



## Using Newsletters as Marketing Tools By Lois Carter Fay, APR

Have you considered doing a company or product newsletter? If you have, you are not alone. And there are good reasons for that.

Newsletters can be used to:

- Enhance a company's reputation and provide credibility
- Build name recognition
- Let your customers know who you are
- Create an impression of your company
- Showcase new products or services
- Reiterate company policies, such as a dedication to customer service
- Get your customers and prospects to act, i.e., increase sales

There are two types of newsletters—internal and external.

Internal newsletters, which are distributed to all employees in your company, can help you to create a good working environment, discuss new and existing company policies, communicate news about clients and employees, and much more. Remember, if your employees aren't happy and don't understand and buy-in to your goals, you might be throwing all of your marketing dollars out the window. There's no point in trying to get new customers if your employees don't do a good job for your customers.

External newsletters—those that are sent to current customers, past customers, prospects, referral sources, media, friends and associates—can be very effective marketing tools. Spend time creating a good database or list. Concentrating on who will receive your newsletters will focus marketing efforts toward those who are most likely to use your products or services. That's time and money well spent!



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### **What's your goal?**

Once your audience is chosen, the next thing to determine is your purpose. Why are you doing a newsletter? What do you hope to accomplish?

Because there are so many newsletters being written and sent--your doctor, financial planner, veterinarian, volunteer organization, and competitors all send them—you need to provide something that your customers will want to read. People don't have time to spend reading things that have no benefit to them. That means it must be a "value added" piece, i.e., one with benefit to your readers/customers.

### **Give knowledge away.**

Of course, your sales message can be intricately woven throughout the newsletter...and it should be. But you have to be careful in your approach. Sometimes you will want to give them the whole apple, with an offer for more, and at other times it's better to merely give a slice or two. The trick is to decide how much to give away.

### **It's okay to tease.**

If the message is new and innovative, or very difficult to understand, you may want to "tease" your audience by providing only brief information, making it apparent that you know what you're talking about. That way, you can entice your customer into *paying* for your expertise at a later date, or through another product you offer. The information in the newsletter should clearly show you solve certain problems for or provide needed services to your customers.

Perhaps, however, your message is not especially creative, just informative and timely. For example, your customers will benefit from a thorough explanation of the stock market changes and a prediction for the future. In your newsletter, you will have to quickly establish your expertise and show the reader how you can help him/her amass wealth (solve the problem). If you can show your reader how you can solve a problem or help him take advantage of a situation, you are quickly on your way to gaining a new customer.

### **Weave your message throughout.**

Another effective technique is to simply give away your expertise, with a very subtle "sales message" contained in the newsletter. That's the way this article is written. Of course, this approach won't work for every business. It's designed for a company that would like to showcase their expertise—in this case, writing and marketing knowledge—to make it clear they have the skills and ability to help a client with a similar project.

This also works for organizations that are not necessarily interested in selling a product or service, but instead, wish to persuade their audience about a particular point of view. A government agency, for instance, may need to not only inform its audience about things it is doing to help the public, but the agency may also need to convince its



audience that a tax increase is necessary to fund certain road projects. A newsletter is a great way to do this.

### **Create a plan.**

You don't want your material to get boring and old. That's why it's important to develop a good plan that details what will be included in each newsletter. For instance, with each issue you will have certain regular columns—a president's message, summary of new projects you were hired to do, special dates, and so forth. If you plan a year's worth (or at least several issues of the publication) of topics, you will assure your readers of fresh news and they will be more likely to read it.

### **Publish regularly.**

Once you decide to develop a print or electronically distribute a newsletter, make sure you publish it on a regular basis. Print newsletters should be sent no less than four times per year. If you can do it monthly, even better! Your customers will begin to expect your newsletter and if you cease publication, or publish it irregularly, it may hurt your credibility.

Don't forget that in today's business world, it can be more effective to produce an electronic newsletter, or ezine. If you create an ezine, however, you must publish it with a much greater frequency than a printed newsletter. Once a week is best; once a month is the absolute minimum.

### **Seek responses.**

To give you more incentive to publish regularly, build tracking devices into your newsletter. Provide some sort of response form—in a print newsletter this might be a "Reader's Critique" form or a "Bingo Card" for readers to request more information or send comments. An electronic newsletter would include hyperlinks to special pages on your website, requests to "reply to" the email message or telephone hotlines to call. You'll make an effort to continue publishing your newsletter if you know it is increasing your bottom line.

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