:

1. *Avoid the historical beginning.* Good news stories rarely begin at the beginning. While "once upon a time" may be a good way to start a fairy tale, it isn't a very exciting way to begin a news story. Instead, start with the ending – the answer to the question "what happened" or "how do we know".
2. *Eliminate unnecessary punctuation, especially exclamation points.* Good news writing is inherently exciting and doesn't need punctuation – especially multiple exclamation points!!!!!! – as assistance.

3. *Using etc. to end a series.* When you have said all you can think of, end the series with a period rather than with *etc.* News writers report all the facts available; if there is more to say, then say it. If not, end the sentence.
4. *Eliminate redundancy.* Twin words like *cut and eliminate* or *happy and content* are redundant and add little of value to a sentence other than padding word count.

questions and answers