

The Ideal Number

By Bob Osgoodby

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Having published a Newsletter for over 8 years we've learned a few "tricks". Probably the most important one is that people want to get their information as quickly as possible. They are not willing to wade through tomes of information, no matter how well written, to get the ideas presented in the articles.

If two identical newsletters are published, except one has a rather long article, and the other has a condensed version of the same article, there will be a disproportionate number of "unsubscribes" from the first, and few, if any, from the second. This has got to tell us all something.

The ideal number, we have found, is 750 words or less. Personally, I try to keep all the articles I write (and publish in our Newsletters) under that number. If I let my fingers get away from me, and have exceeded that number, I take a long hard look at the article. Nine times out of ten, it can either be shortened or made into two articles. People who submit articles of 1,500 words or so, are basically just wasting their time, unless it is an article they are writing under contract for a "hard copy" publication.

Articles should always be submitted in text format. While it is convenient for the author to write in a "doc" format, many publishers will automatically delete articles submitted this way due to the danger of viruses.

Most modern word processors have a word count feature. As you are developing your article, if you check this on a regular basis, you can achieve the desired size without having to go back and rewrite it.

The second, and equally important "trick" is to word wrap at 65 characters per line. If you don't, people may receive your article in a format that is very difficult to read. Many mail packages default to 65 characters per line, while others default to a higher number.

If they receive an email that is wrapped at 80 characters, and they are set for 65, they will get 65 characters on the first line and 15 on the next. The entire article will be presented like this - very distracting.

Almost all mail clients (readers) will display 65 characters per line correctly. There is also less eye

movement required using the shorter line, making it easier to read. If this is the case, why would anyone consider using a longer line.

If you do not have a sophisticated word processor, "Word Pad" will serve the purpose. First - set your margins using "Page Setup" under the "Files" Tab to .25 inches on the left and 1.5 inches on the right. Select the "Courier New (Western)" font with a font size of 12. This will give you exactly 65 characters per line. Other margins and font sizes will work, but be sure you are getting the correct number of characters per line.

Now, you can estimate your word count. Figure an average of 11 words per line. There will be short lines and blank lines between paragraphs. If your article is around 70 lines long or less, you should be in the ballpark. This article, for example is 54 lines. The actual word count is 570 - close enough? You may vary a bit on the actual count, but at least you'll have an idea of the length of the article and be close to that "ideal number".

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