

MANUAL

How To Write A Newsletter



By Michael Green

Introduction

The rest of this toolkit is all about providing you with instant success as you edit and produce your newsletter. You'll be able to use the many tools, like the instant Articles Archive and the Desktop Publishing (DTP) Layouts, to make sure that the process is quick and easy.

Have fun writing your newsletters and please be sure to provide me with some feedback. michael@howtowriteanewsletter.com I can't wait to hear!

This manual, however, is intended for you to read when you have a little more time and you want to get right 'under-the-skin' of what makes a successful newsletter shine! You don't need to read it cover-to-cover or even at all, and you'll still be able to produce a knock-out newsletter. But, the manual is here for those who want to get the inside track on what makes newsletters work.

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What is a Newsletter?

Just before we delve into the detail, let's start by appreciating the dictionary definition of what a newsletter really is:

I know of four possible definitions.

- **News·let·ter** *A printed report giving news or information of interest to a special group.*
- **News-letter** \News"-let`ter\, **n.** *A circular letter, written or printed for the purpose of disseminating news. This was the name given to the earliest English newspapers.*
- **Newsletter n** : *report or open letter giving informal or confidential news.*
- **Newsletter** <publication> *A periodically published work containing news and announcements on some subject, typically with a small circulation.*

Something should hit you between the eyes when you read the above dictionary definition of a newsletter. You are not normally attempting to do any of the following:

- Produce a work of fine art
- Produce a comprehensive document, like a very detailed research piece or in-depth report
- Produce a magazine

I only mention this because the newsletter description is virtually a by-word for brief and to the point!

I can't count the number of people who set out to produce a newsletter, making the mistake of thinking of it as a detailed piece of literature or a very high quality glossy brochure. A newsletter isn't any of these things and people's expectations of a newsletter are different from what you might expect.

What I'm trying to get across here is that you can "get away" with content and style in a newsletter that just wouldn't fit in when producing other documents.

Now You're Ready to Start

So, you've been put in charge of writing a newsletter for your club, school, company, voluntary organization - the list is virtually endless. But where on earth do you begin?

Staring at a blank page or screen can make the task seem daunting, right?

Of course you could spend hours, days or even weeks researching your content, writing the articles and then pondering the best format for your newsletter. But I guess you've already made the first right move by deciding that you don't want to follow that route, and that's why you've taken the wise decision to purchase this Newsletter Toolkit.

This manual will show you how to take advantage of the lessons I (and many others) have already learned and I present them to you on a plate in the greatest resource ever for newsletter writers everywhere - the "How To Write A Newsletters" toolkit.

About the Author

About the author - Michael Green:

Like all new business people, I had hoped that I would find that magic combination that would grow my company into something really special.

Of course I wanted to earn a good income, but I was looking for something more than that - I wanted my business to take on a life of its own, to grow even when I wasn't at work, to provide me with a lifestyle and freedoms that few small businesspeople ever achieved.

Well that was the dream anyway!

But it didn't take me long to discover that day-to-day trading in a new business can be a long hard battle. Quite literally! Working days would start at the crack of dawn and carry on through to late evening and beyond.

And the financial rewards were nothing for me to write home about either. Cash was tight and the creditors were never far away from my door.

Something had to change, but what?

An Idea That Leapt From the Page

I sat in my office one dark lonely evening, after a hard day where nothing had gone right. I was six months down the line from having started my "dream" business, but it was starting to feel more like a nightmare.

As I sat there, I started thumbing through a newsletter I'd been sent in the mail. I wasn't paying too much attention as I stared half-reading, half dreaming at an article that lay in the corner of page 6.

And then it started to sink in that I was reading the story of a guy in North Carolina. He happened to be in a similar line of print-related business to me and he was describing how he'd regularly published his own newsletter. My interest grew...

According to the article, his own newsletter had helped take his business from zero to \$1/2m dollars in five years.

It wasn't a flashy claim, his story didn't sound incredible or completely outrageous.

Understand that his business growth was not overnight. He'd done it in five years (not five minutes or weeks). But there was just something about what he'd done that caught my imagination...

By Now, Anything Was Worth a Try

So, more in desperation and hope than true belief, I decided I would follow his example.

And here's exactly what I did...

I produced one newsletter each month and mailed it to a list comprised of all of my customers at that time (less than 50-75) and as many local businesses as I could add to my small database. In month one I got the list to 500...month two I mailed 700...and so on.

Now month-in, month-out I just kept on mailing by post the very same list of local businesses.

It's important to understand that I wasn't writing much about my business in my newsletter like you might have expected. This point needs to be emphasized, now and throughout. Newsletters don't work like brochures (which often don't work at all), they don't work like sales letters (that most people view with some cynicism), they work because they are a subtler form of marketing that people learn to trust.

So my newsletter discussed business, my newsletter discussed lifestyle and it discussed people and management, but it never spent more than 1 out of 4 pages talking about my actual business, products and services!

"Surely that can't work or won't work for our organization", I hear you say.

Please take it from me, it can and will work for you too. And the next chapter explains precisely why.

Twelve Years Later and the Business Had Been Transformed

To put the story in a nutshell, the monthly newsletter became the most significant part of our marketing program. The database grew from the original 500 right up to 60,000 business contacts and they were geographically spread way out of our initial area.

As the mailing list grew, so did the business. Sales soon reached in the \$ millions and we shaped up for an IPO which valued the organization at \$28 million. The IPO didn't take

place when I realized that it would be better to keep this value in my own pocket. I think I did the right thing because the business has kept growing to this day!

I want to say a couple of things at this point:

First of all I'm not saying a word of this with the intention of boasting. Instead, I'm sharing my experience with you because I want you to see and understand that I'm basing everything that I've written here on real life experience - not academic or text book guess work.

The other thing that I need to acknowledge right away is that it should go without saying that publishing a newsletter was never our only form of marketing and it hasn't been solely responsible for all the success.

I mention this second point because from time to time you do hear the most incredible claims made in business, but you and I know that the way to make money or build a successful club or organization (if that's your objective) is to work hard at it. Luck required for sure. Mine was chancing upon that article talking about newsletters some twelve years ago.

But fundamentally nothing is going to happen unless you act on it, and once you have, it's going to incorporate damn hard work - if only dealing with the consequences of the response to your efforts.

The Biggest and Most Important Factor

What I am trying to ensure, that you appreciate before you work through this manual about producing a newsletter, is that my newsletter was and still is THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT in my success! And that's it.

Now we're ready to start on the manual.

Chapter One:

Why do Newsletters work?

Whoever you're producing a newsletter for; yourself, your company, your club, society, school, voluntary organization - whoever...the chances are that it's intended to present you in a good light and can therefore be considered as a PROMOTION for your organization.

There are lots of ways to promote yourself; brochures, sales letters, the web, perhaps newspaper, radio or even TV. But they all have a disadvantage that few have noticed or taken the time to discover.

The problem with all the other forms of marketing covered above is that everyone already knows that the sole purpose of producing the advertising is to promote you (your organization).

There's nothing wrong with blatant promotion. We all need to do it. It is just that the public (businesses, whoever) are simply all too sophisticated to think that you're trying to do anything else.

So no matter how clever or sneaky your advertising, they'll see it for what it is. You're trying to sell them your product or service. Period!

A Newsletter Can Be Completely Different

Why is a newsletter so different? The answer is that unfortunately some are not!

I see a lot of newsletters that look like the organizations brochure, but just under a different name. The owners think that by calling the publication a newsletter, their audience won't notice that all it does is carry on shouting about the same old stuff over and over.

So they fill their newsletter with pages of articles about how great they are, with some dull old news that no-one is ever gonna read and with statements from the President and so on....VERY DULL.

I've yet to see a convincing example of this type of newsletter and seriously doubt that it is ever actually cost-effective to produce something like this. How can it be? It's boring, extremely unconvincing and at best, it might just be perceived as another

corporate brochure.

Your newsletter is capable of so much more!

A Newsletter Builds Incredible Credibility

“A newsletter is the greatest credibility building marketing tool known to man.”

Re-read that sentence and think about it for a moment...

The public has grown cynical of glossy self-congratulatory brochures and salesy marketing letters. Consider for a moment how many times, on average, per week you receive a brochure or a letter through your mail trying to sell you additional credit cards. Most the time you just rip them up without a glance - right?

In short people have grown accustomed to receiving sales based marketing material.

But a newsletter is different - completely different...

That's because a newsletter doesn't appear to seek to sell you anything as its first and primary objective. Instead it seeks to inform, to educate, to build knowledge.

The secret to a newsletter success is that it can lift the credibility of your organization over all your rivals.

The Secret is to Build Trust

Think for one moment about the biggest factor that encourages people to buy or join one organization over another. The answer is “trust”.

People go with organizations that they trust or they know from somewhere. It's just human nature! But let's see why?

Imagine for a moment you require an electrician or a plumber to do some work in your home. Who do you turn to if you don't have a regular person you use? Nine out of ten times you'll turn to a family member or close associate for a recommendation of an electrician or plumber that they used recently and were happy with. Why is this? The answer is that we'll trust the recommendation far more than we'll trust somebody who we located via the Yellow Pages.

Don't think that the above situation only exists in home life. No, it exists in business

and all other environments. We always prefer to work on recommendation - we always look for an organization or individual that we can trust.

Now the chances are that you cannot win sufficient work, members (or whatever your objective is) through recommendation alone. So you're going to need an alternative model to work from. A newsletter is that model and resource!

By publishing a newsletter, rather than another sales brochure, you will build credibility, inform your potential clients, and most critically of all - develop vital trust between you and your potential marketplace.

Trust Builds Through Communication.

So we now know that building trust is vital and the simple lesson is that the absolute key to building trust is great communication. I can't think of a better communication tool, than a newsletter!

Chapter Two

The Purpose of Your Newsletter

We've just described in *Chapter One* how newsletters build trust, but you need to be sure you're building trust with a purpose.

It is important to define the precise nature and purpose of a newsletter:

- Is it to build profits by building sales?
- Is it to educate your market by providing useful information?
- Is it to enlarge your membership by distributing your newsletter to potential new joiners?
- Is it to inform old alumni of your latest news and generate income?
- Is it to build general credibility and awareness for your organization?
- Is it to solve a problem or set of problems for your readership?

It may sound obvious, but be clear about the purpose of your newsletter. Then sum it up in a sentence or paragraph. Grab a pen now and write it down now. This will be your **Statement of Purpose**.

It might be helpful if others (in your organization) were to “buy in” to your statement of purpose, so you might need to show it to them and get their approval too.

Periodically refer back to your Statement of Purpose, particularly when you get onto your 2nd and 3rd editions and ensure that you're still fulfilling the original objectives you set for yourself.

Writing your statement down means that you'll always have an easy reference point to refer back to.

Chapter Three

Debunking those Newsletter myths

Goodness knows how many myths surround the writing world. I often say to people that I have been an editor of a business publication for many years and they look at me like WOW! If I only I had a dollar for every time someone said to me “I wish I could do that”. My point is - you can!

Let's start by debunking the myths that have grown up around the subject of newsletters.

Myth 1 - Don't I need to be a professional writer?

You don't need to be a novelist to write a newsletter. You need a plan and a structure and then you really are ready to start. The tips I'm giving you are to get you started. What you do need though is the ability to speak to people, ideally a sample of your readership, and ask them for ideas. What would they like to see in the newsletter?

So you certainly don't need to be a novelist or a writer. Your job is to try and get inside the heads of your readership and give them what they want.

Myth 2 - My newsletter needs to be accessible to everyone.

Accept the fact that your newsletter won't be read by everyone. Tell yourself this from the start; you are not going to be able to appeal to everyone. Some people will think it's great. Others will glance through it and YES, some may throw it away as it lands on their desk.

That's fine a newsletter should be a targeted resource and the chances are that the whole world isn't going to take a detailed interest.

Myth 3 – Don't I need to write in a formal style for my newsletter?

Write as you speak. Don't think that you have to be an expert in the English language. Pick a style that you are comfortable with that you think will appeal to the reader. I feel that the informal approach is most appropriate in the majority of cases. A formal approach can scare off readers.

Having said that a casual writing approach may work best, don't forget to spell-check everything you write. Casual writing is not the same as writing with lots of typos and spelling errors contained within!

Myth 4 - Won't I need to be an expert in everything I write about?

Don't think you have to have the ability to write about all topics. Write about what's of interest to you. And, if you want to tackle a subject that you don't know a great deal about, then ask someone who does. Most newsletters articles do not descend into great detail so, once you've got the facts together, you will find you can edit an article on virtually any subject even if you don't have personal knowledge.

I was editing an article about nuclear science - a subject that I do not know or understand anything about. I was still able to edit down the facts and present a short 450 word article that made perfect sense to my readership. You can do the same no matter how complex the subject matter.

Myth 5 - Shouldn't my headline sum up the whole story?

The best approach with headlines is to make them short and snappy.

In reality: Since four out of every five people who pick up your newsletter will read the headlines, headlines should immediately deliver the story's primary benefit and attempt to draw readers into the copy.

Myth 6 - Putting blank white space in my newsletter is a waste of space.

With budgets tight across the board, there's certainly a need to use space effectively. But, without a significant amount of white space, a newsletter becomes unattractive and is really hard to read.

Any good designer will tell you that one of the secrets to successful readable design, is

to leave enough white space to give the eye a rest. Don't forget to leave some space in your newsletter too.

Myth 7 - I'm going to need access to a large selection of stock photography and clipart.

Fortunately for you, the resource kit with this newsletter will show you where you can get hold of stock library material, but while more design resources can make a good newsletter even better, you can still use a number of low-cost tools to make your newsletter stand out.

Initial caps are one way to put a little life in a large block of copy. Shaded boxes and varying fonts are two other common methods. Be careful not to use too many fonts however, it just ends up looking unprofessional.

Myth 9 – My newsletter is being paid for by my organization, so that's all it should talk about.

“Striking a balance between product-oriented and Value-Added material”.

If you've already read my introduction or the about the author section, then you'll already know that I have strong views on this subject.

Some people still think that “every article in my newsletter must feature my product and/or company, club, society”...(fill in the blank).

But, as I've already touched on, one great newsletter strength is credibility. If your newsletter contains no solid, practical information, readers are more likely to perceive it as 100 percent sales-oriented, and less likely to read the next issue. Strive for a balance by providing some useful information that doesn't require purchasing your product or service.

You'll already know from my own experience that I think this balance can be as much as $\frac{3}{4}$ Value-Added interest material and just $\frac{1}{4}$ product/service or “about you” orientated. Come to your own balance, but please keep the balance in mind at all times.

Myth 10 - Getting feedback or response

Some people think that there's not really any effective way of tracking response to my

newsletter.

Wrong! You have an entire arsenal of response methods at your disposal, and it doesn't matter whether your newsletter is internal or external. From business reply cards to coupons, it's possible to have some type of response mechanism built into every issue. The key is to listen to what your readers tell you.

Chapter Four

Deciding How or Where to Publish Your Newsletter

It used to be that printing was really the only option when it came to producing your newsletter. But now there are some clear choices:

- Printing
- Internet
- Email
- Other electronic means (like CD Rom, DVD, etc).

The Internet provides a tempting and cost-effective alternative as an answer to both producing and distributing your newsletter. But there are some important factors you should take into account.

This chapter weighs-up the pros and cons of Print over the Net and visa-versa.

Printing - the Pros.

If you're looking to create sheer impact then there's no doubt that a printed newsletter still has a significant edge over publishing on the Internet.

The fact that a printed newsletter is real; you can pick it up and feel the quality of the paper, along with its weight, texture and colors, does ensure a longer lasting impact on your reader.

- A printed newsletter is more portable than an Internet version.
- You can read it literally anywhere; plane, train or even in your bath.
- It requires no electricity or special equipment.
- Paper is more comfortable to read from than is a computer screen.

Think of printing this way. Despite the Internet now being very firmly established with high levels of access in both the home and work, and considering that many newspapers publish themselves completely free of charge online, newspaper sales globally have barely been affected.

This is because it is just easier to read a paper over your morning waffles or cereal, than it is to be hunched over your computer screen reading the news online.

The Cons of Print

There are three key disadvantages of a printed newsletter:

- **The cost of the Print**
Whether you intend to photocopy your newsletter or go for a better quality printed version, there will almost always be some costs attached to the actual production of a printed newsletter. More about these options in your Bonus #2 section.
- **The cost of Distribution**
How are you going to distribute your newsletter? If it is by postal service then you need to factor this into your budget. Or maybe you'll hand it out personally, over the counter or in some other way that doesn't add to your expenses.
- **Timescale delay with Print**
From the moment you provide your printer with the final artwork there will be a pause before you receive the newsletter back. How long? This will depend on the complexity of your printing. Again loads more detail in Bonus #2.

Internet or Email Newsletters

An Internet published newsletter can take a number of forms:

- This can be in HTML (that's regular web pages).
- PDF's (Portable Document Format). This format can be read on screen, but is frequently intended to be printed out. This manual itself is an example of a PDF based document.
- By Email to be sent directly to a subscribers list for your newsletter. This can be as regular plain (ASCII) text or the email can be made to look like a web page (in other words an email can actually contain HTML code).
- Your newsletter can be a combination between an email and a web page! This can be an interesting format as the reader would typically see a headline and read a summary or lead in paragraph of an article, before clicking on a link which takes the viewer to the full article online.

Good for Your Pocketbook

The greatest advantage of an online newsletter - in any of the forms above - is that it is virtually free to publish (though not quite, you will have some Internet Service Provider costs).

Interestingly this actually turns out to be the greatest draw-back of an online newsletter too. Because they are so cheap to produce, there tend to be a lot of them. As a result it becomes harder for the reader to select 'quality' newsletters over something akin to junk or Spam mail.

Less Impact Maybe, But Easier Distribution...

As we've already discussed, an online newsletter doesn't have the impact of the printed version. But it does have some obvious distribution advantages over a printed version of the newsletter.

Suppose that you're publishing your newsletter and sending it out to your membership (customers, potential customers, potential members...fill in the blank). Where do you send it?

In most cases to their home or to their work.

But what if they're not at home or work? One great advantage of email and internet based newsletters is that the recipient can typically pick up their email from anywhere in the world. This means they can read your newsletter from anywhere in the world too!

And when it comes to time sensitivity, you really can't beat the online world. It's instant. Or at least as instant as the regularity with which your reader checks their email or browses to your newsletter website.

Factors That Will Help You Decide Whether to Publish In Print or On the Net

You've probably already developed a good sense as to whether you plan to publish in real life or online, but just in case you're still in two minds, here's a quick check list:

- Budgets - if they are very tight then the Internet is your best bet.
- Impact - if you've just got to have stunning impact, then printing is always

going to win out.

- Portability - Both printing and Internet versions have their advantages here. Paper is generally more portable, but the Internet has faster global reach.

Chapter Five

Getting the 'Look And Feel' of Your Newsletter Right

When we talk about 'Look and Feel' or L&F, we mean more than just the design of the newsletter. If it is a printed newsletter then we're referring to the quality of the paper, as well as typographical issues like the typeface, bullet points and images use.

The L&F online involves many of the same issues (apart from paper stock of course!), but also includes factors such as the style of the hyperlinks used to navigate the reader around the newsletter and decisions over how the navigation bars work.

So the Look and Feel (L&F) is really the design + every other detail that influences the way the reader feels about your newsletter.

Look and Feel

Before a newsletter is designed, the person creating it always needs to make a decision about the style and content of the images. Professional graphic designers will have spent years studying a college, but this section is intended to give you a fast start with some hints and tips for good design. These are therefore general rules of thumb:

Some Rules of Thumb for Design

- Don't mix image styles. By which I mean, if you take the decision to use a certain style of clipart or photography, try not to mix-and-match them together. It just doesn't work well.
- By definition a newsletter is typically not a large multi-page document. If it were, you'd be calling it a magazine or perhaps journal. Because your newsletter probably only covers say 1 to 24 pages in size, mixing in too many styles of graphics doesn't work.
- If you decide to use Clipart, then try to stick to the same style of Clipart throughout.

- If you decide to use Photography to illustrate your articles, then try to stick to a similar style of pictures throughout (i.e. always color or always black and white, etc).
- If you decide to use sketch drawings or cartoons, then that style might be best maintained throughout.

Of course any good designer will tell you that design rules are there to be broken. That's how new and innovative design gets produced. This is true.

But if you're not a creative designer by profession, then you're probably best steering away from newsletters that try to combine all the different types of images available.

Fonts and Typefaces

In many ways the above information about not mixing and matching too much, also applies to the fonts you select.

Now, nearly all newsletter production is carried out on computer and your PC or Mac will have umpteen built in fonts. In addition it will possibly also have hundreds of others supplied fonts with your Desktop Publishing (DTP) package too.

The temptation to make use of all the fonts, at the same time, can be nearly overwhelming. Please take it from me, don't do it!

Resist the temptation to use every font on your computer. Decide on your house font (that's the one which you're going to primarily use) for your newsletter and stick to it pretty rigidly.

You may involve other font styles in designing headings for specific articles. But again, as with the graphics, unless you really know what you're doing when it comes to design and layout, the best advice is to keep it simple by limiting the fonts to 2 or 3 at maximum.

Template Layouts You Can Use Right Now

Don't forget Bonus #1 contains professional newsletter design layouts, ready-to-go, in many popular DTP packages.

Fonts Have Families Too

Broadly speaking there are two or maybe three categories of typefaces. These are:

- Serif
- San Serif
- Script

Serif

The serif font has little tails and hooks on all of the letters. The most common example of a Serif font is the one that this manual has been written in:

Times New Roman

Take a closer look at the letter **N** above. See how the letter uses small hooks at the top and bottom of the vertical lines. Now study the **R** above and you'll notice the lead in horizontal lines at the top and bottom of the character.

The concept behind a serif font is that it is meant to be easier to read. The theory being that each letter quite literally leads into the next, making it more comfortable on the eye.

San Serif

As the name suggests, a San (without) Serif font has no tails or hooks. The individual letters all end in straight lines.

Sans serif alphabets joined the ranks of typefaces in the early 19th century when an English type foundry produced the first sans serif typeface in 1816.

The most common modern examples of a San Serif fonts are:

Arial

Helvetica

See how the **H** (for example) in the word Helvetica contains no hooks or tails and ends in absolutely straight lines.

The concept behind a San Serif font is that they tend to allow more white space on the page by not containing fiddly tails and hooks. This is said to make them easier to read and this may be even more relevant on a computer screen.

So perhaps oddly, precisely the same argument is made in favor of **San** fonts, as is made for **San Serif** fonts. Supporters of each argue that theirs is the easier to read typeface, either because they do or do not have the hooks and tails. Ironic really! You can take your pick and join either side of the argument.

Surprisingly nearly all typefaces fit into either of the above two categories, but I did mention one other and this is the script font.

Script

Script is not commonly used and tends to be reserved for special purposes like invitations and the like. You may find that you virtually never need to use a script font in all your newsletter writing. It is also harder to identify the archetypal script font, but one good example of a script is:

Commercial Script

Chapter Six

How Long Should A Newsletter Article Be?

A newsletter is typically not a long document. So articles need to be brief and concise.

500 words is perhaps a typical length newsletter article, though there isn't a definitive number of letters, words or characters that make up the 'perfect' story and it is good to vary the length of different articles.

Of course the article length will depend on the style, format and size of your newsletter. Short articles can make effective fillers for a corner of your newsletter or a regular feature spot. They also help to break up the longer articles making the newsletter a more enjoyable read. This is really important...

If your readers feel they can 'dip-in' and 'dip-out' of your newsletter, then you will have done your job.

The use of bullet points and other devices also make articles far more readable and gets round the problem of not having all that much space.

Article Length Rule of Thumb

To give you a clue about the best article length, consider this:

Anymore than about 700 words on a letter size page (or A4) becomes hard to fit in much more than an 8 or 9 point font, once you have included a graphic or other heading of reasonable size. 1,000 words are just about the maximum for a page. In fact, if you write as many as 1,000 words, you'll be using very little white space and/or imagery. Neither are very satisfactory situations for the casual reader.

Chapter Seven

Understand Your Target Audience

So you're starting to get to grips with newsletter basics and now it's time to think about the content.

The first thing you need to ask yourself is:

Who are you writing for?

By this I mean two quite distinct things:

- First, which organization are you writing the newsletter for? Who exactly are you representing here?
- Second, exactly who is your intended audience? I mean who's the readership going to be?

You might think that the first question about which organization you're writing the newsletter for might be absolutely straightforward in your case. It might be in principle, but just take a moment to read the next page or so.

Know the Organization That Your Newsletter Will Represent

You may have just landed the contract on a paid or, just as likely, voluntary arrangement to produce a newsletter for an organization that you don't necessarily know a great deal about. If this is the case then **GET YOURSELF BRIEFED**.

If you're going to write a newsletter for someone else, you need to understand their business or organization first. If you're not an expert in the subject field, then start by asking the client to supply information that will quickly acquaint you with what they do.

Request that they send you some trade newspapers, annual reports or yearbooks, and some of their own correspondence, preferably pitch letters so you really understand the organization you're about to represent..

8 Great Questions to Get You Fully Briefed

Setting up an interview directly with your client (or even with yourself), works incredibly well. You'll get under-the-skin of what the newsletter is really going to be about.

Here's my secret list of questions I always want to know the answers to and I would proceed to interview after reading up the background information:

1. What's unique about your club, organization or company...(you fill in the blank)?
2. Who are your clients, customers, members...(again fill in the blank)? This will tell you what kind of audience you'll be writing for.
3. What recent product/services/achievements are you most proud of? Can you show this to me? Describe it in your own words. (This information is good for a news, new-product or press release feature in your newsletter.
4. Are there any clients, past members, etc, who would provide a testimonial about what you do? (Keep it short -- it does make good filler material - and it's full of credibility).
5. Have you won any awards, trophies, cups, recognition of any kind from your industry, league, etc.?
6. Are there any misconceptions we can use the newsletter to clear up?
7. What advances in your industry/field/sport, etc. will interest your audience? Don't get too technical here.
8. What does your audience need to know about your business/service/product/idea/club/society/voluntary group/school/organization?

Know Your Audience

Before writing your newsletter, you must know your audience. This can't be stressed enough. Failure to find out who your audience is and what makes them tick means that you'll be taking chances on the success of your newsletter. So discover the following:

Know their interests

Understand their level of knowledge of the subject and their reading level.

Get to know at least a representative sample of your audience on a personal level. This might even be you of course!

It is true to say that most newsletters are still aimed solely at "potential clients." Of course there is nothing inherently wrong with this, since a newsletter is a marketing tool.

But this single-minded focus on "potential clients" excludes several other very important groups for your newsletter.

These "other" target audiences typically include:

- **Current clients, members, etc.**
- **Potential prospects or members** (including new members, new prospects, summer associates or interns). Essentially anyone new to your organization.
- **Internal consumption by the organization itself.**
- **The industry bodies, sporting associations or specialist press.**
- **The general public.** There's a wider PR role for your newsletter that you may not have considered at all until this point.

Let's take them one at a time...

Current Clients

Your current clients, members, etc. will read through your newsletter from time-to-time. Make it worth their time by providing information that they won't have necessarily seen elsewhere. If the newsletter is printed on paper, then refer them to additional resources online. You might think it strange, but everyone loves to read hard copy which points them in the direction of something useful online.

Try to think of what your organization might mail to clients, and what you tell them over the phone. If this information is not sensitive, proprietary, or otherwise privileged, then include it in your newsletter.

How To Write A Newsletter

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*Looking To Produce A Newsletter?
This Kit Makes It **SO EASY...***

Potential prospects or members

If you're looking for new clients, members, affiliates (whatever is appropriate to your organization) then a newsletter is likely to be a good starting place. I can only speak from experience, but twelve years ago when I started my business, finding new clients was my primary aim for my newsletter. It worked like nothing else we've done since!

There is quite simply no better medium for encouraging "new" people into your organization.

Internal consumption by the organization itself.

From personal experience, you probably know that people within the firm or organization itself will often be the biggest readers of the newsletter. People crave familiarity and reading about something that we already know quite a bit about is often a way to satisfy this most basic of human instinct...

So it stands to reason that a far chunk of your newsletter audience, whether deliberately or otherwise, is likely to end up being people within the organization that you are writing the newsletter for. That's fine. Now you know that this is a key part of your audience, you can shape your writing around this fact. Think about what information you can usefully impart to them.

The industry bodies, sporting associations or specialist press

Depending on the type of organization you're writing for there will be a specialist magazine, trade paper, industry body, sporting association (you get the idea) just looking to fill their pages with interesting informative information. Your newsletter could provide just the source of information that they're looking for, so be sure to add such bodies to your mailing list and write with half an eye on this audience.

Remember if they republish information that you've provided them with, then they'll credit you for it, even if the story isn't directly about yourself. That's more free credibility building publicity for you.

The General Public

No matter how internally focused your newsletter may be, the general public will nearly always somehow get hold of copies of your publication. This often happens by accident. This is a really good thing and you should be aware of the advantages of this fact.

Although you may be focusing your content on a pretty clearly defined bunch of individuals, don't ever lose sight of the fact that the outside world may be reading your newsletter too. Try to incorporate something within your publication that may make your publication and therefore organization accessible to the outside world.

Remember no matter what other objectives you've set for your newsletter, building credibility should always be one. Allow the power of your newsletter to develop credibility way beyond the confines of your immediate audience.

Chapter Eight

Decide On Your Newsletter Frequency

You've already defined your newsletter audience and the purpose of the publication. Now it's time to consider its frequency.

There is no right or wrong answer as to how often a newsletter should be published. It will depend on your subject matter, you audience and of course the purpose of your publication.

But keep this point always in mind. A newsletter, unlike a one-off corporate brochure, is a tool that should be used to continue to build image and credibility.

One Edition Of Your Newsletter Won't Work!

Please accept this one point above all others.

If you plan to publish only one edition and then to sit back and review progress -
PLEASE DON'T BOTHER TO DO ANYTHING IN THE FIRST PLACE.

It may sound harsh, but the reality is that a single issue or edition of your newsletter is unlikely to draw any significant response or feedback.

“Oh”, you might say, “well what’s the point in starting a newsletter then?”

The answer is this...

Newsletters work (and boy do they work!), through a cumulative effect of building trust and confidence with the reader over a period of time. They do not work instantly, well not usually anyway.

Of course there will be some exceptions. The first time someone picks up your newsletter they might just see something that takes their fancy and call you right up to buy or become one of your members or whatever. But if this happens to you, treat this as a bonus, not as the rule.

Because the rule is quite simple. And if you still need convincing, go back and re-read **About the Author** and **Chapter One** of this manual **Why Newsletters Work**.

In a nutshell again:

“Newsletters work because they build trust like no other marketing tool.”

You cannot build trust in one edition, just as you cannot build a true long lasting relationship with someone who you have only ever met or spoken to on one occasion. Please trust me on this point. You must resolve to publish your newsletter on a regular schedule, ideally using pre-defined dates. Only this method will bring the success your newsletter deserves.

Print Publishing Schedules That Work

If your newsletter is physically printed, then your output will be partly limited by how often it is practical to go through the printing process. This may not be a problem for you if you employ a large team of people to help conduct interviews, get the copy together, take or edit pictures and so on...

But assuming this isn't the case for you, here are some practical guidelines and newsletter schedules that work, starting with actual printed versions:

- **Monthly**

A properly printed newsletter can lend itself to a monthly 12-edition-per-year schedule. This will give you time to collate and edit articles, typeset and layout (either yourself or via your designer), proof (an absolutely vital activity), and print your publication.

One month is long enough for your readership to remember that they've seen the publication somewhere before.

- **Quarterly**

Other printing schedules could be quarterly, generally works for a larger newsletter where you have more content to prepare and production issues to consider.

- **Half Yearly**

This schedule can work, but if you want my honest opinion, it's a little too long to stick in someone's memory. Keep in mind that our objective is to build recognition and trust over a period of time. You may decide that either people won't remember your last newsletter six months earlier or that the entire 'trust building' exercise is going to take too long to be worthwhile.

Remember you are not going to be talking to an always static audience. People move around and when they do they frequently get knocked off your mailing list, either intentionally or by accident. If you only mail them twice a year, you're running the risk of losing contact before you've even got going!

Internet Schedules for Your Newsletter

With the Internet it is possible to publish more frequently. For one thing you won't have the printing and distribution delays which can be quite significant in the production lifecycle.

Possible production schedules for an online newsletter are as follows:

Daily

Almost certainly not realistic unless your newsletter is very short and to the point. Some do manage a daily newsletter or eZine, but those who do it would normally have a small team working with them.

Weekly

This is practical and can work very well. Particularly good if your newsletter does not incorporate complex graphics or imagery. Also easier to achieve if your newsletter is just distributed by email, rather than being backed up by a web site that your readers click thru' to.

Monthly

A monthly newsletter published online can work fine. As with a fully printed version, if you produce monthly then you should be allowing yourself ample time to write and edit, etc. It may well be that you plan to publish via Email, the Internet and in Printed format. If this is your plan then monthly is ideal, but again don't underestimate the commitment required to make it happen on time - every time.

Obviously you've got a massive head start owning this kit because you'll find many of the resources you need right at hand.

But Leave Them Wanting More...

Remember you're building a relationship here and just like with any human relationship you need to give and at some future point you'll receive in return.

But you should also bear in mind that you somehow need to leave the reader wanting more. Thinking in the back of their mind; "I'll take a look at the next issue of this newsletter when it shows up."

Getting the frequency of your newsletter right is crucial to leaving your readership wanting more!

Chapter Nine

Naming Your Newsletter

By this stage you may already have a name in mind for your newsletter, if you do then great! If not then here is some useful information that should get you well on your way.

The Components of a Successful Name

There are three useful components that frequently go together to make a successful newsletter name:

1. Include the topic of your site in the title.
2. If appropriate, use the locality of your organization.
3. Use the term News or another word that suggests timeliness.

So a fishing club based in New Jersey publishing its monthly newsletter, could quite easily be called ***The New Jersey Fishing News (or newsletter)***.

Now of course you can be a lot cleverer than that if you like, but please be careful not to lose your readership with the brilliance of your idea.

Remember - the job of your newsletter is to talk directly to the audience you want to build that trust relationship with. Be too clever and half of them will never even bother to work out that it was them who you were trying to get through to in the first place!

Keywords That Work With Newsletter Titles

Want to know what will work in a newsletter title? Here are some tried and tested options. But don't think just because they've worked before they're tired titles. Not at all. I've listed these words here because they have endurance power and impact. You won't go far wrong with any other them.

- abc News
- abc Today
- abc Now
- abc Times
- Modern abc
- Better abc

- abc Hints
- How To xyz.
- abc Tips
- Understanding xyz
- abc Hints & Tips
- xyz secrets

But try and avoid the format “Company Name Newsletter”. Of course it describes who the newsletter is about, but it’s completely boring and something of a turnoff. Why? Because it doesn’t offer any particular benefit to the reader.

Let me explain...

Suppose you’re writing a newsletter for a lawyer. The lawyer is called **Winston, Eves & Craig**. So you decide to call their publication “**Winston, Eves & Craig Newsletter**”.

This is dull, non explanatory and is not going to draw in the reader. Why should it? There are no perceived benefits in it for the person reading the newsletter.

Now suppose you call the newsletter “**Make the Law Work for You**” and subhead it “**by Winston, Eves & Craig**”. Now you’ve got a publication that instantly demands interest. It promises some benefits for your reader and you’ll still get the credit as the organization behind the publication.

Now that would turn out to be rather a long heading and you should work to find something that is both snappy and appealing for your title.

Brainstorm for ideas, don’t reject anything until you’ve written it down and completed the brainstorm session, then go back through and start crossing out or amending the names that don’t make the grade.

There’s a handy website with can help you with your brainstorming at www.nameboy.com. You’ll find this particularly useful if you intend to register the domain name (URL) of your newsletter too, because it shows you which domains are currently available.

Good luck finding the right name!

Chapter Ten

How to Write Newsletter Content without Doing All the Work

One of the greatest challenges for any newsletter editor is not as the job title suggests 'editing', but finding or producing the content.

Some people view newsletter editors in the same light as magazine editors. Nice comparison shame it just isn't true!

You see a magazine editor probably has a sub-editor, a photographer, a picture editor and a number of reporters. They probably still complain that they are badly under-resourced. But they're not compared with you of course.

So you've go to learn a few shortcuts!

Have Others Do the Hard Work

One of the fastest ways of establishing content for your newsletter is to let others provide the content.

The trouble is, you can send out an open invitation to your colleagues to write an article by a certain deadline if you like. But you can be pretty certain that they won't turn up by that deadline - if ever!

So here's a great tip!

Conduct an Interview and Tape It

Get hold of a key member of staff, head of the sailing club, whatever is appropriate. Tell them that you know that there's an audience out there who would just love to hear about his/her views and that you're coming down to do an interview (this can be done over the phone if need be).

Now set your Voice Recorder, Answering Machine or Dictaphone running and ask the key questions you know your readership is waiting to hear the answers to.

Remember to ask the open ended questions. Those are the ones starting with; *who, what, why, when, where and how.*

When you've finished the interview off you go with say 20-30 minutes of recording and your job is simply to play it back and write it out, editing as you go.

Remember you want to keep the content as interesting as possible. And there's nothing more interesting to the reader than hearing about something that answers a problem that they have. So keep the interview rich in problem solving and benefits and you can't go far wrong.

Get Your Interviewee Feeling Relaxed and Comfortable First

Some people may at first be uncomfortable at the idea of you recording them. Explain that your short-hand isn't too good and that this just makes your task easier.

Switch the tape recorder on early and chat about some general stuff first. This will put your interview at ease and then, by the time you're into the interview, they'll probably have forgotten the tape machine was even there.

Most people are pretty flattered to be asked to be interviewed. Some will be surprised that you think they could have something to add. Only you and ultimately your readership will be able to judge.

Guest Articles

Sometimes setting up an interview just isn't practical. The potential interviewee is just too far away (and won't telephone interview well) or they may not have the timeslot available to give you a face-to-face interview.

A good approach can be to ask a potential interviewee to write you a column instead.

If the individual is accustomed to being asked for an interview then they may already have some prepared text, but assuming they don't have an off-the-shelf article ready to give you, here are some useful ground rules to set or suggest:

- Ask your guest contributor to write between 400 and 700 words.

- Be prepared to heavily edit their contribution if they run over. 700 words isn't much, but newsletters rarely work with large articles.
- Set some clear criteria for the article, unless you are happy to give your guest columnist a completely free hand. The bigger the name, the more freedom you'll typically give of course.
- Set out what you'd like to achieve in the piece in one brief paragraph and email it to your contributor, along with the copy deadline.

If your guest contributor turns out to be interesting enough this might even turn into a regular feature of your newsletter.

Wow - imagine that, an entire column already filled before you start to even think about the content for each issue.

Use the Copyright Free Article Archive

You've bought this toolkit and that means that you have free access to an entire Newsletter Article Archive of completely copyright free material. That's an amazing resource for you to use!

But don't go thinking that it isn't relevant to you...

Remember how we've already said that newsletters work by building credibility. Remember that my success was created due to my commitment to send out a newsletter, month-in, month-out, filled with genuine quality material, not just going on about my own business, but captivating my audience and interest to my prospective customer base.

Chapter Eleven

Your Writing Style

- What Works In A Newsletter?

When writing a newsletter you need to select (and stick with) a style that you're comfortable with. Your style might be:

- Formal
- Informal
- Sales Driven

You won't be surprised to hear that I believe that newsletters are best and are most accessible to the reader in an 'informal' style. There are sometimes exceptions where a more formal style will be appropriate.

However, there are virtually no circumstances in which a Sales Driven style will work. More of the reasons why below.

Think Of Your Newsletter as a Personal Letter to a Friend

When you write your newsletter think as you might do if you were writing a personal letter to a close friend.

The advantage of this one to one chatty approach is that your reader will be left with the impression that you are addressing him/her directly.

Try to avoid writing in a very salesy style. It just doesn't work.

If you wanted to write a direct sales piece then go ahead and write a sales letter or produce a glossy brochure. That way everyone will know and appreciate that they are being 'sold' to.

Remember that the key advantage of a newsletter is its ability to gain the respect and confidence of your reader. Do not forsake this trust!

Push Aside Any Concerns About Not Being a Writer

Good newsletter copy is not necessarily the product of a writing genius.

Look, the one person I know who has the most impressive grasp of the English language, who also happens to have more than one English degree and has written for a variety of non-newsletter publications, also happens to be the person who's written English is the most difficult to follow.

How can this be?

The answer is that whilst he writes entirely grammatically correctly and knows how to construct sentences without split infinitives, he doesn't really seem to have the knack of getting a message across in a form that most individuals can actually understand.

So you don't need to have come top of your class in English or have language degrees to communicate.

What you do need to do is sit down, have a clear picture of the story you're about to tell on paper (preferably sketched out in rough headings) and then write things down in a manner that anyone could understand.

And I mean anyone...

The Twelve Year Old Reading Test

Here's a good test – Ask your 12 year old (or borrow one from a friend ☺) to read your newsletter stories out to you. Listen for the sentences that your young friend stumbles over and when they've gone re-write them. I guarantee that these exact same sentences are the passages that are making your newsletter too much trouble for the average Joe to comprehend.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not saying you should look down on your readerships reading abilities. Far from it!

What I am saying is that you are trying to grab a couple of minutes of some pretty busy people's time, so don't make it harder than it has to be for them.

I already said I wasn't suggesting that your readership was stupid. I am saying they're busy people. So respect their time constraints and far from looking down on them, you're respecting that they have choices what they read and that you appreciate they're reading your work.

The Overnight Sleep Test

Now I don't commit anything as finished copy until I've slept on it for at least one night.

An old trick, but it still amazes me how something I thought was a written stroke of genius at 11pm one night, looks like total junk to me the next morning.

And that's why I *always* try to leave at least one night between finishing my writing and letting it be published anywhere.

Chapter Twelve

Newsletter Headlines That Will Always Work Wonders

A good headline is THE key element when it comes to grabbing your readers' attention. Nothing else will have quite the same impact, not even your graphic or picture.

But coming up with that leading headline can be a real strain. Your story might lend itself conveniently to some clever little headline that almost falls out of your brain onto the page. But you know that most of the time this isn't the case.

So here are some great headlines that you can always turn to when you're stuck for something else. They are tried and tested – some are quite old too. But don't let that stop you. The reason they've been around the block is that they work. And if it ain't broke, then don't try to fix it.

Think of this collection as your own private resource that you can turn to when your brain isn't serving up what you want.

Here goes...

Headlines That Will Never Fail You

Shape these to your purposes. Fill in any xxx's with your own words.

<i>How To xxx</i>	<i>7 Ways To xxx</i>
<i>Solutions To xxx</i>	<i>Stop Looking For xxx</i>
<i>New From January</i>	<i>First Time Out</i>
<i>Get Rid Of xxx</i>	<i>Stop Press</i>
<i>Have You Ever xxx</i>	<i>Finding The Right xxx</i>
<i>New..New..New</i>	<i>Important Information</i>

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This Kit Makes It **SO EASY...**

<i>Don't Miss Out</i>	<i>Something You're Looking For</i>
<i>The Answers You Need</i>	<i>Better Ways of Working</i>
<i>Influence At Zero Cost</i>	<i>Lifetime Reward</i>
<i>Easierxxx From Now On</i>	<i>Questions Answered</i>
<i>Privileged Information</i>	<i>Secret Briefing</i>
<i>Background Brief</i>	<i>Take A Closer Look</i>
<i>A Better Way</i>	<i>Faster xxx</i>
<i>Quicker xxx</i>	<i>Better xxx</i>
<i>Easier xxx</i>	<i>Save Money</i>
<i>Extravagant But Worthwhile</i>	<i>Improve Your Image</i>
<i>Build On Your Success</i>	<i>Never xxx Again</i>
<i>Bigger And Better</i>	<i>Improved Performance</i>
<i>Always On Time</i>	<i>Never Been Beaten</i>
<i>Now You Can xxx</i>	<i>Ever Thought Of xxx</i>
<i>Want To Understand xxx</i>	<i>Thinking Of Improving xxx</i>
<i>Free Lifetime Membership</i>	<i>Join Up Now To xxx</i>
<i>Beat The Crowd To xxx</i>	<i>Chance Of A Lifetime</i>
<i>Don't Miss Out On xxx</i>	<i>Stop Wasting Time xxx</i>
<i>Subscribe For Less</i>	<i>Only xxx Places Left</i>

<i>Welcome Back xxx</i>	<i>The Easier Way To Pay</i>
<i>Order Now To Avoid Disappointment</i>	<i>Get This Bonus When You xxx</i>
<i>Happiness That Money Can't Buy</i>	<i>Voted The Best xxx In The USA</i>
<i>Top Of The xxx</i>	<i>Number One xxx</i>
<i>Your Best Bet For xxx</i>	<i>Guaranteed Satisfaction</i>

Guidelines for Generating Headlines

Certain things will always work well in headlines. When I'm short of a headline I always check off the following top list and I'm soon writing again:

- Try to ask a question in your title. Eg. Need A Loan?
- The words *You* or *Your* are emotive, they apply to the individual reading the newsletter and are far more interesting to anyone than *We* or *Us*
- Get personal. Don't be embarrassed – get inside your readers head with your headline.
- People are always subconsciously thinking one thing; "What's in it for me?" Give them the answer in your headline. Right there and then, not in your body text.
- Certain words work like: now, new, first, better, larger, bonus and lots, lots more that I've deliberately included in the headlines above. Use these words to generate instant interest from your readership.

Chapter Thirteen

Pulling The Strands Together And Testing It All Out

Well, if you've just sat down and read this information from beginning to end you might well be now thinking:

“That’s a lot of information to take in, digest and actually use.”

And this thought may well quickly be followed by:

“Where on earth do I actually get started?”

If this is the case then don't worry.

First of all you start with a massive advantage. You already have a ton of material, particularly in the form of article content, that you can use right away!

Now I know there are a lot of folk out there who have bought this toolkit, but haven't gone to the trouble of reading every last page. Are they happy? You bet because they don't need to spend hours authoring quality articles and fillers for their newsletters anymore.

But the fact you've read through this manual means that you have the desire to produce a newsletter which probably exhibits your own style and flair and I'm keen to help you along.

Where To Start

- Start with a 'tester' edition, be that in print or on the internet (by email) and gauge the response.
- Don't over-commit to one specific aspect of your first edition. For example don't invest a disproportionate amount of time in establishing one column or feature, only to then discover that your readership isn't interested.

- Hang on to things that work. When you've found an aspect of your newsletter that is well received – keep it. Don't change things for changes sake!
- Most of all don't be frightened of 'getting it out there'. Sadly, most newsletters really fail before they've even got started. Confidence in the project can suddenly wane because of a side comment by a friend or associate. Bizarrely these (sometimes) unintended 'put-downs' or jokes can deflate new editors to the point where the first issue is never really tested properly with a proper sample readership. Don't fall into the trap of believing everything that one or two close people tell you. Get out there and test it with your true audience.

And Finally

Once you've got your first issue out there and had some feedback from your readership, I'd really appreciate it if you would drop me an email. I'd love to hear your newsletter success stories first hand. My email address is michael@howtowriteanewsletter.com

Good Luck!



Michael Green
How To Corp

P.S. This toolkit is geared towards newsletters and their content, i.e. articles, etc. The information covers either online or offline newsletter equally well.

If you happen to be producing an online newsletter or Ezine (for the purposes of making money from your newsletter), you might like to know that I have produced a toolkit called the [Easy Ezine Toolkit](#).

None of the information in this toolkit is duplicated, as it approaches the subject from the perspective of building an online, money making Ezine. Check it out here: www.easyezinetoolkit.com

P.P.S. If you are interested in turning your newsletter into an Acrobat PDF, but are not certain how to go about the task, then I can highly recommend the [How To PDFcreator](#). This is an outstanding resource which de-mystified PDF production for me and I still use the [How To PDFcreator](#) as a continuous reference guide.