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Making The Most Of Newsletters

By Sue and Chuck DeFiore

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Newsletters can be wonderful tools for communicating with your customers or prospects. Because of their format, they're often infused with more credibility than traditional brochures. If your newsletter is little more than blatant self-promotion, however, it's likely to hit the wastebasket before it hits your target's desk.

By following a few basic tips, you can cultivate interest in your newsletter and make it an effective marketing tool.

Keep it interesting. Whether you're informing prospects or current customers, provide useful content and avoid the temptation of use a hard-sell approach. For example, include a how-to article about some aspect of home buying or selling. While these topics relate to your field and reinforce your message, they also offer valuable advice and will help cultivate a loyal audience.

Do it yourself . . . or not. The abundance of desktop publishing programs on the market makes it easy for virtually anyone to create a newsletter. However, poor knowledge of design basics and overzealous use of difficult-to-read fonts has led to more than one design disaster. Before you try to do it yourself, consider hiring a professional graphic designer to create a template into which you or a staff member can input copy. If you still want to give it a shot yourself, pick up a book on graphic design basics before you create your masterpiece.

Find your look. Depending on your budget, you can choose from a variety of styles—from a simple, one-color piece to a multi-page, full-color format. Factors such as the number of colors and pages, type of paper, and paper size can mean big differences in cost, so ask for quotations on different specifications from several printers.

Keep it short. Generally, it's best to limit your newsletter to eight pages or fewer and keep articles at 300 words or fewer. If you have a lengthy or complex issue to address, try to break it up into two articles or one longer article accompanied by a short sidebar piece.

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Remember what a picture's worth. Photographs add interesting elements to your piece—as long as you use something more creative than the traditional "smiling head" shots. If you choose not to use a full-color format, keep in mind that photographs reproduce best in shades of black.

Don't ignore the details. Triple-check spelling and grammar. Typographical errors can quickly damage your credibility and distract your reader. In addition to running the document through spelling and grammar checkers, have someone proofread it—preferably someone who hasn't seen the article before. He or she will be more likely than you are to catch any errors.

Include a feedback mechanism. Make it easy for readers to respond by including a contact name, phone and fax numbers, and postal and e-mail addresses.

Cost Cutters

Looking for ways to cut your newsletter costs? Here are a few tips:

Team up with another business that reaches out to similar prospects. Split the content—and the cost—of the newsletter.

Run your rough design by your local post office. Sometimes, simple size changes can cut postage costs.

Get prices from at least three printers, and let them know you're soliciting multiple bids for the job. Competition can help you get a better price.

Offer an e-mail option. This allows you to save on postage and printing, but send it only if customers ask. New laws are cracking down on unsolicited e-mail.

We've found newsletters to be a great marketing mechanism. Keep in mind, if you have truly timely news, you can turn your newsletter into a subscription based newsletter. This can lead to another cash flow source.

We have used newsletters as both a marketing mechanism and a cash flow source.

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Writing Business Newsletters: Avoid the "Me, Me, Me" Mistake

By Richard Cunningham

Effective customer newsletters find the right mix of promotional and `real' content to maximize readership.

It's that time of year when the old college roommate sends `round his or her annual holiday newsletter.

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Admit it, you're happy to hear from them, but it's usually too long and it's all "me, me, me."

The same is true about too many customer newsletters - printed or electronic. In the audiobook, "Sound Advice on Publishing E-Newsletters," author Michael Katz says one of the biggest mistakes made by company newsletters is that the focus is mostly on the company doing the writing. It's all right to include announcements of recent awards, new employees, and new customer wins, he says, just don't lead with it.

Instead, lead with and focus on what is useful, interesting, and relevant to the audience - information that helps customers do their jobs successfully or live their lives better. When it comes to writing a customer newsletter, Katz says, "Remember the 80-20 rule. 80% of your newsletter should be focused on helping the reader; 20% should be about you."

Michael Katz offers advice on how to create, write, and publish e-newsletters each week in the free audio-newsletter from What's Working in Biz,

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of business audiobooks and online audio programs on marketing, sales, and small business strategies.

Writing Business Newsletters: Avoid the "Me, Me, Me" Mistake
Why Subscribing Too Many Newsletters Can Cost You Money
Practical Tips for Designing HTML & Plain Text Newsletters
Five Ways To Make Your Newsletter A Big Success
Tips For Finding More Coupons

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