

Consider an eNewsletter...

By Molly E. Butz

If you're a business owner or manager and not currently sending a newsletter (of the electronic or printed variety) to your customers, it might be time you did. It may seem like all of the new blogging and social media opportunities are the best ways to advertise, network and generally get your name out there, and they can certainly be a rewarding avenue to explore, but don't let those options overshadow a time-tested marketing tool: The Newsletter.

Although a well-designed, professional-looking, printed newsletter can be very valuable, we're not necessarily suggesting you dust off your ruler, scissors and clipart books and start snipping. However, pulling together useful information and insights (in regular intervals) and presenting them to your customers electronically can be an easy, consistent and cost-effective marketing boost.

Sound good? Here are some things to consider...

Newsletters apply to practically every company, it doesn't really matter what business you're in. And, unlike advertising materials which are frequently passed over, a newsletter provides free, relevant and presumably helpful information its recipient will actually look forward to receiving. Moreover, because newsletters provide value, they aren't *seen* as advertising, but each time you send one, you're reminding your customers about your business. Voila...advertising! In addition, it's likely the valuable information it contains can be applied to more than just your customer base, so it's highly probable your newsletter will get passed along. Let's face it, how hard

is it to hit "send"? And just like that, more advertising!

Now, I did start by telling you that this would be easy and cost-effective, but I'm sure you're thinking "the devil is in the details." And yes, you will need to spend some time and a little money, but this really can be a low-cost endeavor. Let's take a look at what it takes to get started.

Begin by deciding on a reasonable timeline for sending your newsletter, whether that's once a month, bi-monthly, or even just a couple of times a year. Obviously more often, say monthly, gets your name out there more often and more consistently, but you're also better off sending a newsletter that actually has some "meat" less often than a newsletter that provides little or no value more frequently. Then, once you've devised your plan, **STICK TO IT**. Regular, consistent intervals is a simple way to send a clear, professional message that you're committed; plus, it gives your recipients something to look forward to!

Next, begin developing the content. That's likely the most time-consuming part of the project, but keep in mind that you don't necessarily need to do it yourself. Here are a couple of suggestions for obtaining content for your newsletter:

- Ask for submissions about pertinent subjects from your staff or your customer base.
- Look for interesting articles on the web; get appropriate permission to reprint when necessary.
- Outsource the writing to professional

writers, whether they're freelancers, writers for a local magazine or newspaper or just a good friend with great skills.

- [Warning: shameless plug] Check with the management staff at your local trade association, not only can they provide fantastic writing, they know a LOT about your industry already and we hear they're reasonably priced!

Once your content is ready, consider how your newsletter will be viewed, for instance as links in an email or as a PDF attachment (or maybe even as a printed document). This is another place you may want to consider bringing in an expert. Often the way the newsletter looks can be just as critical as what it says. Designing a brief four- or even eight-page document is usually a rather inexpensive endeavor and worth it for a professional appearance.

When you're ready, hit send, keeping in mind that randomly sending your newsletter to everyone in your email address book is an excellent way to get black-listed as a spammer. A better idea is to begin with a list of folks who have shown interest in receiving information from you in the past, and add to it by asking people via email (consider adding it to your email signature), your website or even your booth at a tradeshow to sign up to receive your newsletter.

A newsletter is an excellent, instantaneous way to drive more traffic to your website, create value for your customers and potential customers, and get your name out there. Because, let's face it, free, good information is just good customer service.



Need some help getting started? Give Qualtim a call.
We can write, design and send your newsletters for you.
Get in touch with Peggy today at 608-239-2608 or pmeskan@qualtim.com.