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## Communication News

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### Made You Look! (How to Power Up Your E-Newsletters)

*Communication News, December 2008*

**By:** *Jessica Strelitz*

To open busy readers' eyes to the value of your e-newsletter, focus on the details. Tailor your subject lines, monitor your metrics to pinpoint popular content, and use high-tech tools that will grow your subscriber base. Plus, sidebars on promoting your e-newsletter on the cheap and links to help you improve your e-newsletter.

**Rating:** ★★☆☆☆ [1 Reviews](#)

E-newsletters can be easy to start but tough to make smart. How do you expand your reach beyond your original member list, determine whether anyone is reading, and, if they aren't, encourage them to do so?

Here's advice on how to make your e-newsletters effective in five important areas.

#### 1. Lay the Groundwork for Success

Email outreach is certainly not going away. Eighty-seven percent of respondents to an October 2008 [Concept survey](#) said that email will continue to be the top form of business communication well into the future. How do you ensure that your electronic newsletter is reaching its goals?



*Jessica Strelitz*

- **Reach the most engaged readers by getting explicit permission before sending them your newsletter.** My firm has found that opt-in readers are more likely to open a newsbrief, click on links, and forward a newsletter to others. This method of subscription doesn't just help your association avoid CAN-SPAM concerns; opt-in newsletters also experience more robust growth over time than ones you send without reader buy-in.
- **Consider the lessons of a few numbers recently released by eMarketer.** Though the percentage varies by industry, average clickthrough rates for e-publications can vary from 2.6 to 5 percent. Twenty percent of respondents reported rates of more than 10 percent. However, the average number of these email sends was from one to three sends per month. So, distribute your newsletter on a consistent schedule, such as once a week or daily. And set a goal for subscriber numbers, average open rates, and clickthrough to help determine the overall success of your publication.
- **Make sure your email list is clean by scrubbing it for duplicates and inactive readers.** Again, this will help make sure the engagement numbers best reflect your true readership.

#### 2. Never Forget That Content is King (and Queen)

- **To pique interest, always tailor your newsletter's subject line to your audience.** If possible, segment your lists based on demographics and target both your subject lines and lead stories to reach out to subsets of readers.
- **Offer something unique to get your readers**

#### Promoting Your E-Newsletter on the Cheap

Not all growth tools cost money. Try these three ways to get the word out for free.

**Use your Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter**

**thinking.** Many content options are easy *and* free. You can tap into existing resources and add value by including content from your association's blogs, publishing viewpoints from your leadership, and summarizing news about your industry from mainstream media websites. This way, your newsletter will offer information readers can use in their professional lives—not just the dates for your association's mid-winter meeting.

- **Don't let length turn off your readers.** Regardless of a newsletter's frequency, readers tend to become saturated with news or announcements after eight to 12 stories. In most of our publications at SmartBrief, we shoot for a balance of 10 to 16 headlines and short summaries. A 2008 reader survey of more than 200,000 subscribers revealed that 80 percent believe that mix was "just right;" 10 percent wanted more, 10 percent wanted less.

### 3. Grow Your Reach

- **Open your email list.** Newsletters are often an association's top member benefit, but they are also a great way to reach out to potential new members. If your leaders are concerned about sacrificing exclusivity, consider developing a separate "premium" newsletter for members while also delivering an "open" send that reaches out to nonmembers. Then offer viral tools that make it easy for others to subscribe.
- **Be sure your newsletter is easy to forward.** Every publication should have a forwarding button for both the complete newsletter and individual stories.
- **Use subscriber growth tools.** When you promote events and meetings on your association website, consider adding a "get your industry news" check box on those pages. Also make sure to add a sign-up section on every premier location on your website, from the splash page to the member benefits area. By using such tools, my company finds that we get a viral conversion boost in our subscriber lists that varies from 20 to 30 percent.

### 4. Remember That Accessibility is Crucial

- **Consider ways other than an email push for readers to access e-newsletter content.** There are a number of free tools available, such as Spring Widgets (see sidebar), that create news feed son blogs, social networking sites, and homepages. And don't forget RSS feeds.
- **Keep your sign-up process simple to avoid putting readers off from the start.** Ask only for what you need to deliver the newsletter: name and email address. If you want more information, you can get it later, but you can't get anything unless your readers subscribe in the first place. Conversion numbers will be higher if you lower the barrier to readers up front and resist forcing them to go to additional screens.
- **Make sure your newsletter content has a presence on your website, and use that content to keep your association homepage fresh.** Also, consider a wireless option so mobile readers can monitor your news, quickly and easily, on the road or on the tradeshow floor.

**contacts** to reach out to association members and potential new members by giving them something useful: content. One association SmartBrief partner used its news brief as an incentive to grow its LinkedIn group membership. The result: more subscribers as well as new members.

**Encourage fellow staff members to promote the briefs** in their IM away messages or in the signature line of their work emails. The message could be as simple as "What are consumers buying this holiday season?" Include a link to sign-up to the newsletter using [Tiny URL](#) so it doesn't get lost on the page.

**Remember that setting up, growing, and monitoring your association's Twitter feed is a good way to track trends.** Listen to your members' tweets. What are they twittering about? Should those topics be the focus of an annual conference session or a section in your e-newsletter?

#### Links to Help You Improve Your E-Newsletter

[A Twitter primer](#)

[Spring Widgets](#)

[SurveyMonkey](#)

[Freeonlinesurveys.com](#)

[ESurveysPro.com](#)

[Tiny URL](#)

### 5. Know and Use Your Metrics

- **Use your newsletter to tap into the brain of your audience.** Whether you publish in house or with an outside vendor, monitoring readership metrics is key to producing a robust, engaging newsletter. You can


dictate future content by analyzing data such as most-read stories, clicks by issue, clicks by section, and subscriber data. These indicators are also useful for tracking industry trends; developing conference sessions, workshops, or panels; and generating ideas about which speakers to book.

- **Consider integrating polls into your e-newsletter.** These are good if you want to know what your readers are thinking but don't have the bandwidth to partner with a firm or plug in an application that helps you track those metrics. *SurveyMonkey* and several other online survey firms (see sidebar) offer free services that allow you to develop poll and survey questions. That feedback can also help you to check the pulse of your readership.

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 **Ronald Keener**, December 16, 2008  
Great stuff, smart advice, thought provoking ideas, glad to see more on this topic.

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- [Are You Getting the Response You Should?](#)
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