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## The 12 Most Common Newsletter Design Mistakes

By Roger C. Parker

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Your newsletter's success depends on its design. An attractive, easy to read newsletter encourages readers to pay attention to your message. However, cluttered, hard to read newsletters discourage readership - no matter how good the ideas contained inside.

Before they begin to read your newsletter, your clients and prospects will be judging the value of your ideas by your newsletter's design. Effective design pre-sells your competence and makes it easy for readers to understand your message. Design also helps set your newsletters apart from the competition.

Here are five of the 12 most common newsletter design mistakes that are made.

1.)Nameplate clutter: Design begins with the nameplate, or newsletter title set in type at the top of the front page. Nameplate problems often include:

Unnecessary words. Words like `the' and `newsletter' are rarely needed. Readers will unconsciously supply a `the' in front of a title, if desired. It should be obvious from the design and content of your publication that it is a newsletter and not a business card or advertisement.

Logos and association seals. Your newsletter's title should not compete with other graphic images, such as your firm's logo and the logos of trade or membership associations. These can be placed elsewhere on the page, allowing the nameplate to emerge with clarity and impact.

Graphic accents, like decorative borders and shaded backgrounds, often make the titles harder to read instead of easier to read.

2.)Lack of white space. White space - the absence of text or graphics - represents one of the least expensive ways you can add visual impact to your newsletters, separating them from the competition

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and making them easier to read. Here are some of the areas where white space should appear:

**Margins.** White space along the top, bottom, and sides of each page help frame your words and provides a resting spot for your reader's eyes. Text set too close to page borders creates visually boring `gray' pages.

**Headlines.** Headlines gain impact when surrounded by white space. Headline readability suffers when crowded by adjacent text and graphics, like photographs.

**Subheads.** White space above subheads makes them easier to read and clearly indicates the conclusion of one topic and the introduction of a new topic.

**Columns.** White space above and below columns frames the text and isolates it from borders and headers and footers - text like page numbers and issue dates - repeated at the top and bottom of each page.

A deep left-hand indent adds visual interest to each page and provides space for graphic elements like photographs and illustrations, or short text elements, like captions, quotes or contact information.

3.) Unnecessary graphic accents. Graphic accents, such as borders, shaded backgrounds and rules - the design term used for horizontal or vertical lines - often clutter, rather than enhance, newsletters. Examples of clutter include:

**Borders.** Pages bordered with lines of equal thickness are often added out of habit, rather than a deliberate attempt to create a `classic' or `serious' image. Page elements, like a newsletter's table of contents or sidebars - `mini-articles' treating a point raised in an adjacent article - are likewise often boxed out of habit rather than purpose.

**Reverses.** Reversed text occurs when white type is placed against a black background. Reverses often make it hard for readers to pay attention to adjacent text.

**Shaded backgrounds.** Black type placed against a light gray background, or light gray text against a dark gray background, is often used to emphasize important text elements. Unfortunately, the lack of foreground/background accent often makes this text harder to read instead of easier to read.

Graphic accents should be used only when necessary to provide a barrier between adjacent elements - such as the end of one article and the beginning of the next - rather than decoratively or out of habit.

**Downrules,** or vertical lines between columns, for example, are only necessary if the gap between columns is so narrow that readers might inadvertently read from column to column, across the gap.

4.) Underlining. Headlines, subheads and important ideas are often underlined for emphasis. Unfortunately, underlining makes words harder to read, reducing their impact!

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Underlining makes it harder to read by interfering with the descenders of letters like g, y and p. This makes it harder for readers to recognize word shapes.

Not only does underlining project an immediately obvious 'amateur' image, it confuses meaning because today's readers associate underlined words with hyperlinks.

5.) Excessive color. Color succeeds best when it is used with restraint. When overused, color interferes with readability, weakens messages, and fails to project a strong image.

Headlines, subheads and body copy set in color or against a colored background are often harder to read than the same words set in black against a white background. Be especially careful using light colored text. Restrict colored text to nameplates or large, bold sans serif headlines and subheads.

A single 'signature' color, concentrated in a single large element and consistently employed - like in your nameplate - can brighten your newsletter and set it apart from the competition. The same color, used in smaller amounts, scattered throughout your newsletter, fails to differentiate your newsletter or project a desired image.

Consistently using black, plus a second highlight color, creates a quiet background against which an occasional color photograph or graphic can emerge with far greater impact.

The architect Mis van der Rohe once commented, "God is in the details." Newsletter success, too, lies in the details. Your readers are always in a hurry. The smallest detail can sabotage their interest in your newsletter, interrupting the reader until 'later.'

And as we all know, 'later' usually means 'never!'

Roger C. Parker is the \$32 million dollar author with over 1.6 million copies in print. Download the rest of the 12 Most Common Newsletter Design Mistakes here

### **Seven Deadly Newsletter Sins (and How to Cure Them)**

**By Claire Cunningham**

#### **Seven Deadly Newsletter Sins (and How to Cure Them) by Claire Cunningham**

Newsletters can be great communication tools, but they take work. Here's a quick list of common problems newsletters run into and how to fix them.

1. The snooze-letter — a newsletter so boring it puts readers to sleep.

Cure: Find out what your readers want to know and write about it. Keep the tone lively. Don't know what readers want? Ask!

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2. Audience too broad – a newsletter with a broad audience (customers, employees and distributors, for example) may meet no one's needs very well or might meet one group's needs while ignoring the others.

Cure: Different audiences = different information needs = different newsletters. Your newsletter will be better read if it provides information that's relevant to the specific audience.

3. Too long – Most folks are strapped for time. They won't tackle a long newsletter.

Cure: Keep your newsletter short. (1–2 pages an issue )

4. I have a friend.... – Everyone has a friend, relative, spouse, or whatever who knows something about marketing and/or communication. Doesn't mean they know anything about newsletters. The results include poor writing, poor design, poor targeting, and poor performance.

Cure: Use people with newsletter experience.

5. Published once in a blue moon - Infrequent publication builds a reputation for poor follow-through. Probably not a good thing for your business.

Cure: Identify the problem. Is it your procrastination? Hire a pro to drive the project. Is it a complicated design? Hire a designer to help you simplify. Keeping your newsletter short will make it easier to publish more frequently.

6. Delegatophobia - Fear of delegating has killed quite a few newsletters, and many business people suffer from this disease. If you've been accused of being too "controlling," you're probably infected.

Cure: Be honest! Do you REALLY have time to write this newsletter? Do you have a writer on staff who can take on this project? If you don't have the internal resources, hire a project manager and writer. Then let them do their jobs.

7. The disappearing act - One issue followed by...nothing. Maybe that initial issue took more effort than expected. Maybe content wasn't planned in advance. Whatever the reason, a disappearing act

doesn't say good things about your company.

Cure: Make the newsletter a top priority. Plan ahead. Stick to your schedule. Hire help if you need it.

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