

PRINTtips

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

Trying to Reach Customers? Try a Newsletter

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 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 of Printtips 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 11x17 sheet of paper, folded in half to produce four 8 ½ x 11 inch pages. To create a longer newsletter, include additional 11x17 sheets. Each 11x17 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 ½ x 11 sheet – fold it in half and it becomes a four-page newsletter that measures 5 ½ x 8 ½ inches; add more 8 ½ x 11 sheets and the newsletter page count increases to 8, 12, 16 or more pages.

The popularity of these newsletter sizes – 5 ½ x 8 ½ or 8 ½ x 11 – is linked to the fact that 8 ½ 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 11x17 paper: instead of folding the sheet in half, fold it in thirds, creating a finished size of 5 5/8 x 11 and a 6-page newsletter. Alternately, trim the 11x17 sheet to 8 ½ x 14 then fold in half. Now you have created a 4-page newsletter with a finished size of 7 x 8 ½. 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 contents to its essential elements.

Newsletter copy

How much copy does it take to fill a newsletter? Typically it takes 400-600 words per 8 ½ 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 2 and 3 hours per 8 ½ 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 originally.

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 announcement
- Customer testimonial

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 3-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 and 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.

Call us for help

A newsletter can be a very powerful tool to keep current customers buying and interest prospects in becoming customers. Put this advantage to work for your business by calling on us. We are newsletter experts – we have been helping businesses and organizations design, print and mail newsletters for 21 years. We can take over complete production responsibilities, including copywriting, or work cooperatively with you on any part of production. For more information, call us at 713.468.8602 for an appointment. It's time to get started!

a vocabulary of the graphic arts

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

Byline: a short phrase or paragraph that indicates the name of the author of an article. Usually appears between the headline and start of the article, prefaced by the word *by*. May also appear at the end of an article, sometimes as part of a mini-bio of the author.

Call to action: an activity requested of a customer or prospect.

Caption: a phrase, sentence, or paragraph describing the contents of a photograph, chart or illustration. The caption is usually placed directly above, below, or to the side of the picture it describes.

End sign: a dingbat or printer's ornament used to mark the end of a story. It signals the reader that they have reached the end of the article.

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

Kicker: a short phrase set above the headline. A kicker introduces a section heading or identifies a regular column.

Mailing panel: the portion of the newsletter containing the

return address, mailing address of the recipient, and postage. The mailing panel typically appears on one-half or one-third of the back page so that it faces out when folded.

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*.

Pull quote: a small selection of text pulled out from the main body of the article and quoted in a larger typeface.

Subhead: a few words that appear within the body of an article that divides it into smaller sections.

If you have experts on your staff that don't have time to write for your newsletter, then conduct an interview so you can get the benefit of their knowledge. Here are a few tips for conducting an interview:

- *Tip 1.* An interview is nothing more than a formal conversation, usually on one topic. An interviewer who makes short, pleasant comments during the interview will help keep the conversation flowing and put the interviewee at ease.
- *Tip 2.* Be polite and respectful. The interview should not be a conversation between best friends, nor should it be an interrogation. Keep the tone at the level of a thoughtful conversation.

T H E I D E A

- *Tip 3.* Be prepared. Do some research on both the interviewee and the topic. Formulate questions in advance and select one to be the key question. Know your questions well enough that you don't need to refer to them during the interview, or ask the interviewee's permission to consult your list.
- *Tip 4.* Be observant. Listen carefully to answers and be prepared to leave your prepared interview questions to probe a response from the interviewee. Remember to remain respectful while probing; don't turn the probe into an inquisition.
- *Tip 5.* Take notes to accurately capture answers, but don't be so intent on note taking that you avoid eye contact with the interviewee. Your focus should be on the interviewee, not the notes.

C O R N E R

TRICKS & 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 reason for 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 stand 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, not 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. *I have a budget for my newsletter and need to live by it. Can you give me some suggestions for keeping costs under control?*

A. There are some things that add to the cost of printing a newsletter without materially affecting its final appearance. If you can live without these things, you'll be able to stay within your budget and still publish an attractive, well-designed newsletter.

- *Use a standard paper size, or a derivative of a standard size.* As we mentioned in the main article, by planning your newsletter so it prints on an 11 x 17 or 8 ½ x 11 sheet, you'll gain the benefit of having a wide selection of economically priced stock.
- *Print in two ink colors.* Unless your newsletter is full of product shots that need to be printed in full color to be effective, you'll save a lot by printing in two ink colors. We recommend black and an accent color, since photographs generally look best in gray scale. Using screens and tints can expand the number of shades of the accent color.
- *Eliminate bleeds.* A bleed is a part of an image or line that appears to run off the edge of the sheet. We create a bleed after the printing is complete by trimming off excess paper to the bleed line. This means we have to print on an oversized sheet so we can take the trim. The exception is if you size the newsletter to print on a derivative of an 11x17 sheet (such as 8 ½ x 14). Since we will be trimming to finished size anyway, there is no additional cost to trim to the bleed.
- *Stick to a 4-page format.* The more pages in the newsletter, the more bindery charges you'll incur. (Bindery is the term for post-press operations such as folding, collating and stapling.)
- *Keep the schedule.* If you want to distribute your newsletter at a set time each month, then give us the stated amount of production time. Rushing production risks errors and may incur additional costs for staff overtime.

questions and answers