

Newsletters that Get Attention

Ten Simple Steps for Small Businesses

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All Write!

My newsletter, *The Write Stuff*, is an important piece of my marketing plan. I'm willing to give it the time and money it requires because I know it gets read. I know because my readers comment on it and, when I offer a book for sale, they place orders. When I write a note asking whether they'd like to be dropped from my mailing list, they email me saying, "No, don't drop me. I look forward to your newsletter."

Now, my business is very small, and my mailing list has not yet reached 200. The advice I'm offering is not for large companies that print 1,000 or more newsletters and have them mailed by an administrative assistant who doesn't know half the people who will be reading them. This advice is for the small business owner wanting to deepen relationships and create some buzz around a young, growing business. I take time with my newsletter and treat it with respect, and I always follow my own ten rules:

1. **Keep the publication schedule fluid.** Send a newsletter when you have something to say. Don't lock yourself into a monthly or quarterly publication schedule and then scrounge to find newsworthy material to fill the space. Sometimes I mail a newsletter two months in a row; other times I have a gap of three to four months between issues. Do you think my readers keep track? I don't.
2. **Send it by snail mail, not email.** An e-newsletter can (and will) be deleted in one mouse click, perhaps read first, more likely skimmed, very possibly ignored because this is not the right moment to stop and view an e-newsletter. A paper copy, though, if not read immediately, will hang around, waiting to be read. I often see my newsletter on a friend or client's desk. Sometimes, during a phone conversation, an individual will say, "I've got your newsletter right here in front of me." The difference in delivery method represents a huge difference in cost; I think it's worth it.
3. **Change your newsletter every time.** Tinker with the layout, even just a little, but especially change up the content. Again, don't lock yourself into a book review each time or a recipe corner or "Ten Tips of the Trade," because you might not have anything really powerful to fill that particular space next time. Besides, the routine gets old-hat after awhile. Present the news of your business, however it might play out in this particular issue. Don't worry about standardizing it. (Even if you use a template, which I do not, change the *material* substantially.)
4. **Make your newsletter a celebration,** not a sermon or warning or reference guide. Showcase your customers and clients. Focus the spotlight on members of the constituency that will be *reading* the mailing. In that way you build anticipation: *Who will be in the spotlight next time? Might it even be me or my business?*

5. **Vary the material in each issue, not just from issue to issue.** Appeal to divergent interests and points of view and needs for information. It's fine to give some tips or advice, but get some human interest in there too. Report on an interesting recent event in your personal life, or offer an opportunity for your readers to engage with you, perhaps enjoy a discount or enter a fun contest. Offer several "flavors" in each issue.
6. **Use color photos!** Not clip art. Or at least use a combination of the two. Take pictures of your customers' grand openings or successful installations of your equipment. Feature casual photos of your staff at work, or picture a recent fund raiser for charity or your latest representation in a trade show. Pepper your page with interesting photos, not just text or a mixture of text and clip art.
7. **Create a document that is both readable and appealing.** Avoid goofy fonts that call attention to themselves or are hard to decipher. Keep your layout clean and neat, with some white space. Jazz it up with line and color—and those important photographs!
8. **Copy in color!** And on decent paper! The finished product must look and feel appealing if it is going to be read. Find a printer who will provide clear, clean copies with good photo resolution and color reproduction at an affordable price. (My local PostNet store does an amazing job for me.) You might consider saving money by printing the front in full color and the back in black and white, but don't cave in to all black-and-white copy. It's just too dull.
9. **Personalize every copy—by name.** I leave a bit of space (truly just a bit) for a handwritten message, and every newsletter gets a few words from my pen, even if it's as simple as, "Just keeping in touch, Chris." If you're not going to make it personal, it's not worth the paper and ink you've paid for, and it's surely not worth the next and final tip. Read on.
10. **Send it in an envelope—First Class.** What percentage of the mail you receive these days comes to you in a sealed, First Class envelope? Not much, if your postal mail is anything like mine has become over recent years. And how many pieces of First Class mail do you open in a month (in a year... in a lifetime!) that have all of these qualities:
 - Attractive, appealing and readable material
 - Offering interesting, useful or entertaining reading
 - Bearing a handwritten message to you, personally, from the sender?

Do you see now why my newsletter is special to the 150 readers who receive it? There's nothing else like it in their pile of mail—ever! Follow my ten self-imposed "rules" and you too can send out a newsletter that gets read and even anticipated.