

Creating The Perfect Newsletter

By Mitchell Harper

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Mitchell Harper
mitchell@sitetell.com

SiteTell :: The New Tell A Friend Tool <http://www.sitetell.com>

[Introduction]

In this article I'm going to tell you the secrets to creating a great newsletter that will have your visitors come back to your site in a shot! We'll discuss what type of content you should publish in your newsletter, how often you should send your newsletter out, and most importantly, how to "speak" to your visitors through your newsletter in order to have maximum impact, and drive them back to your site in droves.

[What do I publish?]

A newsletter is one of the most cost effective and fast ways to communicate with your site's visitor base. However, if you send your visitors newsletters that contain old, stale content, spelling errors, dead links or too much advertising, then what's the likelihood that they'll return to your site? The chances are low. The number one purpose of a newsletter is to try to encourage each and every subscriber to come back to your site. "How do I do that then?" you ask. Through interesting, informative content, that's how.

Here are a couple of ideas for content that you can put into your newsletter:

[1. What's Happening?]

A What's Happening or News section informs visitors of any new additions to your site since the last newsletter was sent out. In this section you can alert visitors to any new articles or interesting inclusions you've made to the site. Here's an example of what you might say:

-- What's Happening @ MySite.com? -----

Hello Everyone,

Welcome to the mid-January 2002 issue of MySiteNews. It's been another extremely busy yet productive month over at MySite.com, so let's take a look at some new features that both myself and my entire team has helped add to the site:

...

[2. Poll Results]

What's that? You don't have a poll on your site? Head on over to www.expresswebtools.com and get your free poll up and running in 5 minutes. Whenever you send out a newsletter, change the poll and include the results of the last poll in your newsletter. Use something like this:

The last poll question was "What type of content would you like to see more of?". There were a total of 149 votes. The results are shown below:

- Articles: 58 votes or 39%
- Book Reviews: 11 votes or 7%
- Product Reviews: 13 votes or 9%
- Interviews: 14 votes or 9%
- Case Studies: 33 votes or 22%
- Sample Books Chapters: 20 votes or 13%

The poll for the first half of February 2002 is sure to start some raving and ranting, and is entitled "In the Netscape vs Microsoft case, who are you rallying for?" Vote right now at MySite.com

Notice how I've mentioned the details of the current poll, and I've given the user a reason to re-visit the site and vote again? Do this in different ways throughout your entire newsletter.

[3. Personality]

Add your personality to the newsletter -- address your readers and let them know that you're there if they ever need anything. In my newsletter, I write the first half, and my newsletter manager Todd writes the rest. At the end of my editorial, I make sure that my farewell's on a personal, rather than professional note. Here's the kind of thing you might write to finish off your editorial:

Well guys, that's my two cents' worth for these past two weeks at MySite.com. If you've got any questions or suggestions, please email myname@mysite.com or post them in our forums.

I know it doesn't seem like much, but think what would happen if you left this kind of message out. In my experience, visitors

like to know that there's a real person writing the newsletter and that it's not compiled by some super computer on the other side of the world.

[4. Unique Content]

Include unique content that your users can't find anywhere else. In my newsletter I always include a "hot tips" section, which lists five hot tips that users can benefit from immediately. Depending on your target audience, you could include simple tips as well. For instance, if you ran a programming-related site, you might include a tip like this:

```
In C# you can place code within a checked block to have the C# compiler throw an exception if any overflow occurs when casting one data type to another.
```

Or, you might want to include a few more advanced tips:

```
In ASP you can use the DateDiff function to work out the difference between dates in terms of either days, weeks, months, years, etc. To get the number of days between Jan 1st 2001 and Dec 31st 2002, use it like this:
```

```
Dim oldDate  
Dim newDate
```

```
oldDate = "01/01/2001"  
newDate = "31/12/2002"
```

```
Response.Write DateDiff("D", oldDate, newDate)
```

Make sure the tips you include are unique to your newsletter, and be sure to allow yourself time to plan them. Sure, each tip is only a couple of lines long, but when a visitor finds a tip that helps them out, you're guaranteed that they'll be on your site quicker than you can say "pageviews".

Another great (although time consuming) method to add value to your newsletter is to include a "newsletter-only" article with every issue. Take 2-3 hours a week and write a 1,000-2,000 word article that you include exclusively with your newsletter. Mention this on your newsletter signup form and watch your subscriptions soar.

What kind of content should you include in a newsletter-only article? Well, try content that relates to some of the more popular articles listed on your site -- the ones that visitors have emailed you about to tell you how the article's helped them accomplish a certain task, etc. Your visitors will love this type of article because it's an additional bonus that no one but them will receive.

[5. Recent Articles and Posts]

Listing recent article and forum posts in your newsletter is a tried and trusted method to pull visitors back to your site -- and it's easy. Simply list the ten most recent articles and forum posts that have been added to your site. If you don't have a forum on your site, then check out Wayne's article entitled "Forum Script Round-Up". In your newsletter, you might show visitors the ten most recent article posts in a list, like this:

-- Latest Articles @ MySite.com -----

There have been a total of 13 new articles posted in the last two weeks. They are shown below:

- Working With PHP Data Types
<http://www.mysite.com/article/1/55>

...

[6. Advertising]

If you have more than 1,000 newsletter subscribers, you should include sponsor ads with each issue you mail. I usually include two or three five-line ads (of 65 characters per line) in mine. The key to effectively marketing a brand or product in your newsletter is to choose those that interest your visitor. For example, if you run a shoe store, include a promo by a shoe company that links the visitor to their site to download a discount coupon.

One last thing I always include in my newsletter is an option for visitors to unsubscribe. Make it clear at both the top and bottom of my newsletter that your users can unsubscribe at any time, like this:

This is the bi-monthly newsletter from www.mysite.com . If you would like to un-subscribe at any time, please send an email to <mailto:newsletter@mysite.com> with "unsubscribe" in the subject field.

[7. Frequency]

It all depends on the amount of new content published on your site and how many visitors your site has. Let's say that Fred Black runs a site about tennis and receives 4,000 unique visitors per day. Fred also receives an average of fifty new newsletter subscribers each day. His site has been running for six months, so he has around nine thousand newsletter subscribers in his database.

Let's also say that Fred is a busy man who coaches tennis too. He coaches five people every day, so he doesn't really have that

much time to add new content to his site, which he updates once every 4-5 days.

In this scenario, Fred should send out a monthly newsletter that summarizes the new content posted on his site, any new messages in his forum, as well as a couple of paragraphs about the latest tennis news, such as the winner of the recent Australian Open.

But how frequently should you send your newsletter? Well, as a good rule of thumb, the smaller your site, the less frequently you should mail your newsletter. If you add new articles to your site every day and have a nicely populated subscriber list, then a daily newsletter is not uncommon. On the other hand, if you only receive a couple of hundred hits per day, then perhaps send your newsletter monthly, and spend more time on promoting your site.

[8. Tone]

When you send your newsletter, most of your visitors will assume that it's been compiled by a couple of guys that help run the site and that it's just a ploy to get users to return to your site, or click on the ads included in your newsletter.

You have to change the recipients' mindset so that they're more receptive to your newsletter and its contents. In terms of how you write your newsletter, try to talk to your visitors like they're your friends, and you're simply emailing them to catch up. As I mentioned earlier, Todd is our newsletter manager. When Todd takes over the second half the newsletter, here's what he says:

Hi guys, Todd here... how's everyone going?

See how he introduces himself and makes you feel like there's actually a person composing the newsletter? Too many newsletters are just marketing junk. If you want to create a healthy subscriber base, make sure you address your visitors like Todd does -- and maybe even spare a paragraph or two to tell them about what's been going on in your life.

However you do it, the more comfortable your visitors feel when you "speak" to them through your newsletter, the more likely they are to trust you, re-visit your site, and click on your sponsor ads.

[Conclusion]

Well, there you have it... the list I use whenever I send out my newsletter. If you don't send out a newsletter because you don't have the faintest clue what to include in it, then hopefully this article has given you some creative inspiration to start one.

If you already send out a newsletter, does it include everything

I've mentioned in this article? If not, maybe you'd like to take some tips from this article and use them to better equip your current newsletter.

A newsletter provides your users with useful, informative, free content that is sent to them on a regular basis -- and as such, it's the best way to communicate with your visitors, and invite them back to your site.

[About the Author]

Mitchell Harper is the author of many eBooks and he also owns SiteTell. SiteTell is a unique viral marketing tool that lets your visitors tell their friends about your site using either email or ICQ in just seconds. SiteTell harnesses the power of viral marketing, making it extremely easy for your anyone to let their friends, family, colleagues and others know about your site!

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