

Newsletter 101

A collection of ideas and tips

By: Scott Vaughan

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Part One: Basic Newsletter Design Tips

1. Design attracts the reader; content keeps the reader.
2. When choosing a typeface, always choose a serif typeface. Serif typefaces have feet on the letters. Times Roman has feet; Helvetica does not. In publications, serif types are easier to read; on posters and fliers, sans serif types are easier to read.
3. Avoid type sizes that are smaller than 11 point. When you drop into 10-point or 9-point type, it becomes very difficult to read and affects overall readership. Senior adults may complain over type smaller than 11 point. (This paragraph is written in 11-point type).
4. Be consistent with your type size. Don't use larger type sizes to fill space, or smaller type sizes to fit copy into a space. Using different type sizes begins to look unprofessional.
5. Leading (the space between lines) should be 2 points greater than the point size of the type. For example, if the point size is 11 the leading should be set at 13. Again, don't squeeze or expand leading to fit space. Be a good editor and edit the copy.
6. Headlines should always include a subject and a verb. Headlines should not be centered unless the copy is in a box and is less than three paragraphs in length. Flush left the remaining headlines. For two-line headlines, don't end the first line with a verb.
7. Avoid the whistles and bells that come with your desktop publishing. Don't stretch, decompress, or arch the headline. In other words, don't turn your headlines into artwork. Keep it simple.
8. Avoid jumping your copy from one page to the next, and from one column to another. Jumping occurs when editors want to continue a story, but run out of space on that page or column. Most readers are frustrated by jumps and will not follow them.
9. Avoid colored paper. Use a white or off-white paper. You'll have a more professional newsletter that's easier to read. Use color with borders and boxes, and with clip art. Color, used appropriately, increases readership.
10. When using copy written in the first-person (the pastor's column, for example), it's best to use a photograph of the writer. The first-person tense is more personal and the photograph strengthens the column and improves readership of it.
11. Don't use clip art as space filler. Clip art is a wonderful tool to improve readership, but make sure that it has application to adjacent copy.

Part Two: Headline Writing Tips To Improve Readership

12. Headlines affect readership. A headline's task is to attract the reader to the story. The first paragraph of the story then pulls the reader into the story. To increase readership, the headline must be present or future tense, not past tense. Instead of writing, "Men went on

- Mission trip” write, instead, “Mission volunteers build church building, improve worship setting.” See the difference? Our men went on a mission trip. Ho Hum. Focus on the benefits of the mission trip.
13. Headlines must include a subject and a verb, and the verb must be action-oriented. Instead of writing, “Vacation Bible School is June 7-11” write, instead, “Register today for Vacation Bible School, June 7-11.” See the difference? The second example calls for the reader to take action. This headline improves readership, but also causes action through the newsletter.
 14. When writing two-line headlines, make sure each line is a complete sentence or thought. You can accomplish this by making sure each sentence ends with a noun.
 - a. This is a good two-line headline;
It makes reading the story much easier
 - b. This is not a good
headline; it frustrates the reader
 15. When writing two-line headlines, the first line should not be longer than the second line.
 - a. This is not a good example
of a headline
 - b. This is a good example
of a newsletter headline
 16. Centered headlines should be limited to stories that are 3 paragraphs or shorter, and to stories that are published within boxes.
 17. Maintain the same typeface for all headlines, and ensure the typeface for headlines matches the typeface for stories. If you choose Times Roman for your stories, please use Time Roman for headlines, too.
 18. Don’t manipulate headlines into artwork. Don’t stretch or squeeze type, or use artistic style to rainbow headlines for affect. Headlines are not part of the newsletter’s artwork.
 19. The size of the headline must be in proportion to the size of the story. Don’t put a large-size headline on a story that is small in length; and, don’t put a small-size headline on a story that is larger in length.

How’s your newsletter? I’m happy to provide a review of your church newsletter. Just send three consecutive issues to Scott Vaughan Communications, LLC, P.O. Box 746, Lexington, SC 29071. The fee is \$50. You’ll get a 3-4 page review that includes specific suggestions and thoughts on your newsletter. This is not a generic review. You’ll get positive feedback and suggestions for areas needing improvement, and marked copies of your newsletters.

Part Three: Newsletter Delivery Tips

20. The newsletter is best delivered by the United States Postal Service. This ensures that each member – regardless of active status or attendance – receives ministry news and opportunity announcements from the church. Distribution only at the church property significantly reduces potential readership by the church family. (There is an estimate that only 50 percent of membership attends on any given Sunday. A 50 percent circulation rate is extremely poor for any publication).
21. According to the United States Postal Service, familiarity with direct mail improves readership. Church mail, for example, sent to church members is considered ‘familiar direct mail.’ Readership for familiar direct mail is as high as 70 percent. Readership mailed to non-members or guests is considered ‘unfamiliar’ and readership may drop to 40 percent with a 1-5 % response rate.

22. Readership can be improved when the folded newsletter is larger than a No. 10 envelope.
23. Readership can be improved when the newsletter is not mailed inside an envelope. This may require a heavier paper so the newsletter is not torn or wrinkled during mailing.
24. The arrival date of the newsletter is critical. The best arrival date is at the beginning or end of a circulation cycle. If the newsletter is weekly, it should arrive on Monday or Tuesday; or, it can arrive on Friday. If the newsletter is monthly, it should arrive at the beginning or end of the month. This timing allows the newsletter to be a forecast of the week or month ahead.
25. The average American household receives more than 15 pieces of mail each week. That's a lot of competition in the mailbox. It's important to make your newsletter 'stand out' from the others. The use of colors – but not colored paper – improves readership upon delivery.
26. Beyond delivery by U.S. mail, consider delivery on the church property. Ensure that copies of the newsletter are delivered to each Sunday morning Bible Study class. Make sure there are enough copies for each class member to have a copy. Also, there should be distribution points throughout the church property, specifically at main entrances and stairwells. These distribution points can be plastic holders or mailboxes, mounted on walls. In some cases, it's important to make the newsletter available outside the church property for those who need a copy, but who can't get to the property during operating hours.
27. The newsletter can be distributed through the church website, either in its entirety or in part. E-mail versions of the newsletter can be considered. E-mail circulation should be in addition to the mailed edition – not in place of it. E-mail editions can replace mailed editions if 100 percent of the church database has a current e-mail address.

Scott Vaughan is a former newspaper publisher and editor, working for 20 years in Georgia and South Carolina. From 1994-2003, he served as director of marketing for the South Carolina Baptist Convention. Through that position, he responded to God's call to serve faith-based organizations and churches with their communication strategy needs. He is married and has four sons (ages 16, 13, 10 and 7). In addition to an ecumenical ministry serving churches and faith-based organizations, he coaches baseball year-round, enjoys old Bonanza episodes, and ends each day with Moose Tracks ice cream. <^><