

The Big Newsletter Secret

By Robert F. Abbott

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A Manager's Guide to Newsletters <http://www.managersguide.com/info.html>

What comes to mind first when you think about publishing your own newsletter or ezine?

For most of us, content enjoys top of mind status. As a professional newsletter publisher for more than a decade, the question I hear most often goes something like this, "What should I write about in my newsletter?"

It's a good question, and an important one. There's no doubt content merits your attention.

But, don't let the importance of content blind you to strategy, especially if you're just getting started with a newsletter or ezine.

Strategy, you see, is the big newsletter secret. It's the articulated purpose that ensures you direct your publication to the right people, and for the right reasons. Get the strategy right, and the rest -- including content -- should fall into place automatically. Miss the strategy, and you'll be forever frustrated, trying to get the parts right without knowing what the whole looks like.

If you're not sure what strategy means, take a look at some of the many online sites that discuss it. I found a number of them by doing a couple of quick search engine searches, using the keyword phrase "business AND strategy" (without the quotation marks).

Expect some confusion after reading more than a couple of articles, since everyone has his or her own definition of strategy, and how it should be developed. Still, after you read at least a few of them, you'll begin to sense a common core, one you can appreciate as you develop your own strategies.

Generally speaking, strategy means putting together the big plan. What am I trying to accomplish? What do I have to do achieve my objectives?

For a newsletter publisher, there are three key elements to strategy:

- * choice of medium
- * publishing objectives, and
- * reader needs.

Choice of medium: Before starting, asking yourself this question: "Should I use a newsletter, or would another medium (ads in newspapers or direct mail, for example) be better? Think hard about the amount of time and money you would invest in your newsletter, versus the amount of time and

money you would put into some other communication vehicle.

Publishing objectives: A newsletter will cost you time and money. What do you expect to get out of it? Will you get a return on this investment? The best way to get a return, of course, is to select a few well-defined and achievable objectives and then focus intently on achieving them

Reader needs: Readers won't look at your newsletter more than once if you don't provide some information they find helpful, entertaining, or otherwise relevant. And, don't forget credible; these must be subjects on which strangers believe you have some expertise or meaningful experience.

Once you've worked out a strategy, then you can turn to tactics. In the case of newsletters, this involves:

- * selecting subjects (content)
- * how you will present that content
- * how often to publish
- * how many words or pages to publish

If you've done a good job on your strategy, you'll find it much easier to make these tactical decisions. Much easier to make the right decisions, too!

Finally, a word of warning: Developing a strategy, especially one that's well thought out, can be time consuming and difficult. But, it's always worthwhile. And, you may find it as enjoyable a creative challenge as writing and designing.

Robert F. Abbott shows you how to create and publish a professional-quality newsletter or ezine in his book, *A Manager's Guide to Newsletters: Communicating for Results*. Read more about this breakthrough book at <http://www.managersguide.com/info.html> .

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