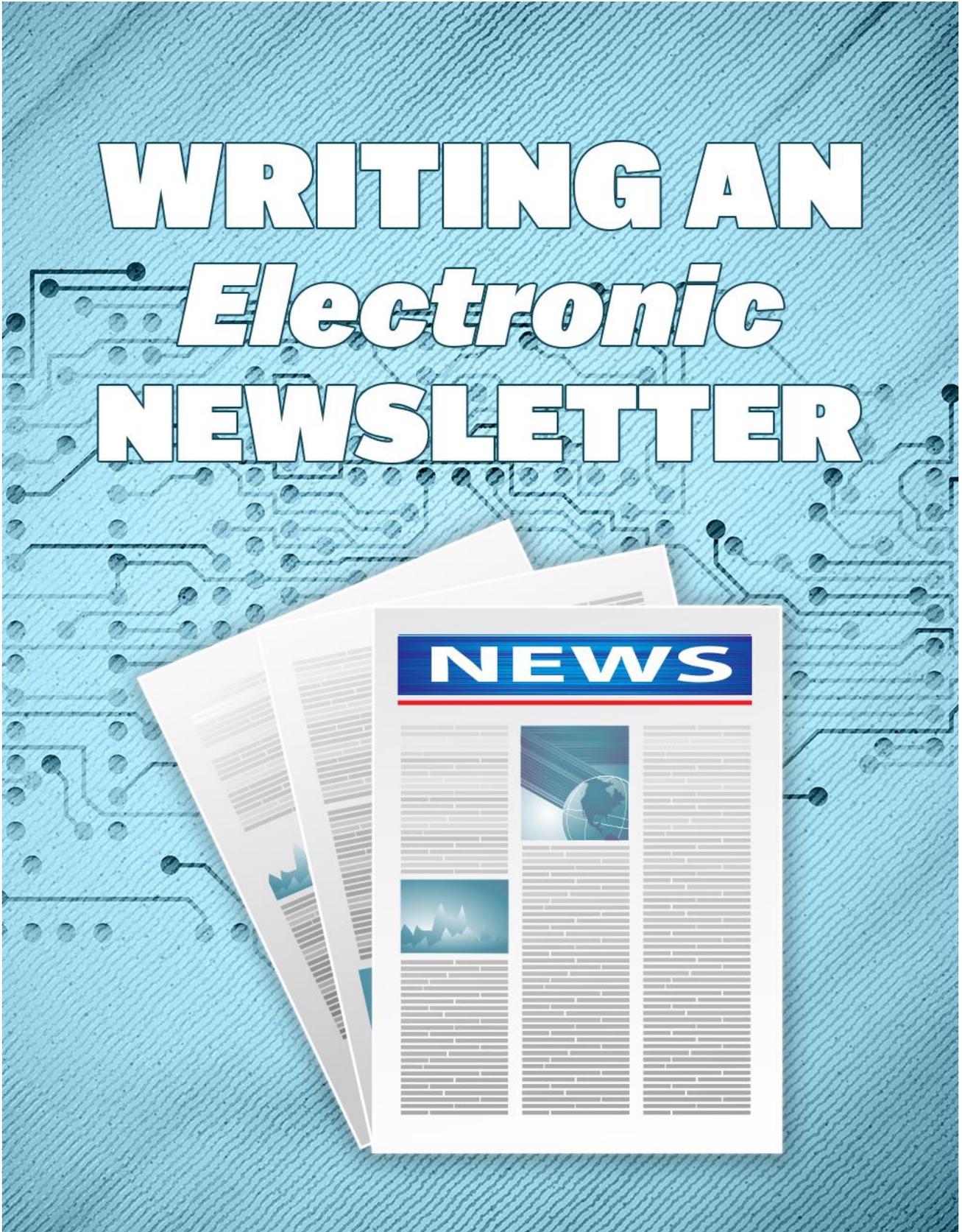


Writing A Great Electronic Newsletter

WRITING AN *Electronic* NEWSLETTER



WRITING A GREAT ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER

In this world, there are definitely 2 types of electronic newsletters. One type grabs the readers and actively (usually dramatically) improves your sales, while the other languishes on a screen for only a matter of seconds before it heads straight for the trash bin.

Now, you want an electronic newsletter that will act as a great marketing tool for you and that will seriously raise your sales. Most companies who have good electronic newsletters attest that the increased sales arising from the newsletter are actually the final step in terms of the newsletter development.

The world of sales is like a pyramid with a staircase to the top. You climb each step with your customers, and then when you get towards the top, your sales simply start to take off. But before you start scribing your electronic newsletter, you need to be aware of its purpose.

AIMS OF AN ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER

Writing an electronic newsletter is not just about reaching your customers and potential customers. There is a whole lot more to it than that. In fact, a great electronic newsletter will achieve the following without you even having to try too hard:

1. Establish and/or consolidate your brand or service.
2. Determine that you are a leader in your field.
3. Prove that your company is one that has integrity and commitment, and is an authority.
4. Demonstrate your professionalism and knowledge.
5. Increase your presence on the Internet with associated, hidden benefits.
6. Create a trusting relationship between your customers/potential customers and yourself.
7. Bring customers to you!

Now with all of those benefits, it is easy to simply stop reading now, rush off, and create your own newsletter, and then sit back, waiting for all of the good things to happen. Now, here is the bad news: if you don't write a great electronic newsletter, but one that is simply average and lacks any proper, appropriate content and graphics, then your newsletter will demonstrate that your company is not very professional, hasn't taken the time to learn how to create a good/great newsletter, and as a result, make customers wonder why they should use your company? They would prefer to go to a company that shows them some respect!

HAVE A LOT OF RESPECT FOR YOUR READERS

Although we usually talk about 'Have a little respect' when it comes to your customers, you need to have not just a 'little' respect, you need to have a lot of respect for your readers and potential readers; otherwise, your newsletter will simply be thrown into the trash bin and not be read.

People have busy lives. We all have to work hard, to cope with changing, and often, quite difficult times. This means that people's time is precious, so they will make or find the time to read good quality material that is relevant and of interest to them, but they will not make any time available to read a newsletter that fails to address them appropriately. This is why respect is so important when it comes to your readers.

Know Your Readers

Knowing your readers shows them respect. All you have to do is to take a little time to know who they are, what is of interest to them, and what will reach them directly.

One fundamental error that is often made is to use an electronic newsletter as a platform for views or as a mouthpiece, serving only the writer and not the reader. But your readers are not dumb; they will soon pick up on this and press that delete key before they have finished the first paragraph. So you have to get to know them.

Now this may seem like an impossible challenge; if you want to send your electronic newsletter out to hundreds, if not thousands, of customers, then how can you possibly 'know' them?

Well, you don't have to know their birthdays or what they like to eat at Thanksgiving, but what you do need to know is what will interest them.

What kind of information are they looking for? Do they need to have legal updates? Is there any legislation that may impact on their businesses or lives that you need to be telling them about?

You also need to consider what they will appreciate in terms of how you and your business can help them. Are there any hidden benefits to using your business? Can you solve some of the complexities of life for them? Are there any direct benefits that your particular style of business can bring to them?

Only when you know your readers and can have a good understanding of what they want are you in a position to start thinking about the style and the content of your electronic newsletter. True, this can be a daunting task, but if you are struggling with it, then enlist the help of a friend/colleague who can ensure that you are on the right track: remember that two heads are always better than one!

CHOOSING THE STYLE OF YOUR NEWSLETTER

The style and look of your newsletter is important and one that should not be overlooked. Basically, your style needs to reflect the fact that this is a professional document, not some high school newsletter (many of which actually look pretty professional now).

You need to establish a corporate style in the newsletter, no matter how small your business actually is. Each newsletter needs to be set out in the same style, be written in the same style and have the same format. This ensures that the identity of the newsletter starts to emerge, so that when it pops up in someone's inbox, they immediately recognize it as a 'good read' and will open it.

If you write using different logos, graphics that change dramatically, and so on, then your newsletter may never ever be opened. The trick is to stay consistent!

Graphics:

Graphics are really important when it comes to your newsletters. Many writers of electronic newsletters have taken the time to get to know and directly target their readers, have written content that is professional, relevant and interesting, but let themselves down by using clip-art-type graphics that are simply not sophisticated enough for today's market.

Graphics are important because they can highlight your point, break up a page of text that may seem too heavy and dull otherwise, and simply brighten up a page.

But using cheap, rudimentary graphics can simply 'dumb down' your newsletter and make it seem cheap. It is far better to use some pictures or images that are more professional looking, even if they cost a few dollars.

Yet there is another danger with graphics: if you use a lot of images at a high resolution, then your electronic newsletter can start to become really big. So big in fact that people will delete it rather than bother to read it, so try to keep your electronic newsletter to a realistic size, some 1-2 megabytes maximum. If you get up to 5-6 megabytes or bigger, then people may simply view it as too big and send it to the electronic trash can, no matter how good your content is.

Layout:

Always place the most important information at the start of your electronic newsletter. So have a title for your first article that really grabs people's attention. Make sure it is short enough for them to be able to see it before opening your mail; therefore, keep it brief.

Your first page should also contain certain important information, such as your contact details, as well as an option to stop subscribing to the newsletter. Now doesn't that seem strange? You want people to read your fantastic electronic newsletter, don't you? So why on Earth would you want to make it really easy for them to stop subscribing to it?

Well, if you show that you are really laid back about someone unsubscribing to your newsletter, then you have not just shown that you respect your readers, you also show that you think that the content of your newsletter is of worth; you have made it easy to unsubscribe because you know that people will not do this, that your newsletter is worth reading!

Obviously, there may be some people who feel that they don't want to read your newsletter and may indeed unsubscribe, but do not have a faint heart. It is definitely worth taking the risk and being confident. So let them unsubscribe if they don't want to read it; after all it is their loss, isn't it?

CONTENT

Content is obviously key to a successful electronic newsletter and many people fall into two big traps when it comes to content. One trap is that a person sits down and tries to write the content, but is suddenly filled with fear. How can they fill the page? What if their writing isn't good enough? Writer's block sets in, and many hours are spent simply staring at a blank screen.

The other trap is overconfidence. "Heck, electronic newsletters are so simple. After all, aren't they just a means whereby I can demonstrate that I know every word of jargon and every big word in the English language? Yep, I am going to blind the readers with the power of my vocabulary. That will really show how intelligent I am, right?"

Well, in fact, both approaches are actually a bad approach. Lack of confidence is as damaging as overconfidence- both are fundamental errors!

Writing the content for your electronic newsletter is a bit like riding a bike; you have to learn how to do it, but once you have learned it, then you will be able to simply write without even having to think about it!

Keep it simple:

Put simply, your readers do not want to know that you had an extensive education and that you possibly swallowed a dictionary. They want to have easy-to-read, clear, and straightforward information that is presented in a style that is relevant to their lives or businesses.

Keep it professional:

A little humor is acceptable. However, there are some areas that are simply out of bounds when it comes to your newsletter.

- **Politics:** Unless your business is geared towards politics or selling political services/ memorabilia, etc., then steer well clear of politics. Otherwise, you risk alienating your readers, and as we saw before, you need to show respect to your readers at all times.
- **Controversy:** If you happen to think that women should not venture out of the kitchen, unless they happen to be going shopping or having babies, or you think that all men need to undertake all of the homemaking duties, then you are perfectly entitled to hold those views. However, if you choose to use your newsletter as a vehicle for controversial views, then you may as well not bother writing it.
- **Write new content:** Now this may seem obvious, but all too often, newsletters are created by people going on the Web, finding some information that they think will interest their readers, and copying and pasting it, without acknowledging the writer and committing a breach of copyright.

This is simply wrong because you want to establish trust with your readers and show that your business has integrity. You simply cannot do this when you have actively demonstrated that you will steal someone else's work and try to take the credit for it!

Your newsletter also needs to have original content to help you establish a 'Web presence.' If it doesn't have original content, then the search engine spiders will simply ignore it. So plagiarism only hurts you in the long run!

- **Personality helps:** Although it is blatantly inadvisable to write on topics that are likely to offend, readers want to know that you are a person who cares about the business that you are in, a person who wants to help them, and one that can be trusted. So it is acceptable to write in a manner that is warm, courteous and friendly. But there is a fine line between being too personal and not being personal enough. Not everyone wants to read about what your kids have been up to; not everyone has kids, so this can immediately alienate some people. If you and your family have had a hard time of late, due to sickness or bereavement, then a brief explanation of any time away from the business or any slow responses is acceptable. But do not use the newsletter as a way of gaining sympathy or rallying people around you; this is unprofessional, and as harsh as this may sound, many people may simply not want to know about it!
- **Grammar and spelling:** Grammar is important because it helps your customers and potential customers see that you are professional and that you care. Sloppy, badly written material will simply make customers search out other places where they can buy the goods or services that you are providing, but you want them to buy from you, so respect them by writing carefully.

Now there are also some other points that you need to consider when writing your newsletter. They are not rocket science, nor are they

extremely exciting, but they will help to ensure that your content is readable!

Style of writing:

Try to always write in a style that is warm and friendly without being overly familiar. You should also avoid writing in the 'passive voice.' So instead of saying, 'Consideration should be given,' use phrases such as, 'You need to consider' or 'We urge customers to consider.' This is a great way of ensuring that your style is not too overly formal.

Length of sentences:

Journalists will often tell you that every sentence must be as short as possible. This is fine in the context of a newspaper, but there are times when you will need to vary the length of your sentences. You are writing a newsletter, not a newspaper, and having sentences that vary in length will ensure that your writing appears easy to read.

Check for readability:

You may write a couple of pages of your newsletter and think that they are really easy to understand. To your eyes, they may be perfectly clear and easy to read. But what is right for one person may not be right for someone else.

Ask a colleague or a friend to read through the draft newsletter and get them to give you honest and constructive criticism. It is vital to get this feedback; otherwise, you run the risk of losing a huge chunk of your readers without knowing why your material just isn't interesting. Be sure to get someone who will be honest to read the newsletter. If you pick someone who will simply want to be nice to you, then he/she may tell a little white lie and not really be upfront about what your newsletter is really like!

Don't oversell in your newsletter:

If you devote pages and pages of your newsletter to trying to sell items, then it will simply appear like a sales gimmick, and no one will bother to read it.

Instead, concentrate on giving your customers interesting information that they likely would not have time to source for themselves. Also, you can provide details of any new areas that you are branching into or any new staff members etc., but don't concentrate on selling too much.

You can, however, have a small section about any special offers that you may have, any tempting offers that will help your customers, or anything that may be of special or seasonal interest. But the newsletter is about establishing trust, which will lead to increased sales; it is not about selling alone!

Now you are equipped with the basic tools to start producing your very own newsletter, but there are still some other things for you to think about, so don't get too carried away just yet!

HIDDEN BENEFITS OF A NEWSLETTER

Newsletters are great because they offer you the opportunity to send out your words to a huge number of people. They establish you as one of the lead players in your field. But there is also another side to electronic newsletters, and that is the fact that it helps you to establish yourself as having a 'Web presence.' Now some of you may think that having a Web presence is not a big deal, but that is where you are wrong. A Web presence can really help turn your business around!

Importance of a Web Presence:

A presence on the World Wide Web will get you noticed. It is a strange fact of Internet life that, if you have a number of articles, newsletters, and informative pieces out there, then search engine spiders will start to pick up on you and your business.

If you have a one-page website, with little genuine content on it, few links to other websites, and no other information in cyberspace, then your business will not grow in terms of Internet markets. Unless you have an extreme niche market, you will simply be ignored by the big search engines; in fact, you will not be ignored, but you will be under their radar, so they will not pick up on you. So what you need to do is to establish yourself on their radar so that when the little search engine spiders crawl through the World Wide Web, they will pick up on you and your business.

So an electronic newsletter is not just about ensuring that you establish a good relationship with your customers; it is also about a little bit of self-promotion through hidden means!

Although the newsletter itself should not be written in a style that is about how great you are and how many big words or jargon terms you know, the hidden function of ensuring that you get maximum exposure on the Web should not be overlooked, since this will help to get your message across and help people to know who you are and what service you provide.

Search Engine Optimization:

When writing your newsletters, be conscious of search engine optimization techniques, but do not let them dominate the content of the newsletter.

For best results, it is better to have a few keywords that you insert naturally into your content. But use keywords appropriately. If, for example, your keyword is 'lock' or 'locks,' then fit these in when you can. But if you inject them into every sentence, then you will lose the flow of your writing, and the whole newsletter will lose focus and simply seem like it is a vehicle for you to circulate items containing your keywords. So use

keywords sparingly, especially if they are obscure or difficult to insert with ease.

You also need to be specific about keywords. Do not start off a page with a certain set of keywords, then change them halfway through. Devote a good 10 or 15 minutes thinking about what your keywords should be and write them down so that you can prompt yourself when writing. But beware of overuse and do not let them dominate the text!

Forward to friends:

Any good newsletter will make it really easy to forward it onto friends or colleagues that will increase your Web presence even more. Make sure that you make this link really easy so that people who don't have much time will be able to forward it onward without too much difficulty; in that way, you will be able to get more people to read it and receive more Web presence!

Sign up for newsletter section:

Make sure that on any routine correspondence you send out electronically that you have a link that allows people to sign up to your newsletter. It is also advisable to tell them how often you send out a newsletter. For example, if it is a quarterly publication, then you will probably get more people signed up than if they assume that it is once a month!

Make sure that the link encourages people to sign up. It is not enough to say 'Sign up for our quarterly newsletter.' You need to say something like 'Sign up for our exciting quarterly newsletter that will tell you of the latest developments and trends in the world of (insert your business area here) and will also keep you posted about any special offers,' or some such wording. Remember that you have to persuade them to join up!

Encourage backlinks:

Encourage anyone who has read your newsletter and who likes it to create a link back to it so that your Web presence becomes more widespread.

The more backlinks you can have, the more you will start to get recognized by the search engine spiders and the closer you will come to the top of the search engine ratings.

Remember that the newsletter is forever:

Ensure that you have the capacity and the resources to devote to a newsletter before you start. If you publish a few newsletters then grow tired of it, you will undoubtedly lose the trust of many of your customers, so plan ahead and avoid failing through lack of planning!

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Now, you are almost ready to start to go into production of your very first newsletter. But there are still some practicalities for you to take on board. After all, preparation can be king, so plan carefully to get the maximum exposure and success from your newsletter.

Timing:

The timing of your newsletter can be critical. Good times to send out a newsletter are when things are a little slow and when you have the capacity to deal with any customer feedback or queries that arise from your newsletter. But there are lots of bad times to send out a newsletter as well. This list is not exhaustive, but covers the worst times for you to launch a newsletter onto your customers:

- Immediately before a busy holiday time, such as Thanksgiving or Christmas. Customers will be busy with preparations, perhaps they will be traveling to spend time with their families, and they will simply not have the time or the inclination to read your newsletter.
- During a time when your business is very busy. You will generate some interest from your newsletter. But imagine how your customers will feel if they take the time and trouble to contact you after they have received a newsletter, but you are too busy to reply to them. Does this generate a trusting relationship? No, it certainly does not, and people will simply feel that you cannot be bothered to follow through on your newsletter, and you will simply lose business as a result.
- Mondays are always very busy. No matter what planning and careful preparations everyone made on Friday, upon returning to work on Monday, everything seems to have just gone silly. Even if your customers are ordering from home, if they work, then they will come home tired on Monday night. Will they be likely to read your newsletter? No, they will simply let it languish in their inbox.

So there are definitely times that are better suited to sending an email out. These are generally:

- Midweek, when things tend not to be too hectic.
- When you have the staff available to deal with any feedback or any questions that people want to ask, or, perhaps most important of all, when you have the staff and the resources to deal with the increased sales that will arise from your newsletter.

It is important that you plan ahead for the year. If you think that you will send out a newsletter quarterly, then look at the peak times of your business, look at when holidays are due, and then pick the optimum dates to send out your newsletter!

Give something for nothing:

One great way that you can dramatically increase interest in newsletters is to have some kind of free 'giveaway' on your official website. This could be a little e-book, a collection of tips, or even something that is not obviously connected with your business. Usually, an e-book is the most successful because it is something that is not too expensive for you to produce, and once you have the e-book (with circulation rights), then you have no further costs.

Then all you have to do is to offer to give this e-book away, but when people come to sign up to get their freebie gift, then you can get them to sign up for your newsletter.

People usually love the idea of getting something for free, so you will generate a lot of interest in this way, and it need not cost you a fortune.

Learn from reading good newsletters:

Possibly the most practical way that you can learn how to write a good quality newsletter is through signing up to a few before you actually publish your own. In that way, you will be able to see what works and what doesn't. Find out from real experience what you find to be a turnoff and what elicits your attention when you read the newsletters. This is important; after all, you wouldn't start to write a newspaper or a magazine without reading a few first, would you? So treat your newsletter with the same kind of respect.

Read a few, get a feel for what is required, and your task will quite simply be so much easier! In particular, pay close attention to the style and formats you like and then try to recreate these in your newsletter. It can also be interesting to see what kind of graphics are used and how these complement the written words. You may even like to make a note of the kinds of fonts that are used and how these help to create a professional style!

Your newsletter is not an email attachment:

If you send out your newsletter as an email attachment, then you will be destined for failure. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have a tendency to block any emails with large attachments, since they think they are spam or a virus. So be sure to send out the newsletter as it is, not as an email attachment.

Good Luck!

You don't actually need anyone to wish you luck now on the subject of writing your first newsletter. You have all the tips, tools, and knowledge that you need, so simply enjoy the increased sales that your newsletters will bring, and perhaps more importantly, enjoy the continued success!