

12 Ways to Improve Your Newsletter's Format

By Stephen Bucaro

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By Stephen Bucaro

Has your newsletter kept the same format for over a year? Is your newsletter's format based on a currently available template? If so, you may be losing subscribers and money. Over the last year, several major changes have occurred on the Internet that may have made your newsletter's format obsolete.

One change is the pervasiveness of spam and the wide implementation of email filters to deal with spam. Another change is the increased sophistication and lack of patience exhibited by Internet users. Bring your newsletter up to date by making the 12 changes described below.

1. DO NOT use a creative email subject line.

Do not use a cute or creative phrase for your newsletter's email subject line. This will cause the recipients email filter to send your newsletter to the spam bucket. The subject line should contain only the name of your newsletter. To avoid getting filtered, make sure the subject line contains the word "newsletter".

2. DO NOT personalize your newsletter.

Everybody knows their name was inserted by an automated

application and that you don't really have a clue as to what their name is. Your readers will view you as insincere and dishonest. Don't use insincere and dishonest automated personalization. You are tricking no one.

3. DO NOT put a "this is not spam" message at the top of your newsletter.

Unless your newsletter can be mistaken as spam, do not put a message near the top of your newsletter stating something similar to "by subscription only ..." or "you subscribed ..." or "to unsubscribe...". If your newsletter can be mistaken as spam, see the following tip.

4. DO NOT use a "top sponsor" ad.

Although advertisers pay more for the top sponsor ad position, accepting them causes you to lose money overall. This is because the first thing your subscribers see when they open your newsletter is advertising. You lose subscribers. Don't waste your subscribers time, get to the meat first - your feature article.

5. DO NOT use a "Contents" section.

Do not put "Contents" near the top, or anywhere in your newsletter. Although almost all newsletters have a contents section, there are three reasons why you don't want it.

1. You are publishing a newsletter to make money. You make money through advertising in your newsletter. You want your readers to peruse the entire newsletter, including the advertising. If your reader sees nothing of interest in the contents they just delete your newsletter without reading any part of it.

2. It wastes the readers time. As an example, next time you watch TV news, notice how they waste your time "telling you what they are going to tell you". Instead of wasting so much time telling you what they are going to tell you, why don't they just tell you?

By enticing you with coming stories, they hope to prevent you from flipping to another channel when they go to commercials. That doesn't work with me. As soon as they start telling me what they are going to tell me, I flip to another channel. Don't waste your readers time by telling them what you are going to tell them, just get to it!

3. The contents section lists only the titles of the articles. Unfortunately, nowadays writers are too busy thinking up cutesy titles that don't give you a clue as to

what the article is about. Therefore, reading the contents is a waste of time.

6. DO NOT put a message welcoming new subscribers.

Assuming that your newsletter has a low turnover rate, the vast majority of your readers will be old subscribers. You force old subscribers to read the same "welcome new subscribers" message over and over again in every issue.

The fact is that even new subscribers are not interested in your "welcome new subscribers" message. New subscribers are trying to determine if your newsletter will provide them with useful information, or if they should un-subscribe immediately. Judging by a "welcome new subscribers" message, your newsletter appears to waste their time.

7. DO NOT bore readers with your personal life.

As your subscriber opens your newsletter, they are thinking "what's in it for me". They couldn't care less that you are going on vacation, that your child did something cute yesterday, or that you have a new puppy. They only care about what's in your newsletter that is useful to them. Don't waste your readers time with trivia about your personal life.

8. DO NOT leave a lot of white space.

Someone wrote that text is easier to read if you leave a lot of white space. Was that idea based on a scientific survey, or was it one persons opinion? I suspect it was the latter. Leave one blank line between paragraphs. Never leave more than one line blank anywhere in your newsletter.

White space is equivalent to "dead air" time on radio or TV. Leaving a lot of white space in your newsletter just forces your reader to scroll more. Don't waste your readers time.

9. DO NOT apologize for a missed schedule.

Sending your newsletter on a regular schedule is one indication of professionalism. But it may surprise you to know that if you miss a publication date - nobody will notice. Contrary to your delusions, not all of your readers are sitting on the edge of their chairs waiting for your newsletter to arrive in their email box. Your newsletter is just not that good.

If you are a day or two, or even a week late sending out your newsletter, I promise you, nobody will care. And the

last thing you need to do is post a message in your newsletter pointing out your lapse in professionalism and making excuses.

10. DO take advantage of viral marketing.

A virus is an organism that spreads itself around. Your newsletter should be like a virus. Ask your readers to forward your newsletter to their friends. Make sure your newsletter has a subscribe link so that anyone that comes into contact with it can easily subscribe. Give reprint rights to the articles, as long as they include your resource box.

11. DO thank your readers for their support.

There are hundreds of thousands of free newsletters. This reader chose to give your newsletter the value of their time. An honest thank you is never a waste of the readers time.

12. DO tell subscribers why they should not unsubscribe.

You should always place an unsubscribe link at the bottom of your newsletter. Just above the unsubscribe link, you should put reasons why the reader should NOT click on the unsubscribe link.

Remind the reader of what they get from your newsletter. Entice the reader to stay by mentioning what will be in the next issue. Display the number of subscribers. If that many subscribers think the newsletter is of value, maybe unsubscribing would be a mistake.

Major changes that have occurred on the Internet over the last year may have made your newsletter's format obsolete. By making the 12 changes described above your newsletter will be better able to deal with spam filters and with todays demanding and impatient Internet users.

Resource Box:

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