



July 2006

PRINTtips



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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. In previous issues of Printtips we've provided tips for good design, so in this issue we'll discuss writing.

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. That's what we did with the name of this newsletter. Printtips tells you exactly what we're about – information that will help you manage the printed materials you purchase for your company. It also asserts that we have the necessary expertise to be providing this information.

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

How To Write An Effective Newsletter (continued)

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.

“...develop a writing style for your newsletter that fits well with 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

“Active writing tells who is performing an action.”

How To Write An Effective Newsletter (continued)

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 513-248-2121.

"A useful technique for proofreading is to use a two-person team."

Hold The Interest Of Your Readers

To help hold the interest of your readers, consider organizing the contents of your newsletter into specific categories that repeat each time the newsletter is published. You may even want to keep some categories in the same location in each issue of the newsletter.

Here is a list of possible categories:

Current events or industry news: tie current events to your industry or company by showing what effect the events might have. An example is an accounting firm that explains how changes in the tax code affect its customers.

Product or service feature story: provide a detailed write-up of a specific product or service offered by your company. You could also use a feature story to explain a new or unusual use for your product or service.

Profile: write a profile of one of your company's employees or customers. Profiling an employee allows your customers to learn more than would come up in regular business transactions, and also personalizes your employees. A customer profile can be structured as a testimonial or a case study.

Columns: a common column is a message from the president or chief executive of the company. But also consider a column written by others who have specific areas of expertise – the service manager or quality control supervisor.

Letters to the editor: publishing feedback received from readers demonstrates your commitment to your readers and gives wide circulation to positive remarks.



"... use a feature story to explain a new or unusual use for your product or service."

Q. As my company's newsletter editor, what do I need to know about copyright?

A. Copyright – the legal exclusive right of the author of a creative work to control the copying of that work – most affects newsletter editors who want to reprint copyrighted articles

that have previously been published. The only way to legally reprint is to get permission from the copyright holder (which may be the publication in which the article first appeared). Contrary to popular belief, giving credit to the original source of the article is not sufficient to avoid violating copyright – you must also have permission.

You can also establish a copyright to protect your publication. This doesn't require you to do anything – as soon as the publication is printed, it is considered copyrighted to your company. It is no longer necessary to register the publication with the U.S. Copyright Office or to use the copyright symbol to establish copyright protection.



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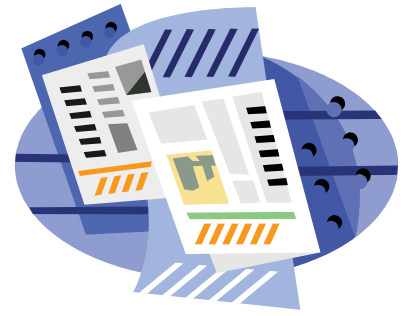
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Newsletter... ...Tricks & Tips

Knowing how many words it takes to fill a newsletter will help you make writing assignments and avoid having too little or too much copy. It takes between 400 and 800 words to fill an 8 1/2 x 11 page - the more photographs, graphics, and formatting you include, the smaller the required word count. If you are assigning a writing task to another person, be aware that most adults can compose 150-300 words per hour.

There are subscription services that provide copy for newsletters and writers who can be commissioned. Here are some sources for newsletter copy:

Pages Editorial Service provides articles, art, stories, and cartoons for newsletters. <http://www.pagesmag.com>

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