

How to Write a Newsletter

by Dean Rieck

When I recently asked for guest post submissions, I had no idea what I'd get. Well, what I got was nothing short of amazing.

It appears that I have some incredibly smart readers with plenty of know-how to share.

So I'm delighted to introduce my very first guest blog post, written by Sally Bagshaw, a writer and editor extraordinaire from the land down under (Brisbane, Australia).

Corporate newsletters are an important tool to communicate with employees, clients, prospects, or suppliers. But like blogging, newsletters can become a victim of not enough time, not enough material to work from, or not enough inspiration.

What starts out as a regular, engaging and proactive tool slowly degrades into a half-baked email sent out once every blue moon. Subscribers slip away, employees disengage, and an important communication opportunity vanishes.

So what do you do? How do you come up with and write newsletter articles that are interesting?

Follow these seven simple steps and you'll soon be back on track:

1. Know your audience

Even if it's an internal newsletter for employees, don't overlook the importance of understanding their problems, their motives and

what they are interested in. If you are able to speak to them in their language, your internal communication efforts will become a whole lot easier.

2. Have a strong, newsworthy angle

Newsletters are meant to cover news. It's that simple. And each article should have an angle that is reflected in the headline, lead and quote.

To make sure your angle is newsworthy, see if it covers one (or more) of the following news elements:

Timeliness — *did it happen recently?*

Proximity — *did it happen close by to you or your readers?*

Prominence — *was someone important involved (a celebrity or a leader in your organisation)?*

Consequence — *did it have a big impact (this can also mean big in monetary terms)?*

Human Interest — *was it about someone who your audience would be interested in?*

Novelty — *was it quirky or out of the ordinary?*

Progress — *did it have to do with innovation or development?*

If you can't tick one of these elements off the



list, re-visit your angle and tweak it. Also have a think about the 5 W's and H (*who, what, when, where, why and how*) of your story. It will make it easier for you to write the article.

3. Write a killer headline

Headlines are just as important for newsletter articles as they are for media releases, direct mail, and blog posts. Keep your headline short, written in the active voice, and make sure it contains a strong verb.

If you get really stuck, try
Who > Strong verb > What.

4. Follow it with a powerful lead

Your lead (the first paragraph) should cover as many of the 5W's and H as possible. Write in the active voice and check to make sure you are staying true to your angle. The lead needs to hook your reader into reading the whole article, so don't be afraid to put the most interesting information up front – don't bury it further down the page.

“Think outside the square and show off your employees, products, even premises in a different way,”

5. Build your angle with a quote

A quote can add interest to your article and show the 'human element' in the story. Don't waste your quote on trivial information such as times or dates. Instead use it to show opinion, observation and impact.

6. Use an image to create interest

People love pictures. Think outside the square and show off your employees, products, even premises in a different way – as long as it supports your angle.

7. Finish your article with a call to action

Like any marketing material, newsletter articles should have a call to action. Obviously you may not be calling for the reader to buy something, but don't leave them hanging there with no direction on what to do next (after all, you've written such a motivating article, they are going to want to do something).

Think along the lines of:

- *download the latest policy from the intranet*
- *register for training*
- *request the latest product brochure*
- *book a demonstration*
- *email the project coordinator*
- *complete the satisfaction survey*

... you get the idea.

So that's it. You are now prepared for your next newsletter. Don't be afraid, focus on your angle and the rest will fall into place.

Good luck!

Sally Bagshaw is a web copywriter and content strategist with a special knack for finding the best angle for newsletter articles. Visit her website at www.snappysentences.com.



Newsletter Design Tips

Newsletters are a great way for businesses to keep in contact with customers so they can tell them about the latest news, trends, products and services that might be of interest. They build confidence in your company by demonstrating you're always working hard for them. Most importantly, they drive sales. The content of a newsletter is extremely important when it comes to affecting a sale; however, the design of a newsletter can be just as important, especially when it comes to your company image and the power of persuasion.

Here are a few newsletter design tips you should follow when designing newsletters:

Know what goes in a newsletter

This might sound simple enough, but you'd be surprised how many elements can be missing from newsletters. Whether they realize it or not, readers are used to certain elements that help guide them through the newsletter in an inverted pyramid - the most important information should be the most prominently displayed information. These include:

Nameplate

The nameplate is your best branding opportunity, because it should be the biggest element on your newsletter. It contains the newsletter name and date/volume, as well as any logos or taglines the company has.

Table of contents

Many newsletters miss this, but a table of contents can persuade customers who aren't interested in the front page articles to open

the newsletter for content they do want to read. Make sure your table of contents stands out, but it doesn't have to take up a lot of room. You could try a heading that reads "Inside This Issue" and place three or four topics below it with the page each is found on. If you have the space, try inserting small images relating to each one.

Call box

This is the area that lists important newsletter staff contacts, as well as information about the newsletter publisher. It does not need to take up much space, and it is usually placed on the second or fourth page.

Running head

This is the area on all pages, except the front page, that includes the newsletter name, date/volume and page number.

Body

The meat of the newsletter, which is organized by columns, headlines, bylines, subheads, jumplines and end signs. Once the other elements are in place, they will remain consistent while the body might change (but not too dramatically) from page to page.

Creative photo use

Newsletters are good places to showcase company staff and customers. Try adding a photo collage to your newsletter design as long as you don't go overboard - too many photos will weaken the content. Other than a collage, one or two photos per page are plenty. Mug shots are often used in newsletters, and, unfortunately, they all tend to look the same after awhile; dull and bland. Try spicing up mug



shots by including action shots instead of still shots.

Be **BIG** and **BOLD**

Use big headlines that grab attention fast and add large page elements such as drop caps and pull quotes (extra large text often wrapped by the main content that accentuates a key quote) to keep the flow quick, smooth and interesting. Headlines should be written in a consistent sans serif font, and you should ensure that all headlines, drop caps and pull quotes are the same color as their corresponding element. That doesn't mean that all of your big elements should be the same color; only that all headlines should be the same color, all drop caps should be the same color, all pull quotes should be the same color, etc. By doing so readers can quickly tell what the purpose of each element is and take it into proper context.

Showcase important information

Pull quotes aren't the only thing you can use to draw attention to a specific important thought, idea or product. Try adding colored boxes or sidebars highlighting the most useful or interesting aspects of the newsletter. Alternatively, the sidebar could act as a calendar of events for groups, clubs and other organizations that meet regularly; while a horizontal area at the bottom of the page could be a graph highlighting recent stock growth or other data as in an investor newsletter.

Contrasting color

You don't want your newsletter to be too bland or too colorful. It needs to be just the right mix to be pleasing enough to the eye for

customers to read it. Don't color your main body text a fancy color - stick with black because it has the highest contrast with white paper (don't use any other color paper for the same reason). Make sure you leave plenty of white space around page elements so the newsletter is easy to read and follow.

Be creative

End signs, which are small symbols at the end of each newsletter article, don't have to be boorish bulleted points. Try coming up with a relevant shape that fits with the newsletter them; or you can even try a company logo to further your branding efforts.

You could also try designing postcard newsletters, which are basically newsletters printed front and back with an article, image and sidebar on each side. They're different from the competition and economical to print and send, though they do stray from the commonly accepted newsletter format.

“The newsletter is a mix of conformity and creativity.”

The newsletter is a mix of conformity and creativity. Make sure yours conform to the accepted standards, add a touch of creativity, and you'll be on your way to designing a compelling newsletter that aids in the quest for return on investment.

article from psprint.com