

E-letter writing tips

Introduction

You are preparing to write your online newsletter. You have lots of information you want to share with your customers and clients. You are excited about the new opportunities that an e-letter will offer both your clientele and your business.

There are a few tricks to getting your newsletter just right. You want to make sure your readers will firstly open it, then read it and then do something with all the valuable information you are sharing with them.

You are probably thinking "this can't be too hard surely"? And it's not, if you take the time to research what works and what doesn't work in the online world.

Online readers skim read and scan. Your newsletter should be easy for readers to skim and get the information they want quickly. Document design will assist with this, but remember to keep articles short and punchy.

Plain English writing principles

All business writing should be easy to read, clear and concise. Your readers are busy people and if they can't easily grasp your concept, understand your language or make sense of what you are saying, you will lose them in an instant. And guess what, next time they see your newsletter in their inbox, they will probably unsubscribe.

Make yourself familiar with plain English writing principles. You can download a more detailed guide to these [here](#).

Here they are in brief:

- Write for the reader, not the writer
- Short sentences 15- 25 words – be concise
- Use familiar simple vocabulary
- Avoid superfluous words
- Avoid jargon and buzz words
- Use of familiar concrete words

- Use of active voice
- Use 'you' and 'we' (talk to your reader. Use a conversational tone)
- Write in the positive
- Document design
- Correct grammar and punctuation

Subject lines

Your e-letter subject line is one of the most important elements of your newsletter. Why? Subject lines can be the difference between your newsletter being opened or not—or being sent to the SPAM folder.

A reader will often make the decision to open your email based solely on your subject line, even if they are good customers of yours.

Subject lines need to be:

- Specific. Generic subject lines won't entice your reader to open. Don't use 'November Newsletter' or 'Latest news'.
- Be specific and to the point e.g. "Exclusive interview with Donald Trump"
- Don't make subject lines too long. Emails are often opened on mobile devices.
- A number of online marketing companies recommend that you limit your subject heading to 40 characters.

According to Flint McLaughlin, Managing Director, [MECLABS](#), "headlines have a specific duty: to give the recipient the need to read." He looked at the wording of select headlines he tested for a company. He discovered that the headlines that had the 'point first,' performed the best. So a headline like: "Set up your free account today and start earning money now," was less successful than "Earn money now with your free account." Earn money, is the point!

Consider your audience

What do you know about your reader? What do you want them to see, think, or feel? What is the goal of your message? What action do you want your reader to take? Do you want them to contact you, buy a product, sign up, or donate?

Your reader wants to know

- Who sent this?
- What's in it for me?
- What do they want me to know?
- What do I have to do?

- Do I have to read the whole thing?

General e-letter tips

Here are a few general tips to help guide you in preparing your e-letter.

- Your newsletter should entertain your reader. Engage them. Make sure it isn't too dry.
- Keep it short. Link to longer articles on your website or blog.
- Use case studies.
- Have interviews.
- Offer tips and advice.
- Have a link to your website/blog/facebook/linkedin/twitter in the newsletter.
- The more frequent your newsletter, the shorter it should be.
- Send out a test email first to see how it looks on both computer and mobile devices.
- Provide both HTML and plain text versions.

Finish with a call to action

Like any marketing material, newsletter articles should have a call to action. Remember your goal for the newsletter. You want your reader to do something. You may not be calling for the reader to buy something, but don't leave them hanging there with no direction on what to do next.

Think along the lines of:

- Download the latest policy from the intranet
- Register for training
- Request the latest product brochure
- Email the sales representative
- Complete the satisfaction survey
- Enter to win a free...

Your newsletter design

There are a myriad of templates available for your newsletter that are free to use. If you prefer something customised you could have a designer come up with a bespoke template so your image and branding is consistent across all your marketing collateral. Whichever option you choose, there are some basic things to keep in mind that assist with readability.

- Use of white space. White space around the text and between headings and paragraphs makes the text pop out. Dense text is hard to read, especially on a screen.
- Use of bullet points. Lists make it easy for the reader to get the information they need. Remember screen readers skim and scan. They will read a list of benefits more easily than a paragraph of benefits.
- Limit it to two fonts if you can and use san serif (easier to read on a screen).
- Keep capitalisation to a bare minimum. Harder to read and slows down the reading.
- Colours – keep to your branding colours. Don't have too many different or clashing colour schemes. You want your e-letter to be easy on the eye.
- Use of headings and sub headings. Headings are important. They break up the information, catch the eye and help people go directly to the information they are interested in. With good headings, your reader doesn't have to fight to find the information. Trust me, if it's not easily accessible, they will give up quickly.
- Use paragraphs! Break up your text into one point per paragraph.
- Graphics and images are important.

If you would like more information about producing an e-letter or would like some help with the content, please [contact me](#).

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