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**PLANNING AND CREATING YOUR E-ZINE'S CONTENT**

**By Dr.Mani Sivasubramanian, M.D.**

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The Most Important Thing About Your E-Zine Is Its CONTENT

In e-zine publishing CONTENT IS KING. If you provide content of a consistently superior quality, your e-zine will be a success.

>>> What forms of content should you use ?

It's your e-zine. You know best – or should – what your audience wants. Here are some suggestions:

=> Editorials

As an e-zine publisher, you are perceived as an 'expert' in your field. Over time, your readers will begin to trust your opinions and views on issues.

You can leverage that into e-zine content by writing editorials. Use an editorial to share your viewpoint on a topical – maybe controversial – issue.

There is an added benefit to this strategy. Readers will respond to your message, either endorse it or oppose it. Their feedback can be incorporated into a follow up article in a future issue!

You could also use the editorial space to establish personal contact with your readers. Write a short chatty piece, maybe about what's been happening in your life lately, or introduce a new author or resource.

=> Feature Articles

A feature article is the most common – and one of the best – forms of content in most e-zines.

## PLANNING AND CREATING YOUR E-ZINE'S CONTENT

Here are some tips for writing good feature articles for your e-zine:

- Articles shouldn't be too lengthy. While there aren't any rules, it is perhaps safe to keep feature articles below 1200 words long.
- Articles should be relevant to the topic of your e-zine.
- Articles should educate or inform. Try and limit the message of a piece to one or two new ideas.
- Articles should be original. The originality should preferably extend to the idea, the

concept behind the write-up as well. Don't simply rehash an article you've read elsewhere. By publishing an article that hasn't been already featured in many other newsletters, you enhance the value of your own e-zine. This however means that you must

– Write your own features: It's hard work, but rewarding. And it assumes you can write reasonably well.

– Get someone to write articles specifically for you: It's difficult to arrange, but the long-term benefits are enormous. You could offer to

a. pay guest authors for their article or

b. contribute an article of your own to their publication in return. This way, you are adding value to readers of your e-zine by providing them with another (your guest author's) point of view, without doing any 'extra' work yourself. A fringe benefit is that you might hook some new subscribers from your guest's list!

– Articles should be exclusive. If someone else writes for you, make sure the same article won't be submitted to dozens of other e-zines. Benefits from publishing exclusive content include

a. syndication opportunities in other publications, online and off

b. no risk of readers leaving you to find your content elsewhere

Reprint articles only if you have to. Even then, add value by putting your own 'spin' on the content – maybe introduce the subject, or comment on the author's opinions or conclusions.

Caution – do NOT 'edit' the original article without the author's permission. Avoid articles that have been reprinted many times before in other publications.

=> News Clips and Stories

## PLANNING AND CREATING YOUR E-ZINE'S CONTENT

Staying informed of the latest developments and happenings in areas of interest is becoming increasingly difficult and time consuming. Your e-zine can offer a solution to this dilemma by providing timely news on topics that might be of interest to your readers.

You may create a separate section to deal with industry news. Or you might devote an entire issue to news updates. By this you are adding value to your subscriber, and ensuring that your e-zine is read every time.

There are many ways of presenting news:

- as a feature article
- a short news clips, with a link to the full story on a website
- as news stories, where each item is explained at length

Whichever way you choose to present the news, make sure to stamp it with your own personality. Make it interesting, personal, chatty, fun, unique, or all of these – with your style of writing, or by adding your point of view.

As with feature articles, news clips should be

- relevant
- useful to your reader
- timely. Remember, old news is no news!

=> Aggregating the best content

Finding, tracking and regularly visiting informative websites on a specific topic is difficult and time-intensive. Many readers will appreciate a listing of the best resources on a subject. Website picks are therefore a valuable content idea for your e-zine.

As an expert on your topic, you can evaluate sites and other resources (e-zines, directories, books, offline publications) for the best. And then list them, along with your rating and opinion of the site, with a link to the site itself.

Many excellent and very large e-zines follow this success model – you can too.

=> Reviews

Here's your chance to help your readers by guiding them to the very best – books, websites, music or other products and services. You, the expert, tell them what is good and what isn't.

Why should you present reviews?

## PLANNING AND CREATING YOUR E-ZINE'S CONTENT

A guiding principle in writing reviews is that the reader's need comes first. In a review, you share something that will be of interest and benefit to them.

If you read a great book, or surf into a wonderful website, then tell your e-zine subscribers about it in a review.

How to write a review?

Some tips:

- Be brief. Provide contact / ordering information for those who want to know more.
- Be relevant. Limit your reviews to the topic and subject of your e-zine.
- Be selective. Set high standards for the products you review. A review in your e-zine should become an honour people will vie for!
- Be analytical. Tell your reader specifically what is good or bad about the thing you review.
- Don't go overboard. Restrain your impulse to offer extremes of praise and criticism.
- Be balanced. Point out the good and bad aspects with equal emphasis.
- Offer Recommendations. At the end, say what you think about it. Is it good ? Or bad ? Should your reader buy the product, visit the website, order the service ? Tell them.

What should you review?

Anything – as long as it is relevant to the topic of your e-zine, and of interest to your reader. Here are some ideas:

- Books : Surely there are books on your e-zine's topic. If you've read any good ones (or even bad ones), or an author/publisher sent you a copy to review, you could write about it for your e-zine.
- Websites : If you have a favourite website, or run across one that is useful, entertaining or informative, review it for your e-zine. You could analyse it in depth, highlight it's strengths and weakness, focus on the benefits it offers. Your readers will love you for this. Indeed there are some great e-zines made up entirely of website reviews !
- Products and services can also be grist for your mill. Just remember to stay within the guidelines – relevant and useful to your reader.

### => Website Updates

An e-zine is an excellent way to get readers to visit your website again, and thereby create "stickiness" to your site.

Why should you encourage repeat visits?

There are two major benefits from running a "sticky" website:

- if you sell advertising space on your site, the repeat visitors would generate more page views, and therefore additional revenue
- if a visitor comes to your site again and again, and becomes loyal to your service, he or she is more likely than others to respond to offers on your site, and to buy products from you.

### => Interviews

Publishing an interview with an expert is exciting, valuable content. And it is easy to conduct one via e-mail.

Here's how it works:

#### Step 1

Identify your expert

#### Step 2

Learn more about your expert – special interests, experience, achievements, status in field, etc. This allows you to modify your interview to suit the individual.

#### Step 3

Decide upon a topic for the interview. Prepare a set of questions you'd like to ask.

#### Step 4

Contact your expert with an interview request. Most experts would be happy to participate in your interview. For those who seem hesitant, mentioning the exposure they would get from your publication is enough to get them to agree!

#### Step 5

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E-mail a copy of your questions to the expert and review the reply.

Make editorial changes suitable for your readership. Rearrange the questions so that there is a smooth flow of thoughts.

By intelligently interspersing additional queries and comments, you can make it appear as if the interview was carried out in person!

Ask additional questions, or for clarification when necessary.

### Step 6

Get approval from your expert for the final version of the interview.

### Step 7

**PUBLISH !**

### => Interactive Features

What sets apart the Internet and e-mail from traditional media (television, radio, newspaper and magazines) is the potential for "two-way" communication, or reader interactivity. And this is even easier with an e-zine.

Why should you interact with readers?

Easy. To improve your e-zine's quality.

- You can establish closer, more personal relationships with subscribers
- You can find out about their preferences, likes and dislikes
- You can listen to their complaints and suggestions
- You can request their feedback on your performance
- You can collect valuable demographic data on your audience

AND.... you can get fresh content to use in your e-zine!

All of this allows you to make improvements, additions and enhance the value and utility of your e-zine to your reader.

### Leveraging Interactivity for your E-zine

By employing interactive tools, you can generate content to use in later issues of your e-zine. There are many different ways to do this. Here are a few ideas:

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=> Polls

Survey your readers. Ask a question. Request a vote on an issue or topic.

About what?

- an article in the e-zine – "Did you find this week's feature helpful ?"
- current events – "Will you vote for the GOP in the next election ?"
- a controversial issue – "Do you believe in religion in schools ?"
- user preferences – "Would you like to receive this e-zine every week ?"
- demographic data – "Do you have young children ?"

Be imaginative and creative.

Some guidelines:

- Be brief. Ask no more than 7 or 8 questions
- Offer choices. Frame the questions to have a YES/NO option
- Provide an incentive to reply. A discount, a freebie, a trial membership
- Compile the results and announce them to the list. Your readers will enjoy hearing about what their peers think and feel about these issues.
- Show that you are acting on the feedback received

=> Feedback

Reader feedback is extremely valuable – if you listen to it with a mind open to change,

and act on it.

Criticism can stimulate you to improve standards. Questions and requests can indicate areas where you must provide content that helps your reader.

A good feedback loop between e-zine publisher and subscriber is worth a lot – probably as much as the trans-continental cables that wire the world together!

How can you get feedback from your reader?

- Make it obvious that you welcome feedback.
- In every issue, ask them to write back with their comments, opinions and

suggestions for improvement.

- Provide an e-mail address to write to, or send them the URL for a web-based feedback form they can submit.

How do you turn feedback into content?

Use your creativity to come up with new ideas. Here are some suggestions:

- Write a feature article that answers the questions your reader asked
- Print out the questions or comments your reader sent in, and answer them. Take care to request their permission to use their words. Most often, they'll agree – especially when you promise them a moment in the spotlight by mentioning their name, e-mail id or website URL in your post!
- Act upon the suggestions readers make; then write about these changes

=> Discussion Lists

Building a discussion group around your e-zine is another way to promote interactivity while generating usable content in the process. While feedback is a one-to-one communication, a discussion group permits many-to-many interaction, since every e-mail sent to the group is distributed to each member.

Here's what you can do:

- Create a discussion group using one of the free or pay-services.
- Announce it on your e-zine and invite your subscribers to participate.

Readers could debate controversial articles and news stories, discuss other issues related to your topic and share their views and opinions with other readers.

The material generated in such lively debate could again be used as the seed to grow content for your e-zine.

=> Forums

One more method of growing an online community around your e-zine and promoting interactivity is a Forum or Bulletin Board.

An electronic bulletin board is a website where a visitor can read messages posted by others, and respond by writing another message on the board. This reply is also displayed for others to read, producing a growing list of discussions on related topics.

After a reasonable period of time, the messages under a particular topic could be encapsulated into a feature article or other form of content on your e-zine.

Dr. Mani Sivasubramanian, M.D. Editor, THE HEART BEAT

Health-E-Zine <http://www.DrMani.com/ezine/heartbeat.shtml> E-ZINE LAUNCH: the e-book to jumpstart your e-publishing career How to Create, Publish and Market YOUR OWN Profitable E-mail Newsletter on the Internet!

### **10 Reasons To Survey Your Visitors, Subscribers And Customers!**

**By Larry Dotson**

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1. You'll find out what type of content visitors want to see at your web site. This will attract your visitors to revisit and read the content.
2. You'll find out how to improve existing products or services. This will attract new customers to buy from your business.
3. You'll find out which products or services your customers would like to see you sell in the future. This will increase your back end product sales.
4. You'll find out how to improve your customer service. This will cut down on customer complaints and how to better resolve problems.
5. You'll find out how to improve your sales letters or ads. This will increase your sales, traffic or ezine subscribers.
6. You'll find out what kind of articles or interviews they want to see in your free e-zine. This will raise your e-zine's readership.
7. You'll find out how to design your web site to fit your visitors needs and wants. This will increase the time your visitors spend on your web site.
8. You'll find out what kind of non related products or services your customers would buy. This will help your business easily move into a different market.

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9. You'll find out how to better price your products. This will help you sell your products or services at a price that will pull the most orders.

10. You'll find out where your potential customers are hanging out. This will inform you where to market and promote your products.

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