

How to Handle Troublesome Subscribers With Kid Gloves

By Alexandria K. Brown

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It was four years ago, and I was nearly in tears when a good friend called me. "What's wrong?" she asked.

"You know that e-mail newsletter I started a few months ago?" I said.

"Yes."

"Well, it's been going really well — I have about 500 readers now. But a subscriber just sent me an e-mail, and all he wrote was 'Take me off your %\$&#* @ list, you %\$&#* @ spammer!' All my subscribers are opt-in. I never sign ANYONE up myself. This guy subscribed on his own, but now he thinks I'm a ..." I cringed at the upcoming word, "... SPAMMER! I'm going to quit publishing."

"Hey!" my friend reasoned with me. "Don't say that. It's just business, Ali. You're always going to get one or two bad eggs in the bunch. That's just how it goes. You're really putting yourself, your ideas, and your e-mail address 'out there,' and there's a risk to that."

She then reminded me how much business I'd gained from publishing my e-zine, and all the compliments on it I'd received from clients, prospects, and associates. Of course she was right. That e-mail hurt, but it wasn't directed toward me. That guy probably had a bad day — maybe he got in a car accident or got fired — and then he opened his e-mail inbox to find dozens of junk e-mails.

Turns out my story isn't uncommon. Many credible e-zine publishers have shared that they do receive nasty e-mails from disgruntled subscribers who forgot they subscribed and are convinced the e-zine is unwanted mail (otherwise known as "spam").

The bottom line? Don't take any chances. Here are six things you can do to avoid problems AND handle any trouble gracefully.

1) Publish on a regular basis. If you send out your e-zine on a haphazard schedule, you risk subscribers becoming unfamiliar with your newsletter and mistaking it for spam. They may have forgotten they subscribed!

2) Always put a *masthead* at the very top of your e-zine that tells your readers WHO you are, WHY they're getting your e-mail, WHAT your e-mail contains, and how they can CONTACT you.

3) In EVERY issue, remind the reader that she SUBSCRIBED to your missive! Something like this will do: "You've received this e-zine because you subscribed to it! If you wish to unsubscribe, please scroll to the end for more information."

4) Provide CLEAR unsubscribe instructions for your readers. Most e-zines put these at the bottom, but some are putting them at the top now to make it easier to find. If your list service allows, always provide a way to unsubscribe via *e-mail*. (It's easier for many of your readers to send a quick e-mail instead of link to the Web.)

5) No matter how easy and clear your unsubscribe instructions are, realize you WILL get some folks writing YOU directly to take them off your list. Accommodate them immediately.

Now, I know a few publishers who disagree with me on this one. They instruct these people to "go back and follow the unsubscribe instructions." But I say just take care of it NOW on your own to avoid future problems — you won't have to do this often anyway.

Send them a polite reply (no matter how rude they were). Something like this will do nicely:

"Dear READER NAME ,

Per your request, I have manually removed your name from our subscriber list. Thank you for giving us a try. You should not be receiving any more issues of EZINE NAME. If you do have any more trouble, please write me personally at E-MAIL ADDRESS and I'll be happy to help.

If you'd like to tell me why you're unsubscribing, I'd appreciate it. I'm always looking to improve my content and your feedback would be valuable.

Have a nice day.

NAME"

6) If someone writes you to politely disagree with your article or editorial, be happy about it. Why? This means people are READING your e-zine, and are so interested in the topic at hand that they want to talk about it with you! If what they have to offer is valuable, you may want to begin a dialogue. I've developed many valuable online relationships with colleagues through discussing the points of my newsletters.

However, if they're obviously writing just to hurt you or make you feel bad, here's where you need to be the better person. Don't fuel the fire — diffuse it. Simply give a respectful acknowledgement. Here's a completely neutral reply that you can use for these occasions:

"Dear READER NAME,

Thanks for writing! I really enjoy hearing from my subscribers, especially from other professionals like you. That's a very interesting point you bring up, and it's well taken. Thank you for sharing it.

Best,
YOUR NAME"

Through these petty annoyances, remember the big picture of why you started your e-zine. It was likely to gain credibility and "expert" status. Your professional reputation is at stake. By publishing an

e-zine, you're also in the business of customer service. No one will want to hire you or buy from you if you're less than courteous and pleasant. Word spreads like wildfire on the Web! It ALWAYS pays to be kind, be considerate, and to "take the high road." :)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alexandria K. Brown, "The E-zine Queen," is author of "Boost Business With Your Own E-zine." Sign up for her FREE newsletter that shows e-zine publishers how to write irresistible content, promote their services and products, and gain thousands of subscribers quickly. Subscribe now via <mailto:EzineQueen-On@lists.webvalence.com> or at <http://www.ezine-queen.com>

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