

# Five Steps to Plan a Strategic e-Newsletter Program



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## Introduction

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It's safe to say e-mail has become one of the most important business communications tools available today. Therefore, as you develop an online business strategy, consider utilizing an electronic newsletter (e-Newsletter) delivered by e-mail, to generate leads and build awareness. e-Newsletters are an excellent way to establish a closer relationship with your customers and ensure your brand and products are at the forefront of their minds.

Over time, an effective e-Newsletter will create and promote feedback and comments from reader. You will begin to hear from them about what new products they would like to purchase, what difficulties they had in using your products, or what tips they have that you can share with other customers. Before you get started, we suggest following these five steps to ensure success and return-on-investment (ROI).

## Step One: Set Your Goals & Objectives

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e-Newsletters can serve various purposes. Therefore, first consider what "measurable" goals and objectives you want to accomplish:

- **Communicate.** An e-Newsletter is the perfect way to communicate timely and valuable information to clients, prospects and referral sources.
- **Cross-sell.** An e-Newsletter is an excellent way to let existing customers know about products and services that complement items they have already purchased from you.
- **Generate leads.** Because of the ability to respond to an offer via e-mail, visit a Web site and track usage, e-Newsletters are a powerful lead generation tool.

No matter how carefully you plan your goals they will never be more than pipe dreams unless you pursue them with gusto.

*W. Clement Stone*

## Step Two: Know Your Audience

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Understanding your audience is essential to the success of your e-Newsletter. Tailoring your newsletter to the specific needs and interest of your various target audiences will help ensure that your goals and objectives are met. Some general questions to ask about your target audience might include:

- Can your target audience receive HTML e-mails?
- How fast is your audience's Internet connection? Should the e-Newsletter be full of graphics that will slow the download time?
- How much time does your audience have to read your e-Newsletter? Do they want a 30- minute read or a quick, short 5-minute overview?
- Does your audience want just the serious facts, or would they enjoy some light-hearted humor in the e-Newsletter?

## Step Three: Content is King

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What you put into your e-Newsletter is critical in determining its success. Because thousands of firms are already using e-Newsletters, there are a lot of online examples of what works and what doesn't. For example, Marketingsherpa.com publishes an e-Newsletter in which each issue contains several detailed case studies. Since Marketingsherpa's audience wants to get information with rich insight into how to market their products better, the newsletter is much longer than most examples you'll find.

Other companies target those audiences who are looking for smaller bits of information. The monthly e-Newsletter distributed by TiVo includes short stories and quick tips to get more from your digital video recorder.

Another alternative can offer the reader a combination of the two, wherein the publishers will first introduce the reader to a story or offer through concise overviews, then add a link to view the full article. These newsletters are meant to be quick reads but if a subscriber wants more details they are only a click away.

Once you've determined what type of content to put into your e-Newsletter, it's now time to decide how to pull it all together. If you don't have time to write a newsletter and/or do not know how to get content, you can outsource the project. There are numerous firms that sell content and the e-mail engine required to deliver it. Or you could try one of the following ideas:

- Ask customers to send in relevant articles/stories for publishing and give them credit for the work by including their name, title, and company at the end of the article.
- Ask your vendors if they have free content you can use.
- Tap third-party publishers. Many Web publishers will let you use their content for free, as long as you attribute the source (get permission first).
- Compile a list of news items or other content, summarize each item, add your own unique perspective and point to the full online article or story.
- You could purchase content from syndication sources (such as yellowbrix.com or contentfinder.com) or use services like Freesticky.com to obtain content.

- Ask your staff to take turns and volunteer to be “editor of the month.”

One last fundamental tip on e-Newsletter content: Keep in mind that the latest version of most e-mail programs (such as Microsoft Outlook) can read e-mail in HTML format. While many older programs can only read e-mail in plain text. Any “solid” e-Newsletter company will have technology in place that can automatically detect which type of e-mail program a person has and send them the appropriate version.

## Step Four: Plan the Delivery

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By this point, you’ve determined who your audience is and what content to include. Now, you need to decide how you are going to get it to them. Some businesses have been known to e-mail the newsletter to their reader list from their personal e-mail programs. This method looks unprofessional and should be avoided at all cost. Instead, use an e-mail newsletter service company that can help you put together your e-Newsletter, provide templates, and manage subscribers and the delivery of your newsletter.

Many of these firms are called Application Service Providers (ASPs), which means they are Internet-based “hosted applications.” To utilize these services all that’s required is a standard web browser. Most firms find an ASP superior to other solutions because it requires no changes to your current computer network. There are other solutions such as software you would store on your in-house servers. These are often complex, less sophisticated and time-intensive. To make your job as easy as possible consider using an ASP to save time, money, and frustration.

## Step Five: Establish Plans for Marketing

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This is an often overlooked step. Once you've built your e-Newsletter, the next question should be, "how am I going to add more new subscribers for each issue?" The easiest way to increase the readership of your e-Newsletters is to let your existing customers know about it.

- Mention your e-Newsletter in all your marketing materials.
- Use your e-Newsletter as a sales tool.
- Encourage people to sign-up via a form on your Web site.
- Ask your partners to invite their customers to sign up.
- Everyone in your company, especially your sales team, should encourage clients to receive your e-Newsletter.
- Ask your clients to forward the newsletter (or just a particular article) to their business associates if they think they would be interested in the content.

## About weBranding

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weBranding is a small marketing and interactive virtual consulting firm based outside St. Louis, MO. Our primary focus is helping small to mid-sized organizations harness the Internet and emerging technologies to generate leads and build brand awareness. Feel free to contact Tommy Young at 618-566-0034 or via email with any questions or to set-up a short initial "sourcing" meeting to talk about your requirements and how we'd approach meeting your needs on time and on budget.