



Marketing With a Newsletter

by Leslie Levine

With some planning, creativity, and a budget, a company newsletter can be a subtle yet persuasive form of marketing. A newsletter can generate referrals, help clinch a sale, and help keep your name in front of the consuming public.

Don't Overpromise

The two most important aspects of any marketing newsletter are its ability to relay specific information to a specific audience and to positively reinforce the reputation of your company. A successful newsletter concentrates on the needs, concerns, and interests of its readership, and puts self-promotion on the back burner. The very act of conveying useful information will help promote your company.

Polly Evans, president of Case Design/Remodeling, Inc., Bethesda, Md., stresses her company's belief in subtle marketing. "We try to incorporate items that will interest our readers. We don't want to blow our own horn. That gets to be a little transparent."

You will, however, want to include news or updates about services your company offers — a new line of products, the addition of a finish carpentry or cabinet service, or another new capability. Diane Barberio, of Kitchens, Etc., in Durham, N.C., uses her company's newsletter, *Remodeling Times*, to promote the company's free consumer seminars. Sent to potential clients, each newsletter outlines upcoming seminar agendas and covers other related topics.

Planning

Probably the hardest thing about a newsletter is planning it. Before you begin the production process, sit down and think through what you want your company newsletter to accomplish.

- Who will receive the newsletter?
- What will the newsletter be called?
- How often will it be distributed? Annually? Quarterly? Monthly?
- How much money is available to cover production and distribution costs?
- What kinds of articles will the newsletter contain?
- Will the newsletter be produced in-house or contracted out?

Who to mail it to. A newsletter should be produced for a specific readership. For example, while Case Design/Remodeling sends its

newsletter to homeowners, Ruppert Brothers, Adelphi, Md., and Sterling, Va., a damage reconstruction company, directs its publication, *Ruppert Brothers Review*, to insurance companies and managers of commercial and residential multifamily structures.

Your distribution list should include individuals and organizations likely to need your services and/or refer someone else to your company. Names of past and potential clients, local chambers of commerce, nearby schools and universities, and local media should be included on your mailing list. Wherever you send the newsletter, be sure to include an individual's name on the mailing label.

What to call it. Naming your newsletter can be a lot of fun. George Dahl, president, Cook-Dahl, Inc. Remodeling, Brockport, N.Y., uses a portion of his company's logo, calling his newsletter *The Plane Truth*. President Ashley B. Richards, of Homeplace Building & Remodeling, Inc., Yarmouth, Me., publishes *On the Level*, which uses a level as a graphic element in the title. It is best to keep the title short and relevant to your company's expertise.

How often to send it. Budget and time will dictate how often your newsletter is published. The main concern is to distribute the newsletter often enough to remind people of your company. Keep the frequency consistent. If your budget cannot accommodate a quarterly newsletter, plan on distributing it just twice a year.

Production and Distribution Costs

Regardless of who produces your newsletter — someone on staff or a freelancer — you will need to draft a budget. Budget items such as design and layout, typesetting, preparation of camera-ready art, printing, and postage should be considered. Any good print shop can help you develop your budget. Don't underestimate postage — it often accounts for nearly 50% of production costs.

If you do contract out the newsletter, be sure to find out up front how you will be charged for the services rendered. If it is an hourly rate, find out how much time will be necessary to complete the project.

Who's In Charge?

Producing a newsletter can take a

day or a week — it depends on the nature of the newsletter. Most companies producing newsletters rely on one person to perform the job, handling everything from writing to coordinating the printing and mailing. That individual may be the public relations person on staff or a free-lance writer. Think seriously before deciding to do it yourself; most company principals cannot devote the time needed to produce a successful newsletter.

Some companies, like Remodeling Tips, Hickory, N.C., have responded to this problem by offering newsletter production services. For a fee, Remodeling Tips will produce and distribute a newsletter customized for your company, with a mix of articles supplied by Remodeling Tips and articles specific to your company or specialty. In addition to the fee, the company requires material from which articles can be written and your mailing list.

What's In It?

After deciding who will produce your newsletter, you need to decide what to put in it. The articles you include will depend on your business and your audience; but here is a short list of possibilities:

- do-it-yourself tips like "winterizing your home" or "cost-cutting storage solutions"
- a letter from the president about recent projects or community activities
- a community calendar of events
- an employee profile
- a before-and-after remodeling project
- a testimonial from a client
- industry statistics or news
- information on new products or developments in your field
- an article on how to finance a remodeling project

Occasionally, you might stumble upon an article in another publication that you think will benefit your readers. To use it, you must get permission from the original publisher. Every publisher is different; some will grant permission, and some won't. If the author of the original article still owns the rights, you must get permission from him or her. Whatever the case, a call to the editor or publisher will clarify who owns the copyright and you can go from there.

Design

The design of the newsletter — the typefaces used in headline and body copy (the main text); the number of columns; the number and nature of the art elements, such as photos, drawings, or cartoons — is a key to its success.

Newsletter formats vary from one-color, text-only publications, to slick, four-color publications with photographs, illustrations, and other graphic devices. The format you use will depend on several variables, particularly budget and time.

The standard size is 8 1/2" x 11". This size provides flexibility (trifolded, it fits easily into a standard envelope or it can be stapled and mailed) and it is cost-efficient to print. Most newsletters today are typeset: You take the copy to a local printer and work out the type specifications and layout. They will then produce it, have you proofread it, and print it. Most print shops can assist you with design and layout or recommend free-lance writers or graphic designers to help you.

With a computer and the right desktop publishing software, you can lay out and/or typeset the newsletter yourself. Keep the design fairly simple, with only two or three typefaces. Many cluttered, amateur newsletters have been produced recently by "instant publishers" using desktop publishing software. Here again, a print shop or a freelancer may be of assistance.

Using graphics. A newsletter, especially one received through the mail, must compete with a multitude of other publications. Headlines, subheads, photographs, illustrations, and photo captions all help capture the reader's attention. A story describing a kitchen renovation is more likely to be read and remembered if it is accompanied by before and after photographs. A cartoon depicting a professional vs. a non-professional contractor will probably leave a greater impression than a long, drawn-out article.

In fact, nothing about the newsletter should be long. Articles and sentences should be short and to the point. The newsletter should be an easy read, not a taxing exercise. ■

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