PRIN*tips*

Starting a Company Newsletter: Tips for Success

Company newsletters are an effective tool for communicating news and ideas, for keeping readers up-to-date on company policies and procedures, and for creating a sense of community. It can also be an overwhelming task to get one started. In this issue of Printips we will provide a number of tips to help you achieve success in starting and publishing a company newsletter.

Anatomy of a newsletter

Regardless of its size, a newsletter consists of distinct parts:

- Nameplate (also called the banner)
- Masthead
- Headlines (and subheads)
- Body copy
- Graphics and/or photographs
- Advertising

The nameplate contains the name of the publication and the issue information. Its purpose is to introduce the reader to the publication, to visually suggest what the reader can expect, and to establish brand name recognition. Therefore, the nameplate needs to be carefully designed as a strong, independent, visual element.

The masthead lists the publisher, the newsletter staff, the credits, and contact information (phone, e-mail, address) for the publication. The masthead usually appears in the same place in each issue.

Headlines and subheads introduce and organize the body copy, while graphics and photographs illustrate or enhance the ideas in the body copy. In addition, typography can be used to create visual interest.

Advertising isn't always included in a newsletter. When present, it may be either classified or display ads.

Getting Started

Before you can begin actual work on your newsletter, you will need to make several decisions, including the name, the page format, how often it will be published, and where you will obtain copy and graphics. You will also need to decide on the basic design and layout style to use.

When selecting a name for your newsletter, remember that the best name will quickly and distinctively convey what the newsletter is about and for whom it is intended. A common way to name a newsletter is after the name of the company. Other more creative ideas include a clever play on words such as **The Mainline** for a water company newsletter or **The Quarterly** for a

coin club. Associated concepts – **Horizons** for the Sunset Apartments newsletter – are also a creative possibility. Do remember to keep the name easy to pronounce and to avoid double entendres that may have a negative or pejorative meaning.

"Typographic effects such as pull quotes or call outs create visual interest."

A popular size for a newsletter is 11x17 inches, folded in half to provide four 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 inch pages. Another size is 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 14 inches, either as a single sheet or folded in half to produce four 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 7 inch pages. A single 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 inch sheet produces a compact two-page newsletter.

To determine the best size for your newsletter, consider the amount of copy you want to include and how often you want to publish. A page size of 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 inches can accommodate between 250 and 500 words of copy when formatted with headlines and graphics.

Most newsletters are published monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly. The primary benefit of a monthly newsletter is the timeliness of its content. However, it may be difficult to keep up a monthly schedule, particularly if you are filling four pages or are responsible for writing all the copy.

"You can eliminate clutter in your newsletter by using white space judiciously."

Although your newsletter will contain your company's news and stories, you may also need to include some **filler** articles on topics such as health, safety, sports, money-savers, holidays, trivia, humor, or kids. There are services that provide this type of copy on a subscription basis. When using royalty-free clip art, be sure to adhere to the terms of use.

Design and Layout

We could devote an entire issue of Printips to the topic of newsletter layout and design. Here we will just review some basics.

Use a grid system to organize the newsletter layout. To develop a grid, divide your page into columns (two, three, or even four), remembering to leave a **column gutter** between columns. For interest, you can even make the columns of uneven size. Now create geometric shapes by blocking areas across columns representing space for photographs, graphics, display ads, and other visual elements. This will help keep the pages from becoming static.

Learn how to use typography well. Select a typeface for body copy and for headlines, then use them to establish a hierarchy of information. Overcome the temptation to use too many typefaces in your newsletter, as this will create visual clutter and lead to an amateurish look. Use varying point sizes to create contrast between the main headlines, the subheads, and the body copy. If you decide to include display ads, change the typefaces so the ads will be clearly differentiated from the editorial copy.

Write interesting headlines. The purpose of a headline is to attract your readers' attention and get them to read the article. Think about your audience when you are writing headlines, and try to have some fun with them. Just remember to keep the headlines clear and simple.

Don't overuse clip art. The Internet has made the acquisition of clip art a very easy task – literally thousands of images can be found online, often for free. But resist the temptation to include too many in your newsletter. Not every article needs to have an illustration, especially since you can use typographic effects such as **pull quotes** or **call outs** to create visual interest. As a general rule, make the clip art you do use as large as possible for the space you have available, and be sure it is relevant to the article. Finally, be consistent in the style of the clip art illustrations. Avoid mixing realistic, cartoon, and abstract styles within one issue.

Create emphasis with color. If using two ink colors in your newsletter, remember that less is more. Color can create drama when used with restraint but can also create clutter if overused. One good use of color is to put a light screen behind text that you wish to highlight in a sidebar.

Design with white space. You can eliminate clutter in your newsletter by using white space judiciously. For example, increase the size of a

gutter and add space between paragraphs to make articles easier to read. Insert some space above and below headlines to frame the thought. Set off graphics with a buffer zone of white space.

We can help

We will be happy to help you launch your newsletter! We can review your design and layout, choice of typefaces, and style guide. We can suggest paper and ink combinations to fit your budget. And we can give you some real-world information on how much time you will need to devote to the project. Call (513) 248-2121 and set up an appointment.

Staying on Schedule

Perhaps the most difficult part of creating a newsletter is finding the time to do it! Most newsletter editors have many other duties, and since the newsletter may be less urgent than other tasks, its schedule may slip month after month.

To help you stay on schedule, we offer these tips:

Tip 1: Create a schedule. This may sound simplistic, but you need to know how much of your time it takes for the various tasks of newsletter production and plan for it. If you are responsible for writing copy, here is a rule of thumb: it takes about an hour to write 250-350 words, or about one page of 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 copy. If you are gathering copy from others, it may take nearly that long to edit and prepare for layout.

Tip 2: Set aside time to work on the newsletter. Decide whether you wish to work on the newsletter in small sessions for a number of days, or whether you wish to devote an extended period in one or two days. Then let others know your schedule, and ask for their cooperation in helping you meet it.

Tip 3: Call us for the production schedule. You probably have a specific time that you would like to distribute your newsletter. Let us know what it is, and we will let you know how many days we will need for printing, copying, and bindery. This will give you a specific deadline to work toward each month. Contact us at (513) 248-2121 or info@macgra.com, and we'll work out the details with you.

TRICKS & tips

"Most newsletter editors have many other duties…"

A Vocabulary of the Graphic Arts

Alignment: The condition of type and or art materials as they level up on a horizontal or vertical line.

Balance: A term used to describe the aesthetic or harmony of elements, whether they are photos, art, or copy, within a layout or design.

Banner: The primary headline usually spanning the entire width of a page.

Column Gutter: space between two or more columns of type on a page.

Dummy: A term used to describe the preliminary assembly of copy and art elements to be reproduced in the desired finished product; also called a comp.

Line Copy: Any copy that can be reproduced without the use of halftone screens.

Page Makeup: The assembly of all necessary elements required to complete a page.

Widow: A single word or two left at the end of a paragraph, or a part of a sentence ending a paragraph, which loops over to the next page and stands alone. Also, the last sentence of a paragraph that contains only one or two short words.

Words

"A term used to describe the preliminary assemble of copy and art…"

Starting a Company Newsletter:
Tips for Success

MacMillan Graphics Ltd.

Park50 TechneCenter
2002 Ford Circle
Milford, OH 45150

513-248-2121
Fax 513-248-5141

www.macgra.com
info@macgra.com

Please Route to the Printing Buyer

Q&A
questions and answers

Q. *I know fonts are important to make my newsletter look its best. Can you give me some advice about fonts?*

A. We'd be glad to – and we hope you'll take it, for good use of fonts can give your newsletter a very professional look.

Size: for body copy, use 10 or 12 point type (depending on whether you are using a sans serif or serif face); 14-48 point type for headlines; and half the headline size for subheads.

Style: in general, use no more than four fonts in any single issue. Select a font for heads and subheads, one for body copy, one for display ads, and use them consistently.

Variety: when you need variety in a font, use bold or italics to create highlights. Bold and italics signal to the reader that there is something about the text that is important. However, do not overuse either bold or italics as overuse creates confusion.