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## 12 Ways to Improve Your Newsletter's Format

By Stephen Bucaro

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### 12 Ways to Improve Your Newsletter's Format

By Stephen Bucaro

Has your newsletter kept the same format for over a year? Is your newsletter's format based on a currently available template? If so, you may be losing subscribers and money. Over the last year, several major changes have occurred on the Internet that may have made your newsletter's format obsolete.

One change is the pervasiveness of spam and the wide implementation of email filters to deal with spam. Another change is the increased sophistication and lack of patience exhibited by Internet users. Bring your newsletter up to date by making the 12 changes described below.

1. DO NOT use a creative email subject line.

Do not use a cute or creative phrase for your newsletter's email subject line. This will cause the recipients email filter to send your newsletter to the spam bucket. The

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subject line should contain only the name of your newsletter. To avoid getting filtered, make sure the subject line contains the word "newsletter".

### 2. DO NOT personalize your newsletter.

Everybody knows their name was inserted by an automated application and that you don't really have a clue as to what their name is. Your readers will view you as insincere and dishonest. Don't use insincere and dishonest automated personalization. You are tricking no one.

improve your life and find your happiness. Only 9.95Seven ways to improve your life and find your happiness.

### 3. DO NOT put a "this is not spam" message at the top of your newsletter.

Unless your newsletter can be mistaken as spam, do not put a message near the top of your newsletter stating something similar to "by subscription only ..." or "you subscribed ..." or "to unsubscribe...". If your newsletter can be mistaken as spam, see the following tip.

### 4. DO NOT use a "top sponsor" ad.

Although advertisers pay more for the top sponsor ad position, accepting them causes you to lose money overall. This is because the first thing your subscribers see when they open your newsletter is advertising. You lose subscribers. Don't waste your subscribers time, get to the meat first – your feature article.

Do not put "Contents" near the top, or anywhere in your newsletter. Although almost all newsletters have a contents section, there are three reasons why you don't want it.

1. You are publishing a newsletter to make money. You make money through advertising in your newsletter. You want your readers to peruse the entire newsletter, including the advertising. If your reader sees nothing of interest in the contents they just delete your newsletter without reading any part of it.

2. It wastes the readers time. As an example, next time you watch TV news, notice how they waste your time

"telling you what they are going to tell you". Instead of wasting so much time telling you what they are going to tell you, why don't they just tell you?

By enticing you with coming stories, they hope to prevent you from flipping to another channel when they go to commercials. That doesn't work with me. As soon as they start telling me what they are going to tell me, I flip to another channel. Don't waste your readers time by telling them what you are going to tell them, just get to it!

3. The contents section lists only the titles of the articles. Unfortunately, nowadays writers are too busy thinking up cutesy titles that don't give you a clue as to what the article is about. Therefore, reading the contents

is a waste of time.

6. DO NOT put a message welcoming new subscribers.

Assuming that your newsletter has a low turnover rate, the vast majority of your readers will be old subscribers. You force old subscribers to read the same "welcome new subscribers" message over and over again in every issue.

The fact is that even new subscribers are not interested in your "welcome new subscribers" message. New subscribers are trying to determine if your newsletter will provide them with useful information, or if they should un-subscribe immediately. Judging by a "welcome new subscribers" message, your newsletter appears to waste their time.

7. DO NOT bore readers with your personal life.

As your subscriber opens your newsletter, they are thinking "what's in it for me". They couldn't care less that you are going on vacation, that your child did something cute yesterday, or that you have a new puppy. They only care about what's in your newsletter that is useful to them. Don't waste your readers time with trivia about your personal life.

8. DO NOT leave a lot of white space.

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Someone wrote that text is easier to read if you leave a lot of white space. Was that idea based on a scientific survey, or was it one person's opinion? I suspect it was the latter. Leave one blank line between paragraphs. Never leave more than one line blank anywhere in your newsletter.

White space is equivalent to "dead air" time on radio or TV. Leaving a lot of white space in your newsletter just forces your reader to scroll more. Don't waste your reader's time.

9. DO NOT apologize for a missed schedule.

Sending your newsletter on a regular schedule is one indication of professionalism. But it may surprise you to know that if you miss a publication date – nobody will notice. Contrary to your delusions, not all of your readers are sitting on the edge of their chairs waiting for your newsletter to arrive in their email box. Your newsletter is just not that good.

If you are a day or two, or even a week late sending out your newsletter, I promise you, nobody will care. And the last thing you need to do is post a message in your newsletter pointing out your lapse in professionalism and making excuses.

10. DO take advantage of viral marketing.

A virus is an organism that spreads itself around. Your newsletter should be like a virus. Ask your readers to forward your newsletter to their friends. Make sure your newsletter has a subscribe link so that anyone that comes into contact with it can easily subscribe. Give reprint rights to the articles, as long as they include your resource box.

11. DO thank your readers for their support.

There are hundreds of thousands of free newsletters. This reader chose to give your newsletter the value of their time. An honest thank you is never a waste of the reader's time.

12. DO tell subscribers why they should not unsubscribe.

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You should always place an unsubscribe link at the bottom of your newsletter. Just above the unsubscribe link, you should put reasons why the reader should NOT click on the unsubscribe link.

Remind the reader of what they get from your newsletter. Entice the reader to stay by mentioning what will be in the next issue. Display the number of subscribers. If that many subscribers think the newsletter is of value, maybe unsubscribing would be a mistake.

Major changes that have occurred on the Internet over the last year may have made your newsletter's format obsolete. By making the 12 changes described above your newsletter will be better able to deal with spam filters and with today's demanding and impatient Internet users.

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### Resource Box:

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None

## **Creating A Newsletter And Making Your Website Magnetic**

**By Mike Cheney**

Creating a newsletter is an ideal way to drive repeat traffic to your website but its design, format and implementation need to be carefully considered in order to achieve the desired results.

### Signing Up

Before you begin creating a newsletter itself attention needs to be paid to the way in which your website will facilitate the capturing of customers' email addresses and other information. Though many sites opt for the quick and simple approach of placing a "Name & Email Address" box on their homepage this is not always the best solution.

Although such an approach makes it extremely simple for users to provide you with their basic details it

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leaves little scope to sell the newsletter's benefits. Neither does it provide your business with the opportunity to simultaneously capture vital demographic information from its customers. A balance needs to be determined between the ease of signing-up for the user and the quality/quantity of information captured by you.

### Format and Frequency

Your website visitors need to be made aware in advance how often they are going to receive a communication from your business. Failure to provide such information may deter people from giving their permission to be contacted in the first place. Stating the newsletter's frequency up front will also benefit your business in the long-term as customers signing up to receive it will all share a common understanding of the expected volume of email they are going to receive – this will lower the number of customers who unsubscribe.

The format of your newsletter is also important – you should either state the format during the sign-up procedure or provide an option for your customers to choose their preferred delivery format. Most newsletters are delivered in standard text format though HTML is being favoured more and more as it enables greater use of images and links but beware – not all Internet users can view HTML newsletters. There are various ways to combat these issues of compliance including delivering a newsletter in both formats based on customers' chosen option at the sign-up stage.

This phrase applies equally as well to newsletters as it does to a website's content. Your newsletter may be well-designed, easy on the eye and technically sound but if it doesn't contain information that recipients find of value it is worthless.

Creating a newsletter can achieve many objectives and therefore you must decide on which are most important to you. Do you want to use the newsletter to facilitate increased traffic, enable capture of marketing information, push direct sales, improve public relations, generate product feedback or foster

loyalty? Your newsletter needs to be tailored to the needs and objectives of your business in this regard.

Generating repeat traffic is one of the easier objectives to attain via a newsletter – including relevant links to certain areas of your site, or featuring competitions / special offers can all drive traffic to your site.

### Summary

Engaging in newsletter activity is the electronic equivalent of knocking on your customer's door – your business has the potential to sell, whether this be selling products, services or the ethos of your company – the potential should not be overlooked.

Mike Cheney

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