

E-NEWSLETTER

/ A focused periodical publication for a subscriber audience /

WHAT IS AN E-NEWSLETTER?

An E-Newsletter is an electronic periodical publication for sharing content such as news updates, survey results, emerging research findings, event reminders and other resources, with interested readers. It is distributed by email. A good E-Newsletter is concise and offers its readers value in the form of knowledge and contact information on a field or issue. The audience is usually self-selected (they choose to subscribe to the e-newsletter) and may include any number of people.

An E-Newsletter is a familiar and cost-effective means of sharing knowledge. It can be distributed easily to anyone with an email account, regardless of where they are located. An E-Newsletter lets readers keep in touch regularly with people who share a common interest without being too intrusive. Previous editions are often archived on a website for interest and easy reference.

REQUIREMENTS:

- *Editor (responsible for newsletter content)*
- *Writers (contributors to the newsletter).*
- *Optional but recommended: E-Newsletter software platform (providing more powerful layout and subscription management features than standard email clients)*
- *Optional: News compiler (compiles news resources from various sources)*



WHEN AND WHY TO USE

The E-Newsletter is regaining popularity. Subscribers value the control they have over

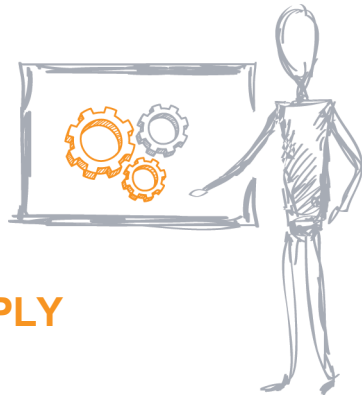
what they receive and can easily unsubscribe if the content is no longer of interest. Another reason for the resurgence of E-newsletters is familiarity with the format and distribution channel. Virtually everyone uses email, and e-newsletters are easy to read and file per the recipient's own preferences.

E-newsletters can be targeted to communities or networks large or small, including staff within an organization, or staff plus partners from other organizations, or even members of the public.

The main reason for subscribing to an E-Newsletter is, of course, the content. A well-curated newsletter can highlight blogs, articles and other resources that contain valuable information by presenting them in a concise, relevant and timely manner. Given the constant pressure of information overload, there is increasing recognition of the value of synthesized reviews, alerts and recommendations.

Content can be compiled from websites, blogs and various social media sites, or it can be created specifically for an e-newsletter. By regularly providing quality, relevant content, the producers of a newsletter can cultivate credibility and trust in their product, their brand and themselves.

E-newsletters can have an important role in sustaining engagement among members of a community: Regular updates inject energy into the community and remind participants of their reasons for connecting with the community in the first place.



HOW TO APPLY

1. Define the purpose of the E-newsletter. Why create it? What would you like to achieve? How might you measure the impact?

2. Consider your target audience: Are they colleagues in your office, or are they from other

offices/organizational units, and/or from partner organizations? Are they part of a community of practice or a network of practitioners? If so, is it a closed network or will new subscribers be allowed?

3. Next, develop a content plan. Consider the topic(s) and content. Knowing the purpose and the audience will help you understand the topic(s) to be covered and the type of content that would be most useful and interesting. Identify a list of likely external/internal content sources (e.g. websites, blogs, social media sources, etc.)

4. Assemble a team. Putting out a regular newsletter requires a dedicated team with sufficient time to contribute as needed.

- ▲ Select an editor to coordinate the entire process. This person may also take on the role of writer.

- ▲ If fresh content is prepared for each issue, then assign writers as needed.

- ▲ If appropriate, assign persons to compile news items from various sources, including from relevant websites, social networking sites like Twitter, or directly from experts.

5. Decide on your platform. For small newsletters you can simply use your email client, but for audiences of more than 30-50, or if you want to track usage, then opt for an email platform such as MailChimp or Campaign Monitor. Dedicated platforms often have free versions with limitations on the number of subscribers and the types of features available; if your newsletter is a success, it may make sense to consider paying for the full version of a platform.

6. Develop your first issue. You will need to develop both content and design. Content commonly used in newsletters includes:

▲ Summaries of news or other updates from your own website or blog, with a link to the full content.

▲ Links to online news and content from external websites, blogs or social media. Add a short blurb that highlights the key message and value for the subscribers.

▲ Brief content (news, reviews, announcements, new ideas, highlights of staff achievements, conferences, jobs, etc.) written especially for the newsletter. Keep such content short – one or two paragraphs, covering the full story or at least the most important points you want to convey.

▲ Event listings. These usually appear close to some relevant event.

▲ Calls to action. If/when appropriate, invite or request readers to do something, such as taking a poll, signing up for an event, sharing newsletter content with others, etc.

Other content tips:

▲ To help in organizing the content, create an outline for the e-newsletter: table of contents, news highlights, events, etc.

▲ Optionally, you can choose a theme for each issue within your main topic, and select/create content accordingly. Organizing newsletters by theme can enhance their appeal and impact.

▲ See *Tips for success: Content development* below for more suggestions.

7. Create a design for your first issue. After testing and refinement, the same design (with minor variations) can work for subsequent issues as well as people begin to recognize your brand.

▲ Create a simple, attractive layout that is easy to view on a web browser and that is mobile-friendly as well.

- Use either HTML or PDF for the e-newsletter. HTML is perhaps preferable: It does not require any attachments and can be read immediately within the subscriber's email client. (Please see References below for additional guidance on HTML email design.)

- If you are using an email platform, then you may be able to choose and customize an existing template offered with the platform. Otherwise you will need to create your own layout.

- In either case, keep the design of the newsletter simple, and the graphics minimal, to reduce bandwidth requirements. Give the newsletter a clean look and feel with enough white space so that copy does not appear cluttered. Retaining a white background can also save on ink for those choosing to print off the newsletter!

- The layout should include a header with a banner, a body and a footer.

- **The banner** at the head of the newsletter should include a name and logo (small graphic or coloured text) representing the sponsoring organization or programme; the name of the newsletter; possibly a tagline (short phrase or keywords to describe the newsletter and its purpose); and the newsletter issue number and volume or date.

- **The body** should include section headings and bulleted lists to divide the content into

manageable chunks. This enables readers to scan quickly to items of interest, and makes reading the newsletter a more appealing experience. Align content left and be consistent throughout. Use different fonts (no more than 3) and colours to divide the sections and enable scanning.

- Each section should start with the highest priority/most important item first.
 - **The footer** should include a link to subscribe, pointing to a landing page that describes exactly what is in the newsletter and how often it is published, and offers a preview of a sample newsletter so that visitors can decide whether to subscribe.
 - The footer should also include a link to unsubscribe (as easily as possible), a contact email address for feedback (be sure to monitor this address!), and any relevant privacy statements on how readers' information is used and protected, and whom the content of the newsletter is for.
 - If your newsletter is public, you can include links to share the content with others (social media buttons for Twitter, Facebook, etc.)
 - Once the layout has been customized, save and re-use it for every issue to maintain uniformity and develop a brand.
 - See *Tips for success: Newsletter design* below for more.
- ▲ Once the newsletter has been designed, test the design with a sample of your audience. Do they like it? Do they find it easy to read? Check it in several different browsers, including mobile view, to see if the layout is preserved.
- ▲ Also test all the links and ensure they open in separate browser windows.

8. Once all content, design and testing is complete, **send out the e-newsletter to people in your distribution list**. Make sure the email goes out from a person and not a generic email address. People tend to open emails from respected individuals or organizations that represent a leading authority.

9. **Save all issues of the e-newsletter** by posting them on a website: Store them as a PDF file or as webpages. An archive enables readers to find previous issues without having to search their inboxes. It also enables wider sharing of content and thus promotes subscriptions.

10. Once you have sent your first e-newsletter, it is recommended to **prepare an editorial calendar**. Consider the frequency of sending that works best and allocate responsibilities accordingly among the members of your team. Choose themes and topics for several upcoming newsletter issues to make sure there is enough content worth exploring for several months.

11. **Keep an eye on impact.**

▲ Based on the newsletter's purpose, set some goals that can be monitored through standard metrics. If you are using an email newsletter platform such as MailChimp or Campaign Monitor, you will have access to statistical reports that can help you analyze the performance of your newsletter. These reports can indicate how many persons open/read the newsletter, which links are clicked, how many persons subscribed or unsubscribed every time a new issue was published, etc.

▲ Periodically survey your subscribers to get feedback on how the contents are used; how they contribute to your objectives like internal communication, knowledge sharing or strengthening capacities; and to obtain content suggestions.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS



Your newsletter will be vying for attention with other newsletters and emails. Readers must dedicate time – probably work time – to reading your outputs. Hence, you should maximize both content value and design effectiveness.

Content development:

▲ **The writing style for a newsletter** should be informal and conversational. Content should be in the active voice. Avoid jargon unless you are sure your readers understand it; in general, keep the language simple. Always check for spelling and grammatical errors.

▲ **Email subject lines** for your newsletter should contain the newsletter's name and the issue number. They may also contain keywords to describe the content. Keep subject lines to a maximum of 50 characters. Avoid using promotional words like “reminder”, “help”, “free”; these may cause your newsletter to be automatically marked as spam.

▲ **When selecting content for your newsletter, remember to focus on value for your readers.** Value comes from the relevance, timeliness, conciseness and ‘actionability’ of your content, for your particular audience.

▲ **Conciseness is particularly important.** Content should provide the key message in the first three lines, and should run to no more than two paragraphs total, on average. For longer content, create a short blurb for your newsletter that summarizes the content, and post a longer article on a web/Intranet site, linked from the newsletter. Sometimes you can divide longer content into multiple sub-headings within one newsletter (adhering still to a two-paragraph limit per subheading).

▲ **Keep headlines succinct and include key words.** Here are some tips:

- Describe the key point of the copy in less than 10 words.
- Use numbers, e.g., “The 5 best...”; “3 Tips to help you...”.
- Use questions to capture interest.
- If the news highlights an expert, use the person's name in the headline.
- Avoid jargon or jokes in headlines.

▲ **Include graphics when appropriate.** Photos and illustrations can help to increase visual appeal but may also take up valuable bandwidth. Use in moderation and keep the potential restrictions of

your target audience in mind – among them, the needs of mobile phone users who may have difficulty viewing larger-sized images.

◆ **Consider inviting respected experts to contribute** an editorial or leading article for each edition.

◆ **More sophisticated newsletters may be able to offer subscribers personalized, automated content** – in effect an *à la carte* menu which allows readers to choose which content they receive from among several relevant themes/options.

Newsletter design:

◆ **The overall look and feel of a newsletter should be inviting and easy to read.** The simpler the design, the easier it is for readers to share the content with others without losing the formatting.

◆ **Maintain brand consistency:** Ensure the newsletter design is based on the organizational brand and any relevant sub-brands.

◆ **Include anywhere from three to five top stories,** in addition to other regular content.

◆ **Place the two most relevant, interesting stories at the top of the page** to maximize the impact of the newsletter in the

email client's preview pane. This will help increase the open rate.

◆ **Include a table of contents for newsletters with five or more sections.** Place it at the top of the email to allow for quick scanning.

◆ **Make sure the format is mobile-friendly.** An ever-increasing proportion of emails, including newsletters, are read on mobile phones.

Interacting with your readers

◆ Establish an email address – again, preferably a person, not a generic one – for submitting content ideas and comments, and include it in your emails.

◆ When promoting a newsletter (for example, on your Intranet/website), provide a clear description of the content and frequency, and share a preview, if possible.

◆ If people are automatically signed up for a newsletter (for example, when they join a work team), then send a welcome message explaining why they are receiving it.

◆ Include a link to subscribe (in case a reader forwards your newsletter to others) and one to unsubscribe in every newsletter. Allow readers to unsubscribe easily with one click. This will ensure that only interested people are on the subscriber

list. Invite readers to suggest or contribute content for the next edition of the newsletter or to suggest a new topic if a thematic focus is chosen. This gives the benefit of useful feedback, cuts down on your workload and strengthens relationships.

Take advantage of social media – such as internal enterprise social platforms like Yammer, or external social media – to promote your newsletter. (Always adhere to any applicable social media guidelines when doing so.)

Distribution

Send out the newsletter at the start of the business day for most of your audience. It is suggested to send newsletters on a Tuesday or Thursday; avoid Mondays since your email may get buried under other urgent messages.



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