

Basic Formatting Rules for Building a Successful Ezine - Part 2

By Max Shifrin

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Max Shifrin
max@funezines.com

Fun Ezines <http://www.funezines.com>

Just as in life, there are three tiers of wealth in the ezine industry. There is the lower class who have fewer than 500 subscribers. Then there is the middle class with 501 to 100,000 subscribers. And finally, there is the upper class who have more than 100,000 subscribers. Some of the really rich have a subscriber base in the millions!

There are some simple rules you can follow to get from the lower class to the middle class, then from the middle class to the upper class. First thing you must do is understand the rules and then make the determination as to whether you really want to be in the middle or upper class. As in life, the middle and upper class do not escape the bonds of the lower class until they make the determination that they are willing to work hard and do what it takes to succeed.

The basic formatting rules of a successful ezine are geared to take you solidly into the middle class in the ezine publishing world.

In Part One, we covered the basic structure, the use of html email or standard text email, standard fonts and widths, section and item dividers, and the use of Ascii Art in an ezine. You can get an autoresponder copy of Part One by sending a blank email to:

<mailto:articles@funezines.com?subject=art002>

In Part Two, we will continue to move forward with a look at the table of contents and static content, URL and email hyperlinks, and advertising in an ezine.

TABLE OF CONTENTS AND STATIC DATA: In the newspaper industry, there is a term called "above the fold". What this refers to is

when a newspaper is folded in half, the top of the front page is what catches the readers attention first. Newspaper editors spend a great deal of time determining just exactly what will appear "above the fold", as this is the information that will drive impulse buyers at the newsstands.

On the net and in email, "above the fold" is the first thing you see in your presentation before someone scrolls down. Just as in the newspaper industry, part of this space should be devoted to telling what it is they are looking at. If you keep this portion of the ezine the same from issue to issue, then your reader will open the ezine and know exactly who you are and what they want to do to begin reading your publication.

Generally, I try to keep three pieces of information above the fold.

First. I want to include an Unsubscribe email address. I really don't want them to unsubscribe, but people will drive you nuts with demands to unsubscribe them, unless you are willing to make it absolutely obvious to them how to do so on their own!

Second. I want to include the name of my ezine, the publication date and the issue number, and if I am into sharing my number of subscribers, I like to place this information as well.

Third. I want to tell my reader how to find what they are interested in finding. I have published many ezines, and in each the Table of Contents varied in its style and presentation, but it was always there. In some cases, I simply outline the sections in the ezine, and in other cases, I outline the sections and tell the name of the article that is included in each article section.

URL HYPERLINKS: It is all about simplifying the adventure for your readers.

If you are sending HTML email already, you can skip this part. If you are sending text mail, you have two methods to consider. The question of which method to use resides in how many of your subscribers are AOL members.

Most email applications will take a link that has the "http://" printed in front of it and make it a hyperlink already. AOL demands to be different. For your AOL subscribers, you have to make a choice. To give them hyperlinks that they can click, you must format it as:

```
a href="http://mylink.com" http://mylink.com/a
```

For the remainder of your subscribers, you only need to present:

<http://mylink.com>

For non-AOL subscribers, the first option can become quite unattractive and challenging to read, especially with long URL's. For your AOL subscribers, the second option must be copied to their browser. If you leave the "http://" off of the link, all readers would have to cut-and-paste the link to their browsers.

Given these options, most successful publishers choose the second option, because it simplifies the process for the majority of their readers.

EMAIL ADDRESSES: The same rules that apply to the "http://" tag also apply to an email address. You can choose either to make the email address a hyperlink or you can choose to let people copy-and-paste the email address to their email application.

I recommend always making the email address a hyperlink. It is only a matter of simplifying processes for the majority of your readers. The method that you would employ to do this is to attach the text "mailto:" directly in front of the email address, with no spaces in between the two.

With the email address as a hyperlink, the reader can simply click on the link and their email software will open to a new message that is properly addressed.

ADVERTISEMENTS: Advertising in ezines is common practice. These advertisements are the lifeblood of the publisher, and can take the form of ad swaps, in-house ads and paid advertising.

Whatever the format, readers tend to carry on about how they do not want advertising in your ezine. Yet, readers do understand the importance of advertising in their reading materials. So while they openly argue that you should do away with them, they fully expect the ads to be there.

Internet-wide, the arguments of whether advertising should be permitted or not, has generally been muted. On the other hand, consumer advocates have launched a fight against a certain kind of advertising that you should be careful to avoid. The argument has risen to prominence in this era of pay-per-click search engines. The concern is in attempting to pass off advertising as content.

If your goal is to alienate your readers, then by all means, go ahead and try to pass off advertising as content. However, if you are like most publishers, and consider each of your subscribers to be as important as the next, then take steps to distinctly identify advertising as advertising.

You should always set that advertisement apart with special advertisement divider bars. One technique I have used in times past was to identify the "advertisement starts here" bar and the "advertisement ends here" bar.

Whatever method you use to distinguish an advertisement from content is fine. Just be certain that you do so.

IN CLOSING: Formatting your ezine consistently is one of the most important steps you can take in developing your subscriber base. It is not so much that one format is superior to the next; it is that a standard format will take you further than no format at all!

Each of us will reach our own conclusions about how we want to format our own ezines. And often times, we will tweak those formats many times in the life of our ezine. Tweaking the format once every six months or completely overhauling the format once a year is fine. The real killer of an ezine is changing the format from week to week, issue to issue.

If you want to grow your ezine into the middle class by breaking the plateau of your 500th subscriber, then you should take a good hard look at your formatting points. While getting to the upper class in the ezine publishing world cannot be done with formatting alone, you certainly cannot get there without stabilizing your format. After all, only the rarest of ezines can ever reach the middle class without a stable format.

The whole premise of formatting and the individual points of formatting revolves around one central issue. That issue is simplifying the experience for your readers. If you make it easy for your readers to read your publication, your readers will make it easy for you to grow the size of your subscriber base.

Resource Box:

Max Shifrin, the owner of <http://www.FunEzines.com> specializes in helping ezine owners build their subscriber base. Max uses massive promotions to generate hundreds, even thousands of subscribers every month for over 100 ezines! Want Max to grow your Ezine? Visit: http://www.funezines.com/clients_signup.cgi Make sure you subscribe to Max's Popular Marketing & Publishing Ezine Send an email to: <mailto:promotion-tips-subscribe@topica.com>

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