

Keep Your Company Newsletter Out of the Circular File

By Jessica Albon

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You spend a considerable amount of time and money on your print newsletter and the only way your investment pays off is if your readers actually interact with your newsletter in a positive way. Unfortunately, most company newsletters don't do a very good job of encouraging any such interaction.

How can you make sure your newsletter's one of the successful few? Here we have the five key questions your newsletter must answer to leave a lasting impression on your readers.

Who's it from?
How's it relevant?
Is it interesting?
Why read it now?
Why keep it?

Who's it from? You wouldn't believe the number of companies that neglect to make it obvious who the newsletter's from. It's often not enough to include your company name on the newsletter somewhere. Rather, consider each newsletter an opportunity to introduce your business to people who've never heard of it before. Your mailing label should include your company's slogan (and a bit about what you do if it's not obvious) and logo. Ask someone who's unfamiliar with your company to take a look at your newsletter and guess who it's from and what they do. If they can't, perhaps it's time to make some changes.

How's it relevant? Your readers don't have much time. Clearly they don't want to spend what little time they have reading something that's not going to apply to their lives. You might prove your newsletter's relevance by putting a table of contents near the mailing label (don't list article by title, rather list them by benefit). You'll find some great examples of proving relevance at the newsstand. Take a look at the magazines available and see how they convince readers that's what's inside is worth reading.

Is it interesting? After you've proved to the reader it's relevant, you still have to prove that it's interesting. Interest is typically a matter of tone and depth. Some readers prefer formal newsletters with articles that examine each facet of a limited topic, while others want a more general approach with a more playful tone. Get it right and your readers will wait by the mailbox for your newsletter.

Why read it now? Make sure your readers see the information as applicable right now. What's applicable will depend on your readers, but in general, if you have information that's in some way timely (safety features, for instance), promote it up front. You can also offer your readers special discounts and promotions.

Why keep it? Not all company newsletters should be kept, and you'll need to determine whether or not yours should. If you decide you do want readers to keep the newsletter, you can add value to your publication in the form of reference articles or collections of resources. If you want to make sure readers can always find your newsletter, perhaps you could start new subscriptions with a manila folder to keep all the issues in (or a binder, if you prefer). An alternative is to offer something they can keep from each issue-an index card of important phone numbers, for instance-that they'd cut out or remove from the newsletter before throwing it away or passing it along.

When your newsletter answers these questions, your readers will see more value in it. While you simply can't get everyone to read your newsletter the moment it arrives in their mailbox, you can encourage readers to look forward to receiving your newsletter.

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