

## how to produce a customer newsletter

### 1. Why produce my customer newsletter?

Before you start, be clear about why you are spending valuable time and money on producing a newsletter for your customers. Use questions 2 – 4 to identify your objectives and how to achieve them.

### 2. What do I want my customer newsletter to achieve?



- Demonstrate how much the company appreciates its customers
- Generate and maintain loyalty from customers
- Inform customers of new products and services \_\_\_\_\_
- Advise customers of important company changes \_\_\_\_\_
- Include competitions or offers to reward and attract customers  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Help customers to get the best value out of products and services  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Who is my customer newsletter aimed at?

- All customers
- Low / high value customers \_\_\_\_\_
- Potential / new customers \_\_\_\_\_
- Associates / distributors \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

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### 4. How frequently should I publish my customer newsletter?

Newsletters work best as communication vehicles and motivators when they are published to a set frequency. It is important to stick to your schedule.

- Monthly
- Bi-monthly
- Quarterly

### 5. How do I plan my newsletter production?

Working backwards, calculate how much time it will take to complete each stage:

- Plan issue                      \_\_\_ days / weeks              Date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_
- Research & interviews        \_\_\_ days / weeks              Date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_
- Write articles                    \_\_\_ days / weeks              Date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_
- Design & layout                \_\_\_ days / weeks              Date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_
- Proofreading                    \_\_\_ days / weeks              Date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_
- Printing                         \_\_\_ days / weeks              Date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_
- Distribute to customers       \_\_\_ days / weeks              Date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_
  
- Total**                              \_\_\_ **days / weeks**

This will enable you to know when to start working on your newsletter in order for it to reach your audience on your desired publication date.

**Start work:** \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_                      **Publication date:** \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_

### 6. What format should my customer newsletter take?

Printed newsletters are usually produced in standard A4 paper size format. For every sheet of paper, you have two pages. Calculate the number of pages:

- 2 pages – 1 x double-sided sheet of A4 paper
- 4 pages – 1 x double-sided sheet of A3 paper folded to make 4 x A4 pages
- 8 pages – 2 x double-sided sheets of A3 paper folded to make 8 x A4 pages and then stapled
- 12 pages – 3 x double-sided sheets of A3 paper folded to make 12 x A4 pages and then stapled
- \_\_\_ pages – the total number (including cover) must be divisible by 4.

If you prefer, you can choose to have A3, tabloid or a non-standard page size.

### 7. What paper types and printing should I use for my newsletter?

Your printer should be able to show you samples of suitable paper. While black and white printing used to be cheaper, full colour is more affordable now. Ask your printer to give you a quotation for both, if necessary.

### 8. What should I call my customer newsletter?

The name of your newsletter is very important and you need to establish what it will be before creating a basic design. The name should have significance for your readers and reflect the identity and values of your company – choose a name that will be both suitable and popular.

### 9. How do I design my newsletter?

If you use an external designer or have an in-house designer, they need to be involved at the earliest possible stage. The visual style of the newsletter – the look and feel – should be agreed before the first issue is laid out.

The design normally reflects an organisation's corporate identity and often features its logo.

By developing a design at this stage, it will enable you to calculate how many words will fit on each page, so that you know how many articles to write and how long they should be.

### 10. What content should I include in my customer newsletter?

The answers to questions 1 – 4 should help you decide the content of articles.

A general customer newsletter could include:

- Announcements of new products or services
- Articles on choosing and buying products and services and tips and advice on how to use them
- Company / industry / sector news, developments and events
- Personal message from managing director
- Profiles of departments or employees
- Competitions and offers
- Features on lifestyle or general topics

To create continuity from one issue to the next, include regular features, eg profiles of departments, a focus on a specific product or special technique. If there is a lot of detailed information on a topic, make it more digestible by splitting into several articles in more than one issue.

### 11. What editorial tone should I use in my customer newsletter?

While general communications with customers can tend to be formal in tone, a customer newsletter can be more informal. This could be influenced by whether your company provides business or consumer products or services and which sector it is in.

Even where the tone is light-hearted, it is best to show respect for readers. Generally, the tone should be upbeat and enthusiastic – you want customers to be excited about your company, not depressed by it. If you do not have experience of writing or editing, an experienced copywriter can help write articles for you.

### 12. How do I get a quote for printing my newsletter?

To prepare an accurate quote, your printer needs to know:

- Page size \_\_\_\_\_ eg A4, A3, tabloid
- Number of pages \_\_\_\_\_
- Stapling or other finishing required \_\_\_\_\_
- Paper type eg matt or gloss finish \_\_\_\_\_
- Quantity \_\_\_\_\_ ie how many copies you want printed
- Artwork – will you employ a designer to produce a digital layout with photographs scanned in high quality? If so, tell the printer what format of software file the designer will provide \_\_\_\_\_
- Names and addresses to be printed on and newsletters shrink-wrapped?
- Date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ when you will get finished artwork to the printer
- Date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ when the finished newsletters must be delivered to you

### 13. How do I distribute my customer newsletter?

Distributing thousands of newsletters adds packing and postage costs.

When you know the quantity to be sent, you will need names and addresses from your customer data records to label the newsletters.

You can have names and address printed directly on to individual copies of the newsletter. If you purchase a bulk mailing licence, you can also have the licence information printed on them too. Copies can then be shrink-wrapped in polythene and delivered to the appropriate Post Office for mailing.

Alternatively, you can have the newsletters delivered to a mailing house which will pack, label and post them. You will need to supply address labels or the data needed to print labels.

### 14. How do I plan an issue of my customer newsletter?

Once you have all the above information, you can start to produce your first issue.

First, create a schedule and advise this to every participant (eg designer, printer, mailing house) so that they are ready when you need them.

Next, you need to decide the content of the current issue:

- What news / promotions / competitions / events do you need to publicise?
- What do you need your customers to know?
- What do customers need to know about?
- What do customers want to hear about?
- What is newsworthy?
- Are there any achievements to celebrate?
- Are there any updates to stories in previous issues?
- Create a flat plan – a diagram of which articles will appear on each page

### 15. How do I write articles for my customer newsletter?

If you are writing an article yourself:

- Decide what you want an article to say
- Decide how long the article will be
- Interview people if you want to quote them – if they are busy, send them questions by email and ask them to send you a written quote
- Try to write simply. Not everyone will be an expert on that topic, but they need to be able to understand it
- Double-check facts and figures and check with interviewees that they are sure that what you have quoted is suitable for publication

If you ask colleagues or suppliers to contribute articles, give them a clear brief:

- Agree the topic and what the article will say
- Agree the length
- Agree the tone and written style
- Agree the deadline for completion

If you are using a professional copywriter, give them a similar detailed brief and as much information as possible.

### 16. How do I edit articles for my customer newsletter?

If you have written an article yourself, it should need no editing.

Contributions from colleagues or suppliers should be edited to ensure:

- The content is suitable
- All material reads well – cut out waffle
- Consistency in spellings, industry jargon, etc

The editor of the newsletter must ensure that high standards are maintained throughout.

While senior managers may not want to have their articles changed, it is the editor's responsibility to ensure everything is suitable. In some cases, this may be difficult to argue, but it is vital that the editor has control.

Articles published in a customer newsletter can have a big impact on how your company is perceived and may even lead to legal action against it, so make sure that you have control over all material.

### 17. What about photographs and images for my newsletter?

Photographs can produce a very strong impact and add a lot of interest to a newsletter – their inclusion should be considered when developing the basic newsletter design.

- Use professional photography – don't risk amateurish efforts
- Try to shoot interesting photographs – avoid people sitting at PCs or standing with their hands crossed in front of them
- Photographs of people looking natural make better than those of people posing artificially
- Do not use passport-style photographs

Use photographic prints the same size or bigger than each photograph as it will appear in the newsletter – even better, use transparencies.

Digital photographs must be taken at 300 dots per inch resolution. Photographs taken at 72 dpi may look good on the internet, but are not good enough for quality printing.

### 18. How do I check my newsletter?

Once you have all your articles and photographs, check everything:

- Are facts and figures accurate, especially prices and terms and conditions?
- Are spellings and grammar correct – you may want to ask colleagues to read everything for you as a fresh eye can often spot any mistakes more easily. You may prefer to ask a professional proofreader to check your material
- Are names correct? Are people in photographs captioned correctly?
- Do any articles need to be approved by other people or departments, eg your legal adviser(s)?
- Are you sure that everything is suitable for publication?
- Are the messages in your newsletter consistent with all other corporate communications?

If you have any concerns, this is the time to resolve them.

### 19. How is my newsletter laid out?

Once you have all your material – articles, photographs or other images – hand these to the designer and discuss the layout as shown in your flat plan.

Label photographs so the designer knows which articles they accompany.

The designer should provide proofs to you so that you can check the newsletter before going to print.

### 20. How do I check proofs of my newsletter?

- Read through the whole proof
- Can you spot any errors? It's your last opportunity to do so
- Have articles been included in their entirety and not been chopped off at the end?
- Are photographs in the right places and correctly captioned?
- Are you certain that everyone who should approve any aspect of the newsletter has been given the chance to do so and has confirmed their approval?

If there are any final corrections, advise these to the designer and request a corrected proof.

### 21. Printing and distributing my customer newsletter

Once you have approved the layout, the approved version must be sent to the printer to print the finished copies of the newsletter.

When you receive the printed copies, check to see that they are as you approved them. Occasionally, there are mix-ups where previous, incorrect versions are printed by mistake – ensure your approved version has been printed.

When you are totally satisfied with the finished newsletter, distribute the newsletter or have it delivered to the mailing house to distribute.

### 22. The next issue of my customer newsletter

Feedback is very important to ensure that your newsletter meets the needs of customers as well as the company.

If customers do not like a newsletter, they will not read it – it could even destroy their loyalty.

As well as asking people what they think of it, you can conduct reader surveys to ask what people like or dislike and what else they would like to see included. Use competitions, offers or feedback forms to encourage feedback.

Use the results to plan the next issue of your customer newsletter.