

How to Create a Newsletter People Eagerly Read

Simple Tips to Respect and Entertain Your Readers...and Increase Donations

Write in Small Chunks

Focus on only one idea per story. Break up longer articles into bite-sized chunks -- as separate stories, or use subheads within the longer story.

Let the Readers Write It

Face it, readers will devour a news update sent in by an old friend, yet bypass your finely-crafted article. Create ways to let the readers write the newsletter themselves. Purge the institutional voice and let the humans speak to each other.

Retain the Subject's Voice

Use Q&A format for profiles and lots of quotes in stories. Let the reader hear the subject's voice.

Quotes Give Light, Not Fact

Quotes in stories should not give facts ("I weigh 175 pounds."), but rather insight into facts or personality ("Since I lost the weight, I feel like a teenager.").

Extracted Quotes Lure Eyes

Blow up a powerful quote, box it, and it serves as another headline to entice the reader. It should obviously relate to the headline, and lure the reader into the story.

Entertain to Inform: Offer Benefits

What's in it for me? (W.I.I.F.M.). Every headline and paragraph must answer that question. Readers will not be bored in print. The trashcan beckons. The benefit of reading the story must exceed the investment of time. Hurry is the enemy of the newsletter. Remember, the words spoken by James Earl Jones in the movie *Field of Dreams*. "It is money they have, and peace they lack."

Headlines Must Tell, Not Tease

Headlines must clearly state the main idea of the story. Never tease the reader or ask a question in a headline unless you also telegraph the answer. Kill clever headlines that don't tell the story.

Use Subheads to Draw the Reader In

In longer stories, subheads capture skimmers, pull readers through and give the main ideas at a glance.

Combine Similar Items into One Story

If two stories contain info about the same topic, make a third story on that topic instead.

Beware the President's "Address"

Disconnected members care little about what the leader of your organization thinks, unless the leader...

- has proven expertise the reader needs, or
- packs the article with facts and analysis, or
- is unusually entertaining.

Quote the leader in other stories, but be careful about allocating precious space in the newsletter to a "president's column" just because the newsletter has always had one.

Waste No Words, Use No Filler

Redundancies, and rambling sentences are time thieves to the reader. Cut them. If you need to fill space, use an entertaining photo.

Always Answer the Basics

The headline and first paragraph answer who, what, where, when and sometimes why. The rest of the story answers how. Tell a complete story no matter how brief.

Provide Related Sidebars

For every story, consider breaking out part of it as a sidebar with a quote, list, factoid, chart or Web site link. These are eye magnets.

Crop Photos Tightly

A small picture of large group wastes space and annoys the reader. Either blow it up so every face is clearly visible, or crop tightly to focus on a couple of people. Identify everyone in the photo.

Hire a Good Third-Party Editor

The fresh perspective and professional skill of a third-party editor can keep your newsletter in a reader's hands for five or 10 minutes longer. Plus, it saves hours for volunteer leaders who should spend more time with the family. The money you invest will return through increased donations, and peace of mind for the volunteer leaders. If you like what you've read on this page, perhaps we can work together on a communication program that entertains to inform, and pays more than it costs.