

Smart Marketing

By Lynn H. Colwell

From saddle-makers to beauticians to clock makers, business owners all over are hopping on the newsletter bandwagon. It's no wonder. Newsletters are a fun, quick, affordable way to talk to your customers. They showcase your strengths, stimulate interest in your services and cater to your customers' needs. And they're a great advertising tool.

Mara'd Sjostrum, owner of The Plant Mill, a nursery in Post Falls, ID, can testify to the power of a good newsletter. The spring issue of her publication, "Nursery News," included a column on ladybugs in the garden, along with a reminder of the store's upcoming ladybug sales promotion. Sjostrum's phone started ringing as soon as the newsletters hit area mailboxes. "Those calls were the beginning of a suc-

cessful campaign," she says.

Julie McCluney, of Hills Bros. Lock & Safe in Garden Grove, CA, is a believer, too. Her store's newsletter, "Keynotes," gets 10 times the response of its Yellow Pages ad. "We get tons of referrals with every issue," she says.

Newsletters can also be the mainstay of your marketing efforts. Here's why:

✓ **Newsletters are inexpensive to produce.** Newsletters don't need to be four-color extravaganzas to make a positive impression. Desktop publishing has slashed the cost of producing professional-looking newsletters to match the budget of al-

most any business.

✓ **Newsletters personalize your business.** A newsletter provides the personal touch and extra service people crave. Long after customers leave the premises, a newsletter continues to strengthen the relationship.

✓ **Newsletters are an effective, but subtle, sales tool.** A good newsletter will fire up customers about your product or service, so they become eager buyers.

Make A Plan

Publishing a newsletter is like launching a business. It starts with a plan. You'll need to consider the following:

**A NEWSLETTER
CAN BOOST YOUR
BUSINESS. HERE'S HOW
TO GET STARTED.**

✓ **Target Audience:** The more you know about your customers, the better. Depending on your business, demographics that could affect your newsletter include age, sex, education, marital status, living quarters, shopping habits, children, occupation, language and ethnicity.

✓ **Standard columns:** Regular columns create a feeling of continuity and substance and help ensure that

customers look forward to every issue. Ideas include customer or employee profiles, seasonal tie-ins, service and product updates, calendar of events, questions and answers, and articles by community leaders.

✓ **Format:** Get ideas by collecting and studying other newsletters. Call a couple of local printers and request samples, or ask other businesses for copies of their newsletters.

Money-Saving Tips

■ When you're getting bids, let printers, mail houses and freelancers know that cost is a factor. Outline your needs as specifically as possible. Know the size of your newsletter, how many copies you'll print, how often you'll print, how many colors you want, whether you'll provide camera-ready proofs, the turnaround time you need and whether you need collating.

■ If you need help with layout or photography, try a high school or college student. They work cheap in exchange for samples for their portfolios.

■ Ask your suppliers if they'll help subsidize the newsletter.

■ At least once a year, purge your mailing list. If you mail first class, undelivered newsletters will be automatically returned to you. If you use bulk mail, include an "address correction requested" notation on the newsletter.

■ Look for ways to save on printing. Ask if you can use leftover paper your printer purchased for another job. If so, you've got a bargain. Ask if your printer offers "free color days." Print on those days, and colored ink costs nothing.

■ Look for low-cost or free ways to get your newsletter in customers' hands. Include newsletters with invoices. Keep a stack by the cash register, and get in the habit of asking customers if they've seen this month's issue. Deliver the newsletter with orders. Carry a supply to hand out at meetings. Ask other business owners to keep a supply of your newsletters in their stores, and offer to do the same for them. If you use a mail house, ask how you can sort your mail to take advantage of the lowest rates.

■ Think barter. Your printer, for instance, may be willing to supply paper for free in exchange for a product or service you offer.

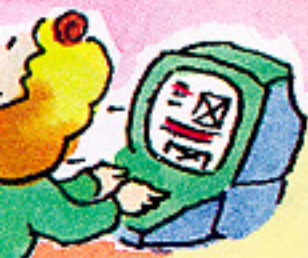


NEWSLETTERS FIRE UP CUSTOMERS ABOUT YOUR PRODUCT OR SERVICE.

✓ **Tone:** Your audience will determine the tone of your newsletter. For example, Cathy Leer, owner of Family Physical Therapy Services in Bedford, NH, decided on a conservative, professional tone for her newsletter, "The Able Body." The publication is distributed to physicians who refer patients to her. "Our goal," she says, "is to show the doctors that we know what we're doing."

On the other hand, Constantine Pergantis, owner of Nite Lites, a Potomac, MD, lighting design company, prefers a chatty, casual tone in "Nite Lites News." The newsletter careens from cartoons to updates on the basketball team his business sponsors. Every article sounds as if it were written to Pergantis' best pals.

✓ **Publication Schedule:** If you're thinking about pub-



righted material and clip art found in software catalogues or art books.

Get On The "Best Read" List

After all your hard work, you don't want your newsletter to get lost in the mass of junk mail. Here's how to grab and hold readers:

✓ **Focus on your readers.** To build a loyal readership, keep your customers' needs and wants in mind. Include clip-and-save checklists, such as "Answers to the Six Most Common Questions Our Customers Ask Us." Suggest time- or money-saving ways to use your product or service. Offer freebies.

Pergantis' "Nite Lites News," for example, lists rebates the electric company offers to businesses that convert to fluorescent lamps and fixtures. After reading the newsletter, many readers call Pergantis to upgrade their lighting systems.

✓ **Constantly monitor reader response.** Survey readers every few issues with questions, such as "What article was most helpful in this issue?" and "What article topics would you like us to write about?"

✓ **Keep copy short.** If your newsletter is jammed with copy, customers are likely to shove it into a "read later" pile. Guess when it gets read? Follow McCluney's example. Her "Nursery News" packs 11 brief but useful articles in one and a half pages.

✓ **Use color carefully.** Color attracts and keeps more readers than black and white. If you can only afford to use one color, make sure it's easy to read and be aware of how photos will reproduce.

✓ **Use photos, graphics and charts.** But stay away

from boring head-and-shoulder shots. Instead, show relaxed, happy people *doing* something. In group photos, avoid lining everyone up in a row.

✓ **Keep it clean.** Avoid off-color or pointed humor that might offend. In fact, when it comes to humor, it's best to have several people check it out before it trips you up.

✓ **Mail first class.** Julie McCluney searches for the

most colorful stamps she can find. "The stamps make our newsletter stand out from junk mail," she says. The extra cost also ensures that the newsletter arrives in a few days versus a couple of weeks with bulk mail. **95**

Lynn Hutner Colwell is a Post Falls, ID, freelance writer and newsletter publisher.

Business95 Action File

Books and Publications

■ **Newsletter Sourcebook**, by Mark Beach (North Light Press, \$26.99), is the book to turn to for inspiration. It's packed with samples, from budget-conscious, two-color jobs to four-color stunners. It's a great book if you have no idea what you want your newsletter to look like. Call (800) 289-0963.

■ **Editing Your Newsletter**, by Mark Beach (North Light Press, \$22.99), is like a course in newsletter production. It's an excellent starting point for the novice. Call (800) 289-0963.

■ **Marketing With Newsletters**, by Elaine Floyd (Newsletter Resources, \$24.95), explains how to set a budget, save money and survey readers. Call (800) 264-6305.

■ **101 Ways to Save Money on Newsletters**, by Polly Pattison (Newsletter Resources, \$7.95), is filled with tips to help you put out a newsletter on a budget. Everything from choosing the best paper to getting a deal on mailing is included. Call (800) 264-6305.

■ **Newsletter News & Resources** (Newsletter Resources, \$24.95 a year) is a quarterly newsletter with ideas and information on writing, design, production and desktop publishing. Call (800) 264-6305.

Printers:

■ The Newsletter Publishers Association has a list of recommended printers. Call (703) 527-2333.

Newsletter Seminars

■ The Newsletter Factory holds nationwide seminars on newsletter design, production and editing. Call (800) 366-9543 for location and dates.

lishing every month, reconsider. You may get overwhelmed. It's safer to start off quarterly.

Expect to spend between 10 and 60 hours on each issue. That time is devoted not only to writing, editing, proofing and laying out, but also to coming up with ideas for stories, interviewing or researching, taking photos or securing other art work, working with a printer and mailing.

Assume every step will take at least twice as long as you expect. Before you build your timeline, talk to vendors such as writers, the printer and the mail house for estimates on how long their work will take.

✓ **Copyright restrictions:** If you want to use a cartoon or article that was published elsewhere, write for permission to reproduce it. Or use non-copy-