

## Starting an E-Newsletter program.

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An e-newsletter is an effective marketing tool as it's cheap to produce and you can reach a large audience. It is also an unobtrusive way of keeping your name in front of your customers and prospects, helping establish your reputation and credibility, and promoting your business.

But think carefully before launching a company e-newsletter as it's an ongoing not a one-off marketing method.

Unlike an ad, it's also not likely to bring instant results. You may be lucky and find that your e-newsletter is an immediate hit with a huge return for your business, but it's more likely to take time to bear results. The benefits will come as you develop a loyal subscriber database and more and more people start requesting your e-newsletter. For this to happen, you need to produce a quality e-newsletter and promote it in your other marketing material, such as your website, brochure and direct mail.

The other drawback, which shouldn't be underestimated, is the commitment in time and mental energy it takes to produce a regular e-newsletter on an ongoing basis. You will get quicker at writing your e-newsletter, but there will be times when you're so busy that thinking about what to write and finding the time will be difficult.

If you are prepared to take on the challenge, an e-newsletter can be fun to write as well as a cheap way of attracting new customers and business. Are you willing to make this commitment? Is it worth it for your business?

Consider what you want to achieve from your e-newsletter. Do you want to keep an open line of communication with customers and prospects? Do you want to promote your products or services? Are you interested in establishing yourself as an expert in your field?

### Content

As with all promotional material, your e-newsletter must have benefits for the reader even if they aren't, and never will be, your customer. For example, an accountant may explain the latest tax legislation, a business coach may give time-management advice and a PR company may provide media tips.

When planning your e-newsletter think about your reader. You probably won't know many of them personally, but you will have some idea of what sort of people are interested in your information. It helps to keep an imaginary reader in your mind as you write. Then you'll address them directly, rather than writing too much about yourself.

Before you start, have a look at other e-newsletters. Common ingredients of e-newsletters are:

- industry information
- personal anecdotes
- useful tips
- reviews of websites or books
- guest columnists or items by contributing writers
- Q&As
- surveys
- promotional material.

Many e-newsletters use surveys to enter into a dialogue with their readers and help them refine their products and services. Some also attract people to visit their website by offering free downloads of information.

If you're going to use your e-newsletter to advertise your products or services think carefully about where you position your ad. An ad at the beginning may turn some readers off. Many e-newsletters start off with general information and tips and put their own ad at the end. Consider offering your readers a true discount on your services and products.

If your readership becomes substantial, you can also consider selling advertising space. This is a common practice for e-newsletters with a large readership.

## **Keep to the point**

Most people are deluged by emails these days so keep your e-newsletter short. If it's too long it may be deleted immediately or left until later and then forgotten about.

Not only must your e-newsletter be short each article must be short. E-newsletters are a bit like a press release in that you need to get your main message across up-front. If you wish to write longer articles, consider putting them on your website and creating hyperlinks in your email. These are often called ezines (from e-magazines), though the term is now widely used for e-newsletters too.

***TIP:** Put your personality into your e-newsletter. Online writing is less formal than the printed word so you can write like you talk and speak directly to your reader.*

But remember the rules of good writing apply— simple words, short sentences and short paragraphs. Check for grammar, spelling and typos before you send it. If possible get a friend or colleague to test it for you as if you've been working on it closely you may not see obvious mistakes like repeated or missing words. One way of seeing it more clearly is to send it to yourself. This way you can check the layout too.

***TIP:** Stick to the structure*

Choose a simple template in keeping with your brand and image and stick to it. Decide whether to use plain text or html. Plain text has the advantage that everyone can read it, but html gives you greater versatility with design and colour. Some people produce two versions – html and plain text.

## **Subject line**

Use the subject line to identify yourself so the reader knows immediately that they're receiving your e-newsletter. You may also include a catchy caption to tell the reader something about what's in the e-newsletter. But be aware that some servers block emails that have words like 'issue', 'e-newsletter' or 'number' in the heading. The same applies to the word 'free'.

## **Heading**

Use a header to identify your newsletter. It should contain the name of your newsletter and your company name. Even if you've put the name of the newsletter in the subject line, repeat it here as the subject line may be changed if your e-newsletter is forwarded to others.

## **Table of contents**

Many e-newsletters, even though they're short, start with a table of contents.

## Footer or sidebar

**TIP:** Develop a standard footer or sidebar. It should include information such as:

- your contact details
- how to unsubscribe
- encouragement to forward the e-newsletter to colleagues or friends who may wish to subscribe
- copyright details
- disclaimer notice if you're offering opinion or advice
- privacy statement – your guarantee that you won't distribute information about your readers.

## Building your readership

Decide in advance how you will develop your readership. You will probably start with your current customers and prospects and then expand your list through your marketing efforts.

Encourage people to sign up to your e-newsletter by including information on your other promotional material, such as your website and direct mail. Do not send your e-newsletter to people you don't know or who haven't asked for it.

## Database and distribution

At its simplest, you can use your inbox and create your e-newsletter folder in your address book. Send the e-newsletter to yourself with a blind copy (Bcc) to your readership. You may find your e-newsletter easier to send in batches than in one hit.

This method will only work when your database is small. As you grow, you need to either buy software to organise your database or subscribe to a mailhouse, who will manage your subscription database for you.

Consider how you want to manage your back issues. Some people archive them on their website, some provide the latest issue only on their website and a few companies don't put their e-newsletters on their websites at all, choosing to keep their readership select.

Be prepared for the fact that people will unsubscribe and the majority of readers will never become your customers. But hang in there and you will reap the benefits of having a long-term relationship with your loyal readership. And that should equate to profits.

## In summary

- Be clear about your objectives
- Write your e-newsletter regularly
- Only send it to people who wish to receive it
- Provide information that is of interest to your readers even if they are not your customers
- Keep it short and simple
- Promote widely to build up readers and gain customer

## About the Author:

Mary Morel is the author of Promote Your Business, and a series of "How to" write effective marketing material for your small business. She also writes for corporations, government departments and not-for-profit organizations and runs public and in-house writing courses in Australia and New Zealand