

# Tackle a Newsletter and Come out on Top

By Beth Brodovsky

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Unlike any other marketing vehicle, newsletters give you the opportunity to contact your audience and convey your expertise in a way that offers value and information. Newsletters provide a reason -- and a structure -- to maintain ongoing contact. One of our clients has even said that recipients call if her newsletter is a few days late.

A newsletter can include all kinds of information you might otherwise have to develop multiple vehicles to communicate.

Provide Information :: new phone numbers, address changes, new hires, additional services.

Get feedback :: announce a contest, run a survey, promote a hotline.

Brag :: share recent successes, a case study, announce staff speaking and publishing efforts.

It's very important to provide some non-self-serving information too. Educating your audience about your field can only enhance your image and the value of your relationships.

If gathering all this information on a regular basis seems daunting, it doesn't have to be. There are ways to manage the task and develop a valuable piece in a timely and cost-effective manner.

Schedule :: Seriously think about how often people want to hear from you, as well as how much time you have to devote to a newsletter. Time does cost money, whether you do it yourself, delegate it to a staff member or contract with an outside creative firm. Develop a schedule you can sustain.

Size :: How long should it be? Look at others in your field, ask good clients, and think about how much time you want yourself, your staff or your service provider to invest in this project.

Scope :: What is it going to be about? One way to tame content is to choose a few areas to cover and write articles within those areas. For each section, have a list of topics. When building each issue, fill each "slot". You can also expand and re-purpose content you already have. Create a

"news" section to re-purpose press releases, a "question of the month" that draws from the FAQs on your website. What to include depends on your audience. Longtime clients may connect with knowing that Mary Jones had twins last month, but will the CEO of your hottest prospect?

Send :: Choose your mailing list according to the goals of the project. Is the main purpose client contact, prospecting, education or something else? You can pull names from your own database, build a new list from research, or rent lists from a variety of list brokers.

Style :: Are you going for a casual note or a professional communiqué? The answer lies in your brand. This piece, as in all good marketing development, should not be developed in a vacuum. Your newsletter should be an integrated element of your corporate positioning.

#### Maximizing a budget

After managing schedule, size, scope, sending, and style of a newsletter, the last "S" in the list could easily be "Spend." If launching a newsletter still feels time consuming, expensive and beyond your experience consider these ideas for getting a professional look while watching the budget:

Existing content :: Just about every industry has resources to buy, rent or republish (with permission) everything from articles to complete newsletters.

Stock design :: Want a professional look, but custom creative is out of the question? Try using templates from simple publishing programs, preprinted papers, or have a designer create a template that you can fill in every issue.

Preprinting :: Have your designer develop a shell that can be printed in color. You or your designer can typeset each issue, then copy or digitally print in black.

Email :: Skip the printing. Eliminate printing and postage costs by sending an e-newsletter. From a simple email to a fully designed interface linked to your website, the options are rapidly expanding for digital communication.

#### Maximizing your effort

Newsletters are a bonus, as articles can be multi-purposed to become a section on your website, a submission to other online and off-line publications, the basis for other marketing tools and the outline for seminars and speaking engagements. That's four potential uses from one effort.

#### Maximizing your ability

Most professionals are not trained designers, marketers or desk-top-publishers. Think carefully about the cost/benefit ratio here. If you are putting in extra hours struggling with details and the results don't reflect the style and quality of your business.

The most important thing to remember when developing any tool is to think about the why. If you haven't spent the time to develop your message, position, brand and strategy you are on a path with no destination. If you know where you're headed, a newsletter can help make it an easier journey.

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