

So, You Want to Start an eNewsletter

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While not compelling, I am starting this report with a basic definition because it's necessary and makes for an easy and logical jumping-off point.

Newsletters are basically professionally written informational resources that are produced in paper-based-printed or electronic formats. Newsletters are published periodically and distributed to interested parties on a subscription or non-subscription basis. Newsletters are one of the most effective ways to get your message out to people who may want information about your expertise in any given field, as well as information about the products and services you offer. With a newsletter you have the flexibility of providing information through different formats and types of articles – all geared toward keeping people mindful of your products and services on a consistent basis.

Three Types of Newsletters:

1. Free, public relations and marketing newsletters for building awareness of your business or organization.
2. Employee newsletters for keeping internal staff informed and entertained.
3. Paid-subscription or free newsletters that contain non-marketing-oriented information created by experts in a specific field(s).

The primary focus of this report is on free, public relations and marketing newsletters published online and emailed to interested subscribers. These are typically referred to as eNewsletters or eZines, and they are geared specifically toward building relationships with your customers and growing your business or organization. Near the end of this report, there's a short section about employee and paid-subscription newsletters.

Your Best Bet: Develop a Business Relationship With an Experienced Professional Writer

Perhaps the greatest challenge when creating any eNewsletter is writing its content in a way that is compelling and interesting to your prospective customers. For that you will need an experienced professional writer, unless you have great writing skills and enough time to write interesting and clean copy on a fairly regular basis. If you decide to hire a professional writer, you will need to allocate a significant amount of time during the early phases of your eNewsletter production schedule to establish an efficient, collaborative, mutually respectful, and friendly business relationship with that person. Once this initial process takes place during the production of your first eNewsletter, the production of all future eNewsletters should go smoothly, without taking up too much of your time except for brainstorming articles and reviewing and approving subsequent issues.

A professional writer will know how to gather information and ask the right questions. Professional writers are skilled at assimilating everything he or she will need to know about your business in order to write interesting and clean copy; are capable of effectively interviewing your current customers and extracting the right information from them for testimonials about your business; and can conduct research about your industry, in general, and synthesize such information into useful articles that your subscribers will find helpful. A good professional writer will also become a consistent resource for new and refreshing story ideas inside every eNewsletter you ultimately publish.

Looking for the Right Writer

Big corporations have internal full-time professional marketing and communications employees who create their eNewsletters. Some businesses farm out eNewsletter production to advertising agencies. Other businesses hire a professional writer to provide eNewsletter production services.



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Advice On Writers

David Meerman Scott, author of “The New Rules of Marketing and PR” and his most recent “World Wide Rave,” advises business people to hire journalists to write their content:

A good journalist can create interesting stories about how an organization solves customer problems and then deliver those stories in a variety of formats: articles, e-books, Web content, podcasts, and video. Consumers will love it. How refreshing to read, listen to, and watch these products of journalist expertise instead of the usual come-ons that typical corporations produce. ¹

About Design

Try to avoid getting opinions about the design of your eNewsletter from people who are not professional graphic designers. In short, have a professional graphic designer put together the entire look and feel of your eNewsletter. If you can't afford to hire a graphic designer, use one of the numerous templates that are available through eNewsletter publishing and distribution services. Although this may not be the perfect solution – because templates simply do not give your eNewsletter its own unique look – a template-drive eNewsletter will look clean and professional, and most of your subscribers will not know the difference. Whatever road you take, there are some basic rules to keep in mind when producing your eNewsletter:

- **Be graphically consistent.** Make sure all your pages uses the same fonts (preferably one for headlines and another for content, unless you want to get fancy and use multiple fonts).
- **Don't worry about colors too much.** People tend to get very opinionated about colors. Pick two or three primary colors that you like, plus black, that do not make your content difficult to read (yellow, for instance is hard to read) and go with them for your headlines and body copy. Special graphics and photos can be in full color or they can have special tones and shadows applied to them for special effects.
- **Make it readable.** Use fonts that are easy to read and make the spacing between letters, words and lines ample enough (but not too large) for easy reading.
- **Don't overdo it.** Try to find a balance between design and content. In other words, don't over publish photos and graphics all over the place and don't write copy that is long-winded and difficult to follow. Be concise in everything you write. Don't go wild with special graphics, font treatments, photos and colors.

First Order of Business

Before you write and design anything, your number-one task is to define the needs and wants of your target audiences. Begin with an in-depth review of your current and prospective customers and try to segment them into categories. For example, a community college typically services a wide range of students, from high school graduates seeking associate degrees in specific trades to middle-aged people looking for one or two courses that cover certain workforce-development skills. A beauty salon might serve age groups ranging from teenagers to seniors, all with different attitudes, needs, desires, and lifestyles. A coffee shop, depending on its location, might have a customer base comprised primarily of artists and liberals, along with suburban conservatives. A manufacturer might sell to a wide range of customers all with unique personalities, traits, and buying behaviors based on numerous needs and wants. A doctor might find that most of his or her patients tend to be over 50. A nutritionist might service a lot of people with Type2 Diabetes.

Figure out how to draw up clear descriptions of each of your customer groups in a

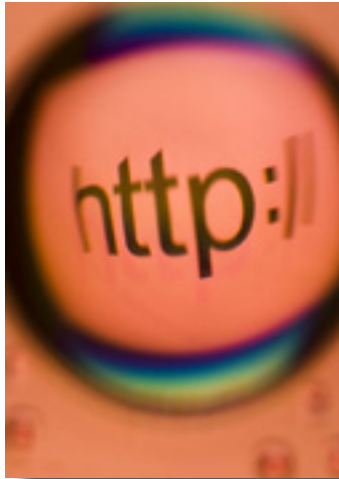


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way that will allow you to target messages geared specifically toward their needs and wants.

The young community college student will want details on how he or she can use that two-year

degree for immediate employment after graduating. The older student is seeking a job promotion. That middle-aged woman who frequents your salon might be dealing with hair loss, and she needs information that will help her make a decision about what preventive measures she may be able to take. The artist sipping tea in your café every day is interested in reading articles about local artists. The diabetic has an interest in knowing how eating fruit can affect glucose levels. All these people can be slotted, as best as you can, into specific groups. Either you or the writer you hire can compose messages for, and share information with, each group. So, your newsletter might end up having a wide variety of articles, or you might consider creating multiple newsletters, each with unique messages targeted toward each of your customer groups.



So, how do you acquire this information about current and prospective customers? Here's a short list of strategies and tips:

- **Develop friendly relationships** with all of your customers so they feel very comfortable sharing information with you. In short, become a friendly, outgoing person with a sincere and genuine concern for your customers at all times.
- **Think like an investigative journalist** and ask your customers a lot of questions without being overbearing.
- **Take copious notes** and keep files relative to all of the information you have collected about your customers' needs and wants.
- **Hold a special drawing** with a decent prize. In order to enter the contest, have your customers fill out a survey that asks them about their needs and wants, as well as how they feel about the products and services you provide to them.

How to Get Visitors to Your Website and Amass Email Addresses

There's plenty of common-sense advice out there about how to build eNewsletter subscriber lists. Yes, you can post an opt-in box all over your website, but you need to have people other than your relatives and close friends coming to your website. How do you get them there in the first place, let alone have them

submit a short online form to subscribe? The first thing you need to know is that this typically takes a great deal of time and energy to develop. The second thing you need to know is that you'll have to become extremely devoted to collecting email addresses.

1. **It takes time to develop a website that gets lots of visitors, let alone getting those visitors to subscribe to your eNewsletter.** You can read all you want about Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and pretty much go crazy trying to figure out how to optimize your site so you come up on the first page of Google search results. In my opinion, no matter what you do regarding SEO, you may not make it to the top. There's no secret formula. However, you should incorporate a certain number of best practices into your website design in order to at the very least be in the game, so to speak. In my opinion, if you religiously follow the rules listed below, eventually your search rankings will improve, perhaps dramatically. However, I also believe – based on my own trial and error – that it's anybody's best guess as to how long you may or may not get to the top, or near to the top, of search results.

- Change your website content on a fairly consistent basis and use keyword weighting techniques (Google "keyword weighting" for more information).



- Publish free content that is interesting and valuable to your customers (like this report).
 - Get other respected websites to link to your website.
 - You can do all the SEO meta-tagging/keywords stuff you can muster, but this may not have any real impact on your search engine results.
 - Use some form of website analytics software in order to figure out what keywords might bring the most visitors to your website over time, then use those keywords in your website content. Try Google Analytics – it's free.
 - Invest in online advertising programs such as Google's Adwords and Business Wire and other wire news and press release services.
- Start a blog and register your own Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn accounts and any other social networking services you are interested in. Consistently post relevant content that your target audiences will find useful and interesting. Basically, become a publisher of information that is geared specifically toward the wants and needs of your customers. Be aware, however, that it may take a good number of months to get a substantial number of readers.
 - In all your communications be sure to include a link to your website.
 - Post on other people's blogs.
 - Do your best public relations outreach by getting major newspapers and magazines to interview you about your expertise as frequently as conceivably possible.
2. **Become a Dedicated Collector of Email Addresses.** This is much harder than it sounds, and it is time consuming. Eric Groves, Constant Contact's Senior Vice President, Global Market Development, provides some sound advice about this topic in "The Constant Contact Guide to Email Marketing." Below are some of Eric's tips related to building an effective email list.
- Place an email sign-up list or guest book at the front counter of your business.
 - Map out your sources of customer connections and come up with a plan for engaging them in interesting conversations and asking them for contact information.
 - Make sure your employees know the importance of making connections and collecting contact information.
 - Post your newsletter opt-in on every web page and include a strong call to action.
 - Have a sign-in link to your newsletter in your email signature.
 - Network with other businesses or organizations that are related to your business but not a competitor and promote each other's newsletters.
 - On the local level, make connections through business organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, and business networking clubs and make presentations about your products and services to the members of these organizations. Collect attendee business cards or have attendees fill out a form that grants you permission to send them your eNewsletter. ²



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Another great source of information on this topic of how to build up subscribers to your eNewsletter can be found in Mary Ellen Bates's informative 14-page e-book titled "The Art of E-Newsletters: How to Effectively Create and Market Electronic Newsletters." Here are some of Mary Ellen's tips:

- Introduce the first issue of your eNewsletter through a broadcast email to everyone you know, asking them to subscribe as well as encouraging them to forward your introductory email to colleagues whom they believe might be interested.
- Create a business card that promotes your eNewsletter and pass it out frequently.
- Publish at least one issue of your eNewsletter on your website so potential subscribers can see its value prior to actually subscribing.³

eNewsletter Service Companies

Now that your eNewsletter has been written and designed, how are you going to publish it and manage its distribution?

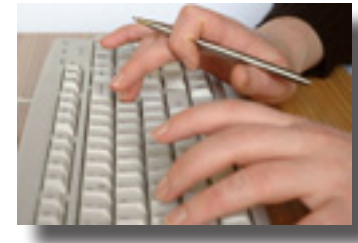
There are a good number of web-based eNewsletter publishing, distribution and subscription analytic service providers to consider. My favorites, to date, are listed here. I'm sure there are many more viable companies that provide these services that I have not yet discovered. I suggest that that you check out all of these services by using their free trials and reviewing their costs based on your needs.

- Constant Contact
<http://www.constantcontact.com>
- Campaign Monitor
<http://www.campaignmonitor.com>
- iContact
<http://www.icontact.com>
- MailChimp
<http://www.mailchimp.com>

A Word About Employee Newsletters

Employee newsletters are probably the most fun to create because you get to interact with and interview company employees in order to create the content. The vast majority of employee newsletters are created internally by the company's communications staff, and they are typically published both online and in print. Some companies farm out the production of employee newsletters to advertising agencies or free-lance writers. Over the course of four years, I wrote, designed and published a monthly employee newsletter, called the "D-Eye," for the now defunct Desert Inn Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. This was pre-eNewsletter days, during the early years of my writing and publishing career when I was fresh out of college. I'd write features on various departments throughout the resort and casino; take numerous photos of employees; do special employee profiles, featuring interesting stories about their hobbies and interests outside of work; announce new hires; feature important news

and information that came out of the human resources department; design photo spreads of employee events; and create special Q & A columns with management and staff. Overall, it was a lot of fun job getting to know just about every employee at the Desert Inn.



A Word About Paid-Subscription Newsletters

If you're a top-notch expert on something, and you know that the information you can provide is both unique and of high value, you may want to start a paid-subscription newsletter that is made available to subscribers for a fee in print via snail-mail and online. Before even entertaining such an idea, however, you need to understand that this is the kind of business that typically takes years to establish. Plus, in today's free-information-rich digital age, making money from paid subscriptions is an extremely difficult task. Nonetheless, there are successful enterprises in this realm. Two well-known, highly successful examples that immediately come to my mind are the Kiplinger Letter and the UC Berkley Wellness Letter. Both have print and online editions. The Kiplinger Letter is a weekly newsletter with more than 133,000 subscribers (as of June 2008) that costs \$117 annually. The Wellness Letter is a monthly newsletter with more than 240,000

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subscribers (as of December 2009) that costs \$24 annually. If you want to start a paid-subscription newsletter, you can easily look closely at the websites of these two long-standing publications to get a fairly good idea of what it will take to get a paid-subscription newsletter up and running.

After trying this myself with a newsletter that I started in 2002 as a paid-subscription monthly and then moved to a free quarterly – called “Educational Pathways” – I have to say that the forced-free-trial promotional method is one of the best ways to get a paid-subscription newsletter off the ground as quickly as possible. This requires that you consistently give issues away for free, both online and in print via snail-mail, to your key audiences, and then hope for a decent return rate. You’ll obviously need a good amount of seed money to get something like this off the ground.

Wrap It Up

Finally, either at the end of your eNewsletter, try to wrap things up with a short synopsis of everything you have already stated, preferably in bullet form. For example, here is a bare-bones list of what was covered in this report:

- Hire a professional writer, preferably a journalist.
- Hire a professional graphic designer or use a template from a eNewsletter service.



- Categorize the needs and wants of your customer and potential customers.
- Develop strategies to organize your customers into specific groups and write content that addresses each group’s needs and wants.
- Get visitors to your website and amass email addresses through a variety of search engine optimization techniques and customer contact collection strategies.
- Take advantage of the best web-based eNewsletter publishing, distribution and subscription analytics service providers.
- Employee newsletters are probably the most fun to create because of the human interaction that must take place to create them.
- Paid-subscription newsletters are the most challenging to create and succeed at, requiring seed money to get them off the ground through forced free trials.

Well, that sums it up for now. If you found this report to be helpful, please sign up “eContent on eContent” at

<http://www.edpath.com/enewsletters.html>.

End Notes:

1. David Meerman Scott, *World Wide Rave: Creating Triggers That Get Millions of People to Spread Your Ideas and Share Your Stories* (New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009).
2. Eric Groves, *The Constant Contact Guide to Email Marketing* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009).
3. Mary Ellen Bates, *The Art of E-Newsletters: Ideas to Effectively Create and Market Electronic Newsletters* (Commissioned by Factiva, from Down Jones, 2007), http://dowjones.mediaroom.com/file.php/71/art_of_E-Newsletters.pdf.

Please see resources and author bio on following page.

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Some of My Favorite Resources with Great Information about eNewsletters:

Constant Contact,
Constant Contact Email Marketing Workbook
(Editor's Note: This is a great place to start, and it's free at <http://www.constantcontact.com/workbook/index.jsp>.)

David Meerman Scott, *The New Rules of Marketing & PR: How to Use News Releases, Blogs, Podcasting, Viral Marketing & Online Media to Reach Buyers Directly* (New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007, 2009)

David Meerman Scott, *World Wide Rave: Creating Triggers That Get Millions of People to Spread Your Ideas and Share Your Stories* (New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009).

Eric Groves, *The Constant Contact Guide to Email Marketing* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009).

Mary Ellen Bates, *The Art of E-Newsletters: Ideas to Effectively Create and Market Electronic Newsletters* (Commissioned by Factiva, from Down Jones, 2007), http://dowjones.mediaroom.com/file.php/71/art_of_E-Newsletters.pdf.

Michael Port, *Book Yourself Solid: The Fastest, Easiest, and Most Reliable System for Getting*

More Clients Than You Can Handle Even if You Hate Marketing and Selling (New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2006).

Pamela Slim, *Escape from Cubicle Nation: From Corporate Prisoner to Thriving Entrepreneur* (New York, Portfolio, published by the Penguin Group, 2009).

About George Lorenzo and eNewsletters, Etc.

George Lorenzo is Chief Writer and Educator at eNewsletters, Etc., a writing, editing, research and publishing service that creates eNewsletters, case studies, white papers, special reports, feature articles and news releases for the education and business sectors. For more information about eNewsletters, please subscribe to "eContent on eContent" at <http://www.edpath.com/enewsletters.html>.

