



6 Common Mistakes Businesses Make When Using Customer Newsletters As a Marketing Tool

...And How You Can Avoid Them

by: Renae Gregoire
The Write Idea

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marketing
communications

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Introduction

If you take the time to do it right, producing customer newsletters as a marketing tool works. How do I know? Simply by the proliferation of newsletters I get in the mail.

A local real estate agent I've never even heard of sends me one every other month. So does a local pest control company—and I'll never use their services because my husband's in the business himself. My physician sends me a quarterly piece. And so does my local grocery store.

Not to mention the newsletters sent with my monthly phone and electric bills, and my credit card statement, as well as the quarterly pieces from my insurance provider and mortgage broker.

Or the dozens I receive by email...

From Office Depot, Amazon.com, Tiger Direct...and almost every other vendor I've purchased from online.

Why? Because newsletters work.

They help vendors build relationships with customers. They keep their name, products and services fresh in the consumer's mind. So the next time I plan to sell my house, or need more ink for my printer, I'll think of that provider or company.

Unfortunately though, many of the newsletters I receive are worth less than the paper they're printed on, or worth less than the bandwidth they use.



I read them, but only because helping companies market themselves by newsletters is one part my job. So I've seen plenty of bad ones, and am writing this report in an effort to help you avoid the most common mistakes I see repeated over and over again.

Mistake #1 – Sending Newsletters Irregularly

The Problem:

A newsletter that came in the mail last week spurred this article on. It was from a networking consultant who helped me set up my network last year. After I paid for the service, the first newsletter arrived. I thought, "This is great! What an excellent marketing tool, and a perfect way to keep his name, and services, fresh in my mind!"

Well, months went by, and honestly, I forgot all about that guy.

In the interim, a friend of mine needed help setting up her network. I knew the guy who helped me before was named Mike—but for the life of me, I couldn't remember his business name, or his last name.

He didn't give me an invoice, and since I paid by credit card, I had no way to contact him. Yes, he had a website, but it was some confusing mix of letters and numbers that meant nothing to me, so I couldn't remember it either.

So...he lost a customer, because I didn't know how to find him.

Until his second newsletter arrived—last week.

Too late.

The Solution:

If you haven't already started your company newsletter, one important point is that you should commit yourself to producing at least a year's worth. As with all marketing efforts, repetition, and patience, is key.

If you happen to get too busy to turn out an issue on time, send something else in its place—a short version with one article, an issue focused on frequently asked questions or reader comments, or even a promotional message with a note to look for your regular features in an upcoming issue.

The point is to send something—anything—so you can keep your name out there in front of your customers.

Avoid Mistake #1 yourself by sending your newsletters on a regular, consistent basis, and don't let too much time lapse between issues. Any less than quarterly,



and you might lose referrals or additional business because your piece didn't arrive in a customer's mailbox when they, or their referral, needed you.

If your newsletter arrives on a regular basis, and if it avoids the other mistakes noted in this paper, it may even become habit-forming—something your customers look forward to reading each month, or every other month, or every quarter.

Mistake #2 –Breaking the 80/20 Rule

The 80/20 rule says that your newsletter should be 80 percent information, 20 percent promotion.

Yes, you can go 75/25, or 85/15. The point is that your newsletter be a resource for your customers, rather than a blatant ad, which will never be read.

In other words, fill your newsletters with content your readers need rather than with content you want them to read.

For example:

An asset management firm may include an article that explains how its IT managers can increase efficiency using today's bar code technology. An attorney specializing in worker's compensation issues might include a piece covering the latest statistics put forth by OSHA, and what they might mean in the future.

Are you an accountant by trade? Your clients might like to read an article called, "7 Little Known Ways to Maximize Deductions." Are you a business development consultant serving sales managers in the high tech industry? Perhaps your readers will be interested in "4 Steps You Can Take Today to Increase Revenues from Current Customers Tomorrow."

Get the idea? When you fill your newsletter with pertinent content that provides real value to your readers, you're accomplishing a number of objectives at once:

- You subtly showcase the fact that you're an expert at what you do, and firmly establish that expertise in your readers' minds.
- You build or sustain relationships with your readers—they may have used your services, or purchased your products last year, but that doesn't mean the relationship should end.
- You increase the worth of what you've provided already, and make your product or service seem that much more valuable.
- You make your publication habit-forming, and welcomed, so it doesn't wind up in the recycle bin.



Make sure the information you send it timely, not outdated. And include lots of tips and advice that will help your reader.

Use the remaining 20, or 15 percent of your newsletter to talk about your latest products or services, or to relate a customer success story.

Follow the 80/20 rule, provide relevant information, and you'll avoid another common newsletter mistake.

Mistake #3 – Not Using Your 20% to Ask for a Response

If you do follow the 80/20 rule, and devote 20% of your newsletter to promoting your new products or services, or even to remind readers of what you offer, yet neglect to ask for a response, you're wasting your 20%.

In my opinion, every piece you produce can—and should—be used as a direct response vehicle.

Don't just tell your readers about your products or services. Tell them how it will make their lives easier. How it will help them generate new sales. How it will solve that problem they've been struggling with.

Help them see the end result your product or service will bring.

And then, ask them to call you so that end result can be theirs. Include a coupon, and ask them to clip it out to realize the savings today. Ask them to visit your website, or to email you.

Don't hope for a response. Ask for a response.

And the resulting sales will pay for your newsletter marketing efforts.

Or, do what many newsletter publishers do. Talk about your newest service. And leave it at that. And you'll be one of the crowds, which regularly makes this common mistake.

Mistake #4 – Writing in Corporate-ese

This is another very common mistake I see, both in newsletters produced by corporate America, and by the mom and pop Scrapbooking store on the corner.

The best way to describe it is to show you an example. (I'm stealing the following content from another of my reports on Fatal Mistakes Businesses Make When Producing a Company Brochure, as I don't have a bad newsletter example in front of me to show you.)



I've changed the company's name to save myself from possible legal action, and to save the company from embarrassment:

Incorporated nearly 40 years ago, XYZ is one of the longest established, independent, privately owned (xyz) companies. XYZ offers a comprehensive portfolio of services designed to protect and enhance today's international business community. The company has built a reputation based on the delivery of a high quality service which is discreet, thorough and extremely successful.

XZY act for some of the most pre-eminent companies in the world and operates on every continent. When working with clients a very close relationship is maintained which ensures the best understanding of their particular requirements.

I kid you not. Those two paragraphs are taken directly from a corporate brochure sitting right here in front of me. Grammar and punctuation mistakes included (XYZ acts, not act. Can you find the punctuation error? Don't worry—it's my job to catch problems like that anyway).

Did reading their material make you want to jump up and call them right away?

Let's dissect their prose, so you can avoid making the same fatal mistake in your writing—whether it's for a newsletter, or corporate brochure.

First problem: Using the passive voice. I'm not going to explain grammar rules here, but I'm going to show you how big a difference the active voice makes.

Passive sentence: *When working with clients, a very close relationship is maintained....*

Let's change it to the active voice, which is much livelier, and see what happens:

We maintain a very close relationship when working with clients....

Read through your copy. Whenever you see "is verbed," chances are you can rewrite the sentence for a better sound and flow.

Second problem: Writing as if they're telling a disinterested party what they do, rather than telling a potential customer. How to correct it? Write directly TO the customer.

Instead of: *We maintain a very close relationship with clients which ensures the best understanding of their particular requirements,*

Say, *We maintain a very close relationship with you, which ensures that we understand your particular requirements.*



Write your copy as if you're talking person to person. Make it conversational rather than a treatise. After all, if they decide to call you, they'll be working with a real human being.

Third problem: Talking about the company in the third person. If you resolve the previous two problems, you'll naturally resolve this one.

Instead of: *The company has built a reputation based on the delivery of a high quality service which is discreet, thorough and extremely successful,*

Say: *We have built a reputation....*

Fourth problem: Writing with over-used words and phrases that mean nothing, and that no one believes.

Instead of: *...the delivery of a high quality service,*

Define what you mean by high quality. The phrase is ubiquitous, and since everyone says it, no one believes it.

For example, perhaps high quality means that your reports are 99.7% accurate, and that you return all phone calls within two hours. Or, perhaps in your industry, high quality means error-free. Be specific. If you want to say you provide a high quality product or service, by all means do so. But tell your prospects what you mean by high quality.

And in doing so, your newsletter will stand out from your competitors', leave your readers with the feeling that a real person is talking, help you truly communicate to your customers, and avoid another fatal mistake.

Mistake #5 – Not Paying Attention To, or Going Overboard With, Design

First impressions are important. If your newsletter looks like your 12-year-old nephew designed it, chances are it won't be read. Either that, or your content won't be taken seriously.

Desktop publishing lets everyone create professional looking newsletters without hiring a graphics designer. But if you're graphic ignorant, or don't have the time to devote to design yourself, I highly recommend that you seek out the services of an experienced designer.

You'll have to pay more upfront for the initial layout and design work, but then you'll have a professional template to use over and over again.

On the other hand, don't focus all your energies on design. After all, in a newsletter, content is king. If you spend thousands of dollars on an elaborate



design, but neglect relevant content, it won't matter how pretty your newsletter looks.

When it comes to your newsletter, choose simple, yet professional versus ornate. And you'll avoid another common newsletter publishing mistake.

Mistake #6 – Continuing to Send to People Who Never Respond

Whether you're sending your newsletter to past customers or prospects, give them an opportunity to opt-out of your mailing. Otherwise, you're wasting already scarce resources marketing to people who have no interest in your publication.

And if they don't opt-out, but never respond, even after you've sent two years worth of regular issues, remove their name from your list.

If they by chance were interested, they may call you just to see what happened.

If not, you're saving yourself marketing dollars.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, there are many more than 6 fatal mistakes you can make when developing your business newsletter.

But by following the guidelines presented above, you'll be well on your way to an inviting, relevant and readable newsletter that moves people to action, outshines your competitors', and becomes a valuable resource that your prospects and customers will save.

If you'd like help developing information-rich content for your business newsletter, please get in touch today. And if you need a turnkey solution, you'll be pleased to note that I've developed working relationships with several experts, including graphic designers and printers.

You may call me at 727-302-0232, Monday – Friday, from 9:00 am until 4:00 pm, Eastern Standard Time.

Or, email me at service@ineedcopy.com, or visit my website at www.ineedcopy.com.

Author Biography

I'm Renae Gregoire, President of The Write Idea, a Tampa, Florida-based commercial freelance writing firm committed to helping businesses like yours communicate your message to your target audience(s) in the most clear and



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