

Learning something new from your company newsletter

Article provided by HMA Public Relations

For companies looking to communicate internally, newsletters offer the perfect medium to deliver important information to employees and vendors. Despite the large number of newsletters produced, many often go unread. The reason? Newsletters often fail to deliver unique content.

As companies increasingly rely on Intranet Web sites and e-mail to deliver information, employees have decreased their reliance on written newsletters. Many organizations have elected to abandon printed newsletters altogether, in favor of cheaper and more flexible e-newsletters. These electronic versions often have no restrictions on space, allowing for more in-depth coverage of important company issues. They also allow for communicators to gather immediate feedback from electronic surveys and online feedback forms.

Whether your organization's newsletter is printed or electronic, the key to increasing readership is not in the way it is delivered. Instead, it's a newsletter's content that draws in readers. Here are a few suggestions to help spark up your company's newsletter.

Count on content to deliver readers

Make sure your newsletter is something people want to read. This may seem like a simple enough concept, but how do you ensure the information important to management is equally valued by employees? To help identify important content, try putting yourself in your reader's shoes. What stories and topics are interesting? What information will help them be both productive and happy employees? To help identify the topics that matter to readers, organize a focus group for employees to share their opinions. Use the opportunity to suggest story ideas for upcoming issues and judge their interest.

Once you have selected the most important stories and items, place them on the front cover. Also, use graphic elements like kickers, decks, sidebars, and pull quotes to make articles more visually appealing. Not sure what a kicker or deck looks like? Scan your local paper to learn various ways to format stories or consult a public relations professional.

Give in to better graphic design

Understanding how to use graphic elements to entice readers is art form. Skilled design also takes a solid understanding of how people read. Start by studying other company's newsletters. Notice how they use colors, space and design elements, such as headings, subheads, and drop caps to emphasize parts of the page. These important visual cues will help readers navigate your newsletter. They also allow readers to select stories of interest. But be careful. Using too many elements can confuse readers and leave them feeling frustrated. Instead, try keeping your visual elements consistent. Select two or three fonts

and using them consistently. Where appropriate, try inserting visuals, such as photos, illustrations or graphics to help break up the page.

Snappy sentences are key to shorter paragraphs

Open up your daily newspaper and you are likely to read short, punchy sentences. By keeping sentences short, readers stay focused. Paragraphs are also limited to two or three sentences. Long columns of text intimidate readers, making lengthy stories difficult to read. For long articles, consider breaking the story up into a series or crafting a sidebar story. Also, try incorporating hard-to-grasp or highly detailed information into easy to understand graphics. Surveys show readers are able to better understand complex information when displayed in a chart.

Get you readers involved

Lastly, offer your readers equal access. Newsletters don't need to be used as a platform for management. By offering readers the opportunity to communicate with other employees and management, it increases the value they place on the newsletter. Employee surveys, letters to the editor or guest columns are all ways to ensure readers have a voice in their newsletter.

HMA Public Relations is a full-service marketing communications agency whose experience encompasses work in the traditional marketing communications disciplines including public relations, media relations, marketing communications, issues management, community relations and special events.

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