

Producing a Newsletter

So, you've decided that your organization could use a newsletter. Before you decide what your newsletter will look like, think about the purpose of the newsletter. Do you just want to disseminate information about your organization's programs and projects? Or do you also want to use the newsletter as a marketing or fundraising piece – to showcase the accomplishments of your organization? If the former is your main goal, a simple online newsletter may be sufficient; if the latter, a printed publication might serve your purpose better.



You should also take into consideration the size of your organization, your budget, and the amount of information you'll want to include in each newsletter. If your organization is pretty small, and your news will be fairly limited or intermittent at first, you might want to start with an online newsletter. If you wanted to have a paper version, too, you could produce a simple newsletter that could be printed "in-house" on your office laser printer.

If you have a large organization, a mailing list of several hundred people, lots of news to share, and some money budgeted for a newsletter, a print publication may be the way to go.

Online Newsletters

An online newsletter is cheaper and easier to produce, since you can simply e-mail the information periodically to everyone on your mailing list. There are many software companies that can help with the production of an online newsletter. Starting at just a few dollars a month, a small humane organization can save precious money and time by sending out their news through e-mail.

Most e-newsletter services maintain contact lists for you, and send out the e-mails through their server. (You only need to click the "Send" button once, and thousands of e-mails are sent out simultaneously.) Also, most companies offer professional-looking templates that can be easily customized with your own logo and photos. No design or computer experience is needed!

If you're willing to spend a few extra dollars, more sophisticated software can even integrate web forms and surveys into your newsletter. Another wonderful thing about e-newsletters is that you can put links in there. This may seem elementary, but think about it – you could include direct links to adoptable pet listings, or a donations page.

The main disadvantage, of course, to online newsletters is that not everyone has an e-mail address. But, this limitation is becoming less and less of a problem as more and more people go online. There are many options out there worth investigating. Type "online newsletter" into your favorite search engine and find what's right for you!

Print Newsletters

A print publication will be more time-consuming, since you may have to spend some time learning the ins and outs of producing a print publication and working with a print vendor. You also have to consider the costs of paper, printing, any additional software, and staff time. But, you will also have a printed piece that you can mail out to anyone who's interested in receiving it.

Here's what you'll need to do to produce your first print newsletter:

Look at other newsletters. Decide which ones you like and think about why you like them. The best newsletters usually have clean design, eye-catching graphics and photos, and interesting headlines that draw you into reading the articles.

Think of a name for your newsletter. Try for something that isn't too generic. If you'll be using your newsletter partially as a marketing piece, a catchy name can grab people's attention. Have a brainstorming session with your staff or volunteers to come up with a name.

Find someone to design and produce the newsletter. If you don't have the skills yourself, review your volunteer list. There may very well be someone in your organization with desktop publishing skills who would be happy to help. Another way to recruit someone is to talk to the art department head at your local junior or community college, or post a message on campus bulletin boards. Your newsletter could be a wonderful project for a graphic arts student. Don't rule out approaching an advertising or graphic design firm – they might get involved on a pro-bono basis in return for an ad in the newsletter or acknowledgment of their contribution.

Or, do it yourself. If you decide that you would like to do the newsletter yourself, but you don't have design skills, there are newsletter templates available that will allow you to use a "cookie cutter" method. The design is already set up – you just plug your text and photos into an existing template. Microsoft Publisher is just one example of a fairly inexpensive software program that contains easy-to-use templates for newsletters.

Plan the content of your first newsletter. Decide what articles need to be written and how long they should be. Next, plan out the issue: Decide what will go on page 1, page 2, etc. You should then have a pretty good idea of how many pages you'll need. You may find that a single two-sided sheet of 8.5" x 11" paper is enough at first. Or, you might need four "pages" – an 11" x 17" sheet of paper folded in half. If you have a lot of content, you might need to produce an eight-page newsletter – two 11" x 17" sheets of paper folded in half and stapled along the fold. If your newsletter is going to be mailed, you'll need to leave room for a mail panel on the back. It may be helpful to do a "mock-up" of the newsletter, so you can visualize what will be placed where.

Write the articles and gather photos. Whether you are writing the articles yourself or recruiting someone else to write them, keep the articles short and sweet, since you'll lose readers with long, involved articles. Try to have a mix of news and engaging animal stories. If you can, have a photo for every story – they break up the "grayness" of the page and motivate your audience to read the accompanying article.

Lay out the newsletter. If someone else is doing the layout, give that person the mockup you created, and indicate clearly which articles go where and which photos

go with which articles. You want to be especially organized if the person is producing the newsletter on a pro-bono basis. If the production process is frustrating, your willing volunteer may not want to do the second issue!

Decide on color. A one-color newsletter is the cheapest option. If a commercial printer is printing the newsletter, your one color doesn't have to be black, however. It can be brown, forest green, or burgundy – any color that's dark enough for people to read easily. Stay away from bright or light colors, like pink or yellow. If you want to add a second color (perhaps for headlines, pull quotes or graphics), it will be a bit more expensive.

If you want to use color photos, you'll need full-color (also called process color) printing. Full color is usually, though not always, the most expensive print job. It looks expensive, though, so sometimes it's not desirable to use full color. You don't want to give the impression that you are spending precious donation dollars on fancy printing. Sometimes, however, your printer can offer you full color at no additional cost to you. If you want to take advantage of that, include a line of bold type on the back cover of your newsletter saying something like this: "Due to the generous support of ABC Printing, we are able to bring you this beautiful newsletter in full color at no additional cost."

Select a printer. Before the first issue of your newsletter is finalized, start looking for a printer. Ask around to see if any print shops would donate all or part of their normal fee. Many times, a reduced rate can be bartered in return for an ad for the printer in your newsletter, or credit for their contribution.

If you don't have any luck getting free or reduced-cost printing, contact at least three different printers and ask to see samples of their previous work. If you like what you see, request a bid from them. To request a bid, you'll need to provide the printer with the following specifications for your newsletter: dimensions, number of pages, ink colors, number of copies to print, type of paper desired (the printer can make suggestions).

Once you decide on a printer, find out what the turnaround time is for your job. The amount of time it takes for the printer to complete the job will depend on how busy the printer is, but as a general rule, build at least a week into your production schedule for printing. When you give the printer the digital version of your newsletter, also provide them with a hard copy of the newsletter for reference.

Here are some additional notes and tips if you're new to creating or supervising the production of print publications.

Text and Type

To make sure the text is legible and easy to read, pick out a typeface that was created for that purpose and use it throughout the entire newsletter. Some examples are Helvetica, Times, Palatino, and Arial. Each of these typefaces includes variations such as bold, italic and bold italic, so you can vary the appearance of your text. Bullet points (•) and numbered lists are other excellent ways to break up the text.

You might be tempted by the multitude of "display" fonts that are available. They are fun to look at and it's tempting to throw them all over the place, but they create a cluttered look and are usually hard to read. Save them for a special-event headline or ad and, remember, use with restraint!

What size type should you use? Type is measured in points. Choose a point size large enough for most people to read comfortably – 11 or 12 points is a good size for most text in the body of the newsletter. Type such as photo captions and disclaimers can be set smaller, but never go below 7-point type. Titles of articles, of course, should be set in larger, bold type so they will stand out.

Finally, make sure you proofread your final copy carefully. If you're not skilled at this task, find someone who is. Always run a spell check, too. Your credibility as an organization is damaged if your newsletter is marred by typos and inaccuracies.

Layout

Make sure your front page has a masthead – the name of your newsletter and your logo (if you have one) displayed prominently across the top of the page. Keep the masthead consistent for all issues. In advertising terms, this establishes a “brand identity” – an element that is immediately identifiable to your readers and that they associate with your organization. Include the name of your organization on the front page, too.

Always try to incorporate a success story and a good photo of an animal on your front page. Use a lot of photos on the inside, too. Photos are a great way to break up copy and add visual impact. To make your photos as eye-catching as possible, crop in tightly on the subject. Often, the background is not that interesting anyway. Make the photos as large as possible. Try to include action shots of people and animals, not just static portraits.

Stay away from text-intensive pages. People are busy these days and yours is probably not the only newsletter they get. If the amount of text on the page looks daunting, they just won't read the article. Another good way to break up the text is to add graphics, sidebars (related information that can be set apart in a box or shaded block) and pull quotes (pithy quotes from the story set in larger type).

Style Guide

Sometimes several people may be working on different print projects for you. For example, one volunteer may be designing business cards, another may be working on newspaper ads and someone else may be producing your newsletter. A good way to make sure that everyone uses a consistent “look” (to keep your brand identity intact) is to create a style guide for your organization.

The style guide should include a list of approved fonts that can be used, a color palette for your logo and accent color, rules on photo and caption usage, and any other guidelines you can think of to keep your printed pieces consistent.