



The 10 Commandments of Email Newsletters

by Elinor Teele

1. KNOW THY READER

Newsletters are about *adding value* to a reader's life. So find out all you can about your audience before you start writing - age, interests, habits, background, etc. Then organize this information into logical groupings (e.g. mid-level executives, marketers, entrepreneurs). The more you know about your readers, the more you can target your messages to appeal to their needs.

2. BE BRAND CONSISTENT

This one's a no-brainer. Use the same fonts, colors and graphics as you do with all your publications to stress brand recognition.

But also think hard about tone. What personality does your brand have (e.g. professional, warm, community-based, etc.)? Does your newsletter communicate that to readers?

3. STRESS BENEFITS IN SUBJECT LINES

Look at your own inbox. Which email newsletters do you open? Subject lines should always stress a benefit the reader will receive in the first few words:

- **Five Easy Tips for Going Green**
- **The Business of Social Networking**
- **A Graduate's Guide to Sensible Investing**

Spam is always a problem. To keep your email in your reader's inbox, stay away from:

- Sticky words (free, hot, love, etc.)
- CAPS
- An abundance of exclamation points!!!!

Newsletters are a friendly medium, so avoid using imperatives – Act Now!, Fill out our Survey. And don't worry about adding a date, issue number or company name. Readers should always see the company name in the "from" address. If they respect you, which they should, they'll trust the sender.

4. OBSERVE GOOD PRACTICES

This goes for both layout and content. Is your newsletter clean and easy for your audience to scan? Readers won't bother to dig down into the articles if it isn't.

More importantly, do you have an opt-out feature that's easy to follow? Does your newsletter contain 80% info and only 20% marketing? Is your writing truly offering something the reader finds worthwhile? Don't write a newsletter just to write a newsletter – focus on building a relationship with your audience.

5. TAILOR YOUR FEATURES

Remember the research we did in the First Commandment? This is where it pays off. Now you can write features that will appeal to specific groups:

- **Sampling Chicago's Chocolate Festival**
- **Charcoal vs. Gas Grills - The Final Verdict**
- **Our Eat Smart Weekly Recipe**



6. BE CURRENT

This goes for subject lines as well as features. What's catching people's interest? A worldwide pandemic? A new *Dancing with the Astronauts* show? Tie your content to the season, the news and the concerns of your readers.

- **Spring into Summer – 40% Off All Trampolines**
- **How Changes in Obama's Tax Policies Affect You**
- **A Doctor's Advice on Fighting the Flu**

7. INVITE RESPONSE

Find ways to invite your reader to click on links and engage with your content. A) This helps you build a stronger relationship with your audience and B) It provides you with valuable click-through data.

Examples include:

- **Coupons for newsletter readers**
- **Promotional deals**
- **Quick polls**
- **Free downloads**
- **Surveys with prizes for respondents**
- **Links to blogs, videos, galleries or new website features**

8. TEST AND TEST AGAIN

And again. On all browsers, at all times of the day, with variations on subject lines, feature lengths, graphics and headlines. You can evaluate the impact of your subject lines by splitting your readers and sending the first group one subject line, and the second another. Which one had a better open rate?

Also, remember that graphics can be suppressed in many browsers. Focus on the quality of the content, not the pretty pictures.

9. HONOR YOUR STATISTICS

They're not the "be all and end all" of email newsletters, but they're pretty close. If readers aren't opening your issue or they're opting-out in droves, something is wrong.

To get the most out of your statistics, provide plenty of click-through options to find out where the heaviest traffic is located. Analyze your weakest links. Conduct surveys. Shorten features. Ask your readers what they'd like to hear more about. Use your statistics to make the next issue better.

10. KEEP IT SHORT

Seriously. On average, readers will spend only 51 seconds on your newsletter and read only 19% of your content. Get out that hypothetical red pen and cut your features down to 300-700 words.

If you have a longer piece, executive summaries, which provide only the first paragraph and a link, are a great way to provide statistics on whether people are willing to read more.

Want to talk about your email newsletter? Contact me at:

<http://www.squamcreativeservices.com/Contact-Elinor-Teele.php>