

Developing effective newsletters – Notes for presentation

Practicalities

Is a newsletter the right tool? Slide 4

- Start with your aims and objectives, what it is you are trying to achieve, as you would when assessing all communication tools
- Would another tool be more appropriate? Slides 5, 6, and 7
 - o Regular face to face meetings, social media, blogs, your website, intranet, conference calls, staff briefings etc. MSD example – have lots of internal followers on Twitter and use website home page.
- Audience
 - o Who are your audiences? Internal vs External
 - o Is a newsletter the best way to reach your intended audience? Do they have access to computers/internets?
 - o Have you asked them if this is what they want/need?
- MSD example – starting by talking with lots of staff around the division (DAs, Heads, researchers). Lots of complaint about too many emails, too many cascades (so some people getting info, others missing info), people not feeling part of the division and not understanding the divisional office structure.
- So a newsletter was a good way of bringing together lots of information that's usually sent via email, in order to help minimise emails, and make sure everyone in the division receives the same information at the same time..Also, could be used to explain the work of the divisional office and related support unit and by showcasing divisional-wide activity, help create a sense of divisional community.

What do you want the newsletter to do? Slide 8

- Administrative vs inspirational - can also combine the two Slide 9 and 10
 - o Informative (business critical)/consultative
 - o Community building/staff engaging, celebrate success
 - o Helping bridge information gap between senior managers and staff
 - o sales/marketing tools (encourage people to attend events/ take part in clinical trials, give money etc.)
 - o Communicate your impact, raise awareness about research drive traffic back to your website

Do you have the resources? Slide 11

- Takes time and resource to prepare newsletters. Do you have enough time to create a weekly/monthly newsletter? (MSD newsletter: 3 people spending 1 day/month each, NDCN weekly newsletter: half a day a week)
- Do you have enough content to maintain a weekly/monthly newsletter? Is the content time-sensitive?
- Map out content for the first 6 months.
- Budget needed (not all external provider are free, designer, printing costs, mailing costs (postage)).
- Do you have the software/design skills to make it look good?

What format will your newsletter have? Slide 12

- Print vs electronic Slide 13

- We tend to think that electronic communications is the only way to go, but not necessarily – people experiencing e-overload, so print may stand out more, it's easier to read, usually better designed, has lasting value, better for long form journalism, carries more weight, can give it out at events, gives more of a sense of legitimacy.
- On the issue of how print can be useful, see <http://internal-communication.com/back-issues/> - Volume 6, called 'Are employee magazines dead? Here's why print isn't past it.'
- NDCN experience – e-newsletter (administrative) and print newsletter (inspirational/community building/celebratory).

If e-newsletters, have you considered...? Slide 14

- Using e-newsletters is not without risk **Slide 15**
- MSD has had to deal with these issues in negotiating a contract with local e-newsletter company Adestra, if anyone wants more details.
- Alternatives available (Outlook templates, simple HTML, digests, etc.) **Slide 16, 17, 18**

Best Practice (10 mins) Slide 20

Send at the same time/day each week/month

- This way users will know when to expect it (especially important if newsletter is being used to deliver business critical issues).
- Contributors will know when copy deadline is.

Content is key

- Scannable content is particularly useful if you have a lot of information to convey (headlines only) – most of our readers report that they skim the newsletter only **Slide 21**.
- Vary the length and type of articles – interviews/ day in the life, event listings/digests.
- Use images, photos etc – although a plain unformatted message might be more suitable (for an administrative/procedural newsletter – as mentioned earlier in 'What do you want your newsletter to do?') **Slide 22**.
- Consistent footer is important (include unsubscribe link if external).

Consistent design

- So users know where to look for content, don't make them re-learn where to find content each time (similar to website navigation).
- Electronic newsletters – check how they render on all devices (surprisingly MSD newsletter mostly read on desktops) – and on all platforms eg PCs and Macs.

Importance of subject line – <http://www.nngroup.com/articles/email-subject-lines/> Slide 23

- Use the subject line to highlight important content that's in the newsletter.
- Use it for your call to action (Tickets now on sale/deadline fast approaching).
- How can it stand out from the noise in the inbox.
- Personalise it perhaps?

Test all the links

- Even if people have sent you information for inclusion, their URLs may not be correct, so do check them all, and test your newsletter before you send it out. Otherwise people will stop trusting you!

Archive back issues

- Consider saving e-newsletters and uploading them to your website or intranet. You could also put pdfs of printed newsletters online, for archive purposes.

Evaluate, re-evaluate, and evaluate again

- Check click-through stats (if possible), which content is read, which isn't.
- Survey readers, and don't be afraid to ask people for anecdotal evidence too.

Apply standard journalistic practice (even in internal newsletter)

- Timely, relevant content.
- Edit appropriately (keep your aims in mind while you are doing this – if the newsletter is about disseminating business critical info, don't include 'villa for rent' adverts!).
- Don't use jargon, avoid abbreviations (even internally people might not know what it all means).
- Use clear and concise language. Use the active rather than the passive voice, Say 'Angela Vincent won the British Neuroscience Association Award' rather than 'The British Neuroscience Association Award has been won by Angela Vincent'.
- Try and use consistent date forms etc. throughout.

Resources

- CIPR CPD courses and skills guides
- Nielsen Norman Group <http://www.nngroup.com/>
- University Style Guide <http://www.ox.ac.uk/public-affairs/style-guide>
- <http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/guide-creating-email-newsletters-ht>
- <http://www.washington.edu/marketing/files/2012/10/ContentGuide.pdf>