



BSSEC

resources

Promoting Your Enterprise - a resource pack

Part 5 - Producing a newsletter

Newsletters are a great way to let others know about recent successes, events or offers and they can also act to remind people that you're still very much in business and waiting for their custom! This section aims to help you plan the production, content and distribution of a regular newsletter to help ensure that it's both engaging and a more effective use of your time.

Initial decisions

The more preparation you can do for the first issue of your newsletter, the easier it will be to produce subsequent editions. However, before you can begin you need to make some initial decisions similar to those when creating a leaflet or brochure (see Promoting Your Enterprise - Part 4). The main points for consideration are:

- What's the purpose of your newsletter?
- Who would you like to receive your newsletter and how can you reach them?
- What actions would you like the recipients to take?
- How will the newsletter achieve its objectives?

Choose your format

Making decisions on the above should help you to choose which format is the most suitable for your newsletter, and more importantly, most suitable for your target markets. Digital newsletters can be conveniently sent either embedded into an email or as an email attachment such as a Word document or PDF, however, don't immediately rule out printed newsletters, particularly if your target market is unlikely to access emails on a regular basis.

Digital

Pros:

- Cost-effective - no print or postage fees
- Flexible length - a digital format means that the newsletter length can be easily varied from issue to issue
- Timely content - digital newsletters don't need to wait for printers or postal services so the content can often be much fresher

"The more preparation you can do for the first issue of your newsletter, the easier it will be to produce subsequent issues"

Promoting Your Enterprise - a resource pack has been produced by Birmingham & Solihull Social Economy Consortium (BSSEC) - a practitioner-led network that supports and promotes the social enterprise sector.

The pack provides guidance and information for social enterprises to help them improve the effectiveness of their promotional activities. It comprises:

Part 1 - Getting Started

Part 2 - Defining Your Market

Part 3 - Writing press releases

Part 4 - Creating leaflets and brochures

Part 5 - Producing a newsletter

Part 6 - Building a basic website

The pack can be downloaded, free of charge, at www.bssec.org.uk

BSSEC contacts

General enquiries

Alun Severn
BSSEC Secretariat
Tel: 0121 233 0278
alun@bssec.org.uk

Media enquiries

Sarah Louise Taylor
Alpha Communication
Tel: 0191 375 0101
sarah@alpha.coop

See the test version of our **Purchasing Guide to Social Enterprise & the Voluntary Sector in Birmingham & Solihull** at www.bssec.org.uk

Cons:

- Deletable - a digital file can be easier to ignore and discard than a printed newsletter
- Limited reach - a digital newsletter can only be sent to people that you've had contact with - otherwise it could be classed as spam. Plus, some people don't have access to the Internet or an email account.

Print

Pros:

- Portable - printed newsletters can be taken to events, seminars, workshops, etc and easily distributed
- Attention-grabbing - printed newsletters often catch a reader's attention faster than a digital file.

Cons:

- Expensive - print costs greatly increase any production budget
- Time-consuming - printed newsletters often take longer to produce because the artwork and any images used need to be optimised for print production. The distribution - envelope stuffing, stamp licking, label printing - also takes much longer
- Waste creation - printed newsletters are often thrown away after reading, therefore it's important to at least use paper from a sustainable source and/or encourage your readers to recycle where possible.

If you do decide to produce a printed newsletter, then we would recommend that you also save the artwork as a PDF as this gives you the option of sending it out via email as well, or at the very least it can be uploaded to your website. Ensure that the PDF is compressed suitably for screen viewing, rather than a high quality print version as this will greatly reduce the file size.

Drafting a schedule

Drafting a production schedule will help to ensure that your newsletter is published on a regular basis. Regularity conveys a positive impression to target markets as it suggests that you're well-organised, reliable and committed to promoting your enterprise.

In planning a schedule you need to factor in time for planning content, collecting stories and images, writing and editing content, printing (if required) and distribution.

You also need to decide how many issues you're going to produce per year and schedule them accordingly. Be realistic about what you can achieve and how long it will take, and remember that quality is often more important than quantity.

Planning content

For every newsletter issue, try to put together a rough outline of what it will feature before you begin writing - this will help you to collect stories and information more systematically rather than wait for something to turn up (it rarely does!).

Creating regular features is a good way to help you plan your content in advance. For example, your newsletter doesn't just need to feature news stories - it could also include event details, opinion columns, case studies, interviews, product/service highlights, etc.

Remember, ultimately your newsletter is aiming to promote your enterprise and the content should reflect this, so ensure that it features details of any recent successes - newly awarded contracts, increase of customers, new staff or just news of jobs well done.

Also, don't forget to include basic but vital information such as newsletter title, organisation logo, publishing date and issue number, organisation strap line, addresses - publishing/head office, contact details, and a contents table.

"Regularity conveys a positive impression to target markets as it suggests that you're well-organised, reliable and committed to promoting your enterprise"

Collecting stories and images

If you'd like your newsletter to feature news from other organisations, then use your contacts and ask for relevant contributions.

If you do approach an individual or an organisation for content, you should give them the following information to ensure that you get the kind of copy you need:

- Article topic
- Desired emphasis or 'angle' of the content
- Any specific points you'd like to be included
- Details of image required and image specifications (size, file type, etc)
- Word count
- Deadline

Also, it's courteous to agree beforehand whether any content provided should be directly attributed to the author.

If you plan to collect stories and images from external resources such as websites, newspapers, other organisations' newsletters, etc, then it's important - and legally required - that you gain permission to reproduce the text and/or image before doing so. You can freely use information gained from external resources, but it's best to check any facts before you publish them or at least reference the source.

Don't forget to also ask for article ideas or contributions from your co-workers - they may have fresh ideas for articles or information about news stories that you're not aware of.

Relevant content

Collecting stories from others instead of creating all of the content yourself can save you time, but it's important to ensure that all information - regardless of its source - is relevant to your readers.

For example, if an organisation supplies you with a story about a new training course, make sure that the story explains why the course may be of interest to, or how it may benefit, your readers.

Writing and editing

An effective and engaging piece of factual writing should tell the reader the following information:

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- Why
- How

Also, a reader should be able to learn what an article is about before reading it entirely. This can be done by reading cues such as descriptive headlines and subheadings, image captions and pull-out quotes

A common - and easy to follow - rule of thumb when writing stories is to use the first line of an article to give the reader a general indication of what it's about, and then use the remaining part of the article to go into further detail.

For example:

Plush Training, the Birmingham-based social enterprise, announced a new volunteer scheme yesterday.

The scheme is hoping to attract young people that are interested in...

Once you've captured a reader's attention, you also need to maintain it so it's important to edit all articles to ensure that they convey a clear message and generally read well.

Don't be afraid to remove unnecessary words including elaborate descriptions or boring facts if you feel that they don't add anything to a story.

"Once you've captured a reader's attention, you also need to maintain it so it's important to edit all articles to ensure that they convey a clear message and generally read well."

Design and layout

Good organisation

Unlike a leaflet, a newsletter features multiple articles so it's essential that it has a well-organised layout ensuring that it's easy to read. Use a contents table, clear page numbers and if your newsletter has multiple pages, you may wish to give pages specific headers/footers indicating what kind of content they feature (news, events, training course dates, etc).

Consistency

The design of your newsletter, regardless of its format, should aim to reflect the branding of your enterprise in terms of its colour scheme, font usage and general style. This will encourage familiarity and recognition.

To maintain this, it's important that the newsletter's visual and editorial style remains fairly consistent from one issue to the next. Large publications generally achieve this by creating 'house styles' - guidelines that writers and designers follow (for an editorial example, go to www.guardian.co.uk/styleguide).

A simple way to achieve consistency is to create a style guide as you go and refer back to it, and in some cases add to it, for every newsletter issue. For example, if in the first issue of your newsletter you capitalise all job titles and all phone numbers are emboldened - then you should try to do this in all subsequent issues.

Visual contrast

A common design problem in newsletters is that when lots of short stories are placed directly next to each other, they can look very drab and almost appear to merge into one another. To avoid this, try to create visual contrast by using frames around stories or by placing coloured boxes underneath.

Also, try alternating the number of columns that each story has and use bold headlines, pull-quotes and images to 'break-up' any large blocks of text.

Accessibility

The RNIB makes a number of recommendations for ensuring that written materials are as legible as possible. But clear design and accessibility are not just about those with impaired vision. They are useful ground rules that can help ensure that your printed materials are easy to read and pleasing to the eye.

Remember the aim is to ensure that as many recipients as possible read rather than discard your newsletter.

Promoting Your Enterprise - Part 4 features some ground rules for legibility, taken from the RNIB's See it Right pack, or you can refer to the RNIB's website at www.rnib.org.uk

Working with designers

If you have the budget, then commissioning a design and editorial agency to produce a newsletter on behalf of your enterprise will save time and ensure that the finished product looks professional. Again, refer to Promoting Your Enterprise - Part 4 for advice on commissioning agencies.

Distribution

It's possible to also commission an agency to handle the distribution of your newsletter, however if you plan to do it in-house then ensure that you keep an up-to-date and comprehensive recipient list. This could include current and past customers/service users, shareholders, funders, etc - anybody you've had contact with that may be interested in your enterprise.

Try to create the list using software that will enable you to easily output the information onto labels or into your email software. Also, try to put in place a regular procedure to ensure that you add to the list frequently - for example you could allow time in your production schedule to ensure that you add any new contact details or email addresses before each issue is distributed.

Distributing a digital newsletter

If you plan to send out your newsletter via email, you may find the following steps helpful:

Step 1

Using your email software (Outlook, Entourage, etc) create a 'distribution list' which is a collation of email addresses that you can easily add to or edit. In Microsoft Outlook, a new distribution list can be created by holding down the Control, Shift and L key. Once created, give the list a relevant name ('E-newsletter recipients', for example) and proceed to add suitable email addresses.

Step 2

Ensure that all email addresses you add to the distribution list belong to people you've had contact with. Adding addresses of organisations that you or your enterprise has had absolutely no dealing with is counter-productive as technically, this is classed as spam (unsolicited advertising).

Step 3

Create a draft of your newsletter email and don't forget to give it a message title otherwise it risks being sent straight to recipients' junk folders. If you're attaching files, try to ensure they are less than 1MB in size - this isn't a strict rule but anything above 1MB is generally considered to be quite large.

Step 4

Ensure that your email message states what action recipients should take if they no longer

wish to receive the newsletter (eg send an email to you entitled 'Unsubscribe').

Step 5

Once you're happy with your message, input your email address as the main recipient and then BCC (Blind Carbon Copy) your distribution list to the message. By doing this, you're ensuring that your recipients don't see all of the addresses you have sent the email to, thus respecting privacy and not distributing email addresses without permission.

Step 6

Create a folder in your Inbox entitled 'Bouncebacks' and another called 'Unsubscribers'.

Step 7

Hit send!

Step 8

Once you've sent your newsletter, it's likely that you'll receive some 'bounced' messages telling you that your email couldn't be delivered to certain addresses. Move these messages to the Bouncebacks folder and mark as a high priority. Once you have deleted or updated the email addresses that have caused problems, you can then delete the bounceback messages.

You can do the same with emails from people that wish to unsubscribe from your newsletter, however its best to keep the original messages to prevent you from accidentally adding them again to the distribution list in the future.

Useful resources

See It Right

The RNIB has recently published a new See It Right book which aims to give organisations the tools they need to improve their policies and procedures in terms of information provision. The book can be purchased for £30 from the RNIB's website, which also contains a number of initial design guidelines free of charge.

www.rnib.org.uk

Constant Contact

An online business that provides email marketing software that makes it easy to create professional HTML email campaigns with no tech skills. A 60-day free trial of a limited version of the software is available.

www.constantcontact.com

Stock Layouts

There are numerous design templates available for very little, or even for free, from online companies. The quality and reliability varies and BSSEC doesn't endorse any of the services, however templates of leaflets, brochures and other promotional items in numerous software formats such as Word and CorelDraw and can be found at

www.stocklayouts.com