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Ezine Tips: Format and Structure

By Richard Lowe

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So you've decided to create an ezine! Congratulations. This is an excellent decision which will increase the odds that people will return to your website often (depending upon your publication schedule). Another very real (and often overlooked) benefit to running your own ezine is you get targeted traffic. People come to your web site because they are interested in what you've got to say, not because they randomly found your link on a search engine.

Before you put out your first issue you are faced with some decisions. Some of those are listed below, with pros and cons. Do you use HTML or text? – Text has the advantage that it is supported by any email client. Also, text is fully self-contained, meaning people can easily read your message whether or not they are connected to the internet. This can be an advantage is ensuring your ezine actually gets read.

HTML can be made to look better as you have much more control over formatting. You can also include graphics, sound and even multimedia. Note, however, that all of these elements must actually be stored elsewhere, which requires bandwidth and also means your message is more difficult to read offline. On the other hand, you can embed a banner or other graphic which can be used to determine how many people are actually reading your newsletter.

You can combine the best of both worlds by using stationary files, although this restricts your readership to people who have clients which can view them. Stationary files can come with their graphics self-contained, which allows offline reading, and they have all of the formatting capabilities of HTML.

Do you include outside advertising? – A major question, and it depends upon the purpose for your ezine. Some ezines are pure lists of ads – I believe these last about two seconds in your average inbox before being deleted. Why? Who needs a list of advertisements? We all get so much spam already that more ads just don't make sense to most people.

A better strategy is to provide some content, with lots of links back to your web site. You can then include advertisements interspersed with the articles, which increases the chances that they will be seen. If you get enough subscribers you can even sell advertising

space if you do it this way.

Personally, I don't mind a few ads in an ezine. This is the same model that magazines in the real world use – advertising pays for the content. However, I like to see a ratio of 4 to 1 at least, content to advertising. You give me too many ads without adding value, and I will tend to delete the ezine or to unsubscribe entirely.

Do you include full articles, partial articles with links to your website or just links? – There are pros and cons to each method. Including full articles tends to make for very large newsletters. In addition, I've found that I am less likely to make it to the bottom of the ezine if there is a large amount of text. This is especially true if I run into an article which I do not find useful – in that case I am very likely to just delete the message without reading any more.

Partial articles is an excellent way to get people to read your ezine. By doing this, you allow them to see that there is, indeed, more to the message than just one article. Thus, they are less likely to stop reading if they find something which is not of interest. Of all the methods, I dislike lists of links the most. I find this confusing and I am entirely likely to just delete the ezine unread.

I think the best of all worlds is to combine all three methods in each ezine. I like to include partial articles with links right at the top of the ezine, where they are likely to be seen. Following those links, I generally include a couple of articles in full, generally reprints from my website. At the end, I include a number of useful links to articles and features which my readers may find of interest. If anyone makes it this far, they are, in my opinion, much more likely to click on a link than anyone else.

Do you include a table of contents? – If you've got a very long ezine, then it is probably a good idea to start with a table of contents. This makes a lot of sense if the ezine is in HTML format, as you can include hyperlinks to each article.

How wide should each line be? – Keep the line width at 60 to 65 characters.

How long should your ezine be? – The thing you need to consider here is that many people pick up their email over dialup connections. This means the same rules you use for web pages also applies to ezines. Keep your size down to under 100kb certainly, and under 30kb ideally. Remember, you are not trying to duplicate your web site in your ezine – you are trying to get people to come back to your web site.

It's also important to remember that the amount of email that people

can store on their email server is limited, often to just a megabyte or so. If your ezine is too large you can take up space that they need for other email.

On the other hand, since you've taken the time to write to your audience don't cheat them with a three line ezine either. My feeling is if you cannot send at least a few pages of text, then don't bother. Do you include original content only? – My vote is to include mostly, if not all, original content in an ezine in most instances. Why? Well, when I sign up for an ezine, I am interested in the knowledge and opinions of the ezine publisher (usually a single person or a small group). Unless the third-party articles are very well focused, I am very likely to delete or unsubscribe if there is not enough original content. This also holds true of websites – I will probably not visit a web site a second time if the only thing it contains is regurgitated content.

This does not mean you should not include articles by other authors. It just means you need to be careful that what you do publish is of interest to your readers and has not appeared on every other site and ezine on the web.

Do you post an archive of newsletters on your web site? – Yes. Why? Because you've gone through some work to create your ezine and you can get more use out of it still by putting it on your web site. First, by including an archive you add credibility, especially as the archive grows. It shows that your newsletter is indeed published on a regular basis. Second, you can post the newsletter as a web page

(convert it to HTML if it is a text ezine), add some keywords and you've added yet another page for search engines to find. This is a great way to pick up visitors.

How do you allow people to opt-out? – Include a link on your page, generally at the bottom. If someone clicks the link they are opted out. For your own sake, don't make it complicated for people to leave your mailing list – if you do, you will get reported as a spammer. You can also allow people to send a return email with "REMOVE" or "UNSUBSCRIBE". Personally, I prefer a link. However, it is a good idea to allow both methods to work as some people will simply reply with REMOVE no matter who you explain it to them.

This is such an important point that I will make it again. You MUST ensure that it is easy for someone to opt-out of your ezine. A single click or a reply to an email, that's all it should take. Do not require them to do any more. Otherwise, you are taking the chance that you will be reported as a spammer.

What is the mechanism for signing up? – I like a double opt-in system. What this means is someone subscribes on my web site via a

web page. They enter their email address and click submit. Now an email is sent to their email address, which they must respond to in order to be added to the list. This makes absolutely sure that a person not only wants to subscribe, but that the email address is indeed his email address. This is about as safe as you can get.

Another method (which I use for my daily tips ezine) is to use an autoresponder. If you wanted to receive my newsletter you would send an email to my autoresponder address. This also ensures that the ezine is sent only to someone who wants it, since you must send it from the desired email address. For more information on autoresponders see <http://www.themestream.com/articles/332918.html>

Any other advice? Don't wait. The sooner you start promoting and sending out your ezine, the sooner you will get return visitors.

Richard Lowe Jr. is the webmaster of Internet Tips And Secrets. This website includes over 1,000 free articles to improve your internet profits, enjoyment and knowledge. Web Site Address: <http://www.internet-tips.net> Weekly newsletter: <http://www.internet-tips.net/joinlist.htm> Daily Tips: internet-tips@GetResponse.com

10 Tips For Ezine Publishers

By Michael Southon

1. Many Ezine Publishers use too many styles of separator in their Newsletter. I recently saw an Ezine that used no less than 7 different separators: ++++++ ----- ~~~~~ \\\|\\\| ===== *****

This confuses the reader and makes your Ezine difficult to read. Your Newsletter will look much smarter and be much easier to read if you use just one or two styles of separator.

2. Always give an email address for your readers to un– subscribe. Making your readers go to a website to unsubscribe will create more traffic but it won't make you popular.

3. Place the email address for unsubscribing near the top of your Newsletter where it can easily be seen. That will avoid messages from your readers asking you to unsubscribe them.

4. Put the title of your main article in the subject field of your Newsletter. People are much more likely to open an Ezine whose subject field reads:

WebTrafficDaily: '10 Power Tips to Boost your Traffic'

than:

WebTrafficDaily, Vol 14 Issue No. 6

5. Unless your Ezine specializes in offering free ads, limit your classifieds to ten per issue. More than that and your readers will be irritated and the ads will lose their effect.

6. In every issue of your Newsletter, tell your readers about some new resource you have added to your Website – give them a reason to come back. After all, that's one of the main reasons for publishing an Ezine – to turn one–time visitors into repeat visitors.

7. Before sending out your Newsletter, do a trial run and send it to yourself. I do this and I almost always find some little error that needs fixing.

8. Keep an archive of back–issues on your website. People are more likely to subscribe to your Ezine if they can see a sample.

9. Search the Web for Tips on the theme of your Ezine – include an 'Editor's Tip' in each issue.

10. Format your Newsletter to 60 characters–per–line. You can either do this manually using a 'ruler' such as this:

012345678901234567890123456789012345678901234567890123456789

Or you can use an ASCII file formatter (much quicker) such as 'Ezine Assistant'. Ezine Assistant is free and you can download it at:

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Michael Southon has been writing for the Internet for over 3 years. He has shown hundreds of webmasters how to use this simple technique to get massive free publicity and dramatically increase traffic and sales. Click here to find out more:

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Building Relationships Through Your Ezine

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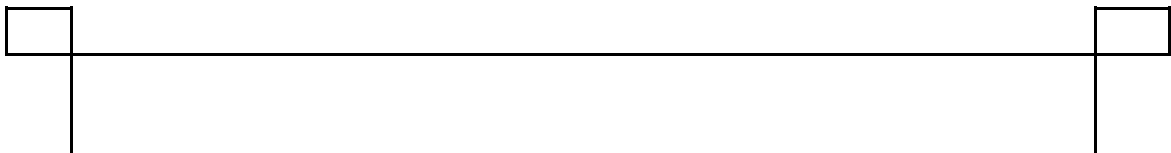
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