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Formatting Your Ezine

By windsong

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One of the common problems faced by ezine editors is being able to format their ezine so that it does not get screwed up when sent out.

So what causes the formatting information to be changed when your ezine is received by your subscribers?

There are many different email programs and they all interpret the email text they receive slightly differently. Some email programs automatically word-wrap lines at a set number of characters, others do not. Some will use a different character font and font size from the original text.

The biggest problem an ezine editor faces is trying to compensate for different font types. A font type determines how much space a character occupies and how close it is to a neighbouring character.

Always use monospaced fonts, or fixed fonts. Otherwise, your text may tend to grow when emailed. In other words the line gets longer. This effect is caused because these characters, known as variable fonts, can occupy a different amount of space making fixed alignment of text very difficult. Fixed fonts all have the same amount of space.

The next thing to avoid is using tabs to align lines of text. This will cause you alignment problems. The best way around this is to always manually insert the number of spaces you require and the incidents of major formatting problems will be reduced.

When it comes to line lengths never use lines longer than 65 characters. Email programs will wrap lines at different lengths but the majority are probably set to wrap at 65. To control where your lines wrap, always use a hard break. This forces the email program displaying your text to wrap a line at that point unless the user has set it to a shorter length.

I prefer to use a line length of 60 characters.

When creating your ezine, always use a text editor such as notepad. Do not use Word to compose your ezine. You will have more problems than you want to deal with. It will lose all formatting when you paste it into the email composition window.

So to summarize... follow these simple rules:

1. Always use a fixed or monospaced font.
2. Do not use the tab key to align lines of text.
3. Always insert a hard break at the end of each line.
4. Keep your line lengths to a maximum of 65 characters.
5. Always use a simple text editor.

If you follow these rules the majority of your subscribers will receive your ezine formatted as you intended it.

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Formatting Your Ezine and Email Messages with TextPad

By Pamela Heywood

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One of the questions I am most often asked is how to format ezines. I always use TextPad for these, to format articles and a multitude of other email offerings. This software *fixes* hard line breaks so that everything comes out looking neat. It's a tool I would be lost without.

(You can get a free download of the evaluation version here: <http://www.textpad.com/> This is fully working.)

I found it a little confusing to configure at first and had to ask for instructions, so here they are for you in case you haven't found the *secret* yet ...

1. From the top menubar pick Configure, then Preferences
2. A box will have popped up. In there, choose Document Classes (Click the little + to the left of that category to expand it.)
3. Next click on the word "Text" within the list of choices in that section.
4. The right hand part of the box should now have changed. You should see a place at the bottom right there where it says "Word break at column number"
5. Click to put a tick in the box to the left of that statement.
6. Type 60, 65 or however many characters per line you wish in the little box to the right of the statement. 65 is

probably "industry standard". I like 60.

7. Click OK

You should now be set up correctly.

In use, there are a couple of other things you need to be aware of:

1. To make the formatting work in each individual document,

you need to depress (to the IN position) the little button that is along the second to top row of the menubars. It looks like a "squiggle" or an S backwards.

If, for instance, you have pasted in some text that was previously formatted at more than your set number of characters, it will then instantly show up the "funny" breaks, which you can manually correct, or it will automatically format the new text you type.

2. Also, and this may seem obvious, but you **MUST** save the document in TextPad first to *fix* in the breaks, before you copy and paste the text to either your email program or your online message posting box for your ezine distribution.

Saving adds necessary, but invisible to you, code for the hard line breaks. If you do not save your work first, it will look right to you in TextPad, but will not be right when it is sent by email.

Happy Formatting!

Ezine Assistant is a program you can use as an alternative, if you really cant get along with TextPad. That also has facilities for setting the line breaks. You can grab a copy from: http://ucats.virtualave.net/eza2_0.exe

There is also an online formatting facility:

FormatIt: <http://www.jbmckee.com/formatit/index.html>

For a great online tutorial on formatting, which also has screenshots on how to use TextPad:

<http://www.marketing-seek.com/hop/format.shtml>

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Ezine Advertising ClassifiedsZine mailto:eacz@sendfree.com (free ads). She is one of the successful publishers featured in "50 E-zine Publishers Interviewed" <http://www.tucats-design.com/interviews>

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