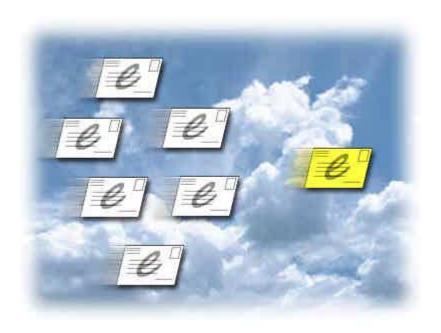# How to Write Newsletters That Get Results
Email Newsletter Essentials

By Steven Brown

Please Share This e-Book With Your Friends and Associates

Copyright Details

This document is Copyright © 2001 Steven Brown.

You are free to distribute this document, provided it is left unchanged.

Contact Details

Contact Steven Brown on steven@fouraster.com or visit www.fouraster.com.

About the Author

I spend hours every week reading articles written to help online business succeed. These articles contain information on all aspects of online business, from marketing to design to sales. I sift through these articles to find the small specks of gold. I then test what I have learned and document the results in my own newsletters and e-books.

I run a business that helps other businesses succeed with their online ventures. My business, Fouraster, has been in operation since late 1998 and has helped many businesses make their online business worthwhile. Proof of this is that my first client's web site is still operating and has continued to grow since the beginning.

If you would like to learn more about my business, please visit www.fouraster.com or email me on steven@fouraster.com.

Introduction

Email newsletters are one of the most effective means of online marketing. Don't jump into writing a half-hearted newsletter. Instead take time to learn the techniques you can employ to make your newsletters work.

All of the information I give you I have tested myself. That is the only true way to your best marketing strategy. Try it and test the results. I've saved you the hard work, I've tested these, and I know what works.

Some might not work as well for you as they did for me, and some may work better. Either way I hope I can get you thinking about the simple things that are often left out of newsletters. I appreciate your feedback, which allows me to determine how well this e-book has worked. Enjoy.

Before You Start

Before you begin your newsletter, you must first consider the following:
- What mailing list program will you use?
- Who is your target audience?
- What will your newsletter be about?
- How frequently will you send your newsletter?
- How will you gather a list?

Mailing List Programs
If you are able to install the program yourself, you can find many free mailing list programs at The Resource Index (www.resourceindex.com). If you are unable to install yourself, many web firms, such as Fouraster (www.fouraster.com), will be able to help you for a minimal fee.

Different programs come with different features. To determine your requirements, read through this e-book and then read this section again. You should look for the following features when choosing a program:

- Handle multiple lists – this comes in handy when you want to be able to manage many mailing lists (say members, general etc.) on the one web site.

- Resume interrupted mailing – sometimes a program will come across an error when sending out your newsletter. You want it to be able to resume sending where it left off.

- Handle large lists – sometimes your list may grow to many hundreds or even thousands of subscribers. You would like your program to be able to handle this capacity.

- Custom fields – it is handy to be able to include custom fields in your newsletter. For example, you might want to include each list member's name at the top of the newsletter.

- Database oriented – databases can handle extremely large amounts of information, as well as multiple fields. If you would like to include custom fields, if your list will become very large, or if you want a fast system, database lists are the best. Flat file databases (text files that act like databases) can be slow, can cause errors with larger lists and can become fragmented (data is not in the proper place).

- You will want to be able to modify the From address and the Subject of your emails. Your program should recall these each time you send a newsletter.

- HTML and plain text support – if you are planning to send HTML and plain text newsletters combined, your program should support it. Alternatively, if you would like to maintain two lists, one for HTML and one for plain text, your program should do so. If you are certain you will only use one of these formats, choose a program to suit.

- Comprehensive support – make sure your program comes with adequate documentation and support.

- Subscribe and unsubscribe confirmation – you want your program to let your readers confirm when they join or leave your list.

- Easy addition and removal – your program should make it easy for readers to join or leave your list.

Target Audience

It is important to define the target audience of your newsletter to ensure it achieves its full potential. If you are able to separate your audience into smaller groups, you should consider a separate newsletter for each group.

Clearly define your target audience and recall this every time you write a newsletter. It will help you to write appropriate articles and target any advertising. If you do not, your newsletter is less likely to achieve the results you desire.

Newsletter Content

A common mistake is to outline your product or services or your business operations in each newsletter. It is hard to find new information for each newsletter and readers will not be interested. Instead, write informative articles, solving the problems your readers face every day. This way your readers are more likely to find your newsletter interesting. They will also remain subscribed and read each issue. You will build trust with your reader and bring them closer to becoming a customer (or return customer). Displaying knowledge of your industry will make readers confident that you know what you are doing.

Newsletter Frequency

It is important to establish a reasonable time frame between newsletters. One that will:

- Give you enough time to write each newsletter
- Give you time to complete your other work
- Allow you time to gather the information you need
- Allow you to present current information on a regular basis
- Leave enough time between each newsletter for readers to take in the information

Common frequencies include:

- Daily
- Weekly
- Fortnightly
- Monthly

Gathering Email Addresses

The easiest place to start is with existing customers. Contact them and ask them if they would like to be added to your subscriber list. Explain:

- What your newsletter is about.
- How often it is sent.
- How they will benefit from it.

You should then:

- Offer to send a sample newsletter – do not subscribe them at this point, but include instructions for subscribing in this newsletter.
- Ask them if they know of someone who might be interested in your newsletter.

Important note: Do not spam. Spamming is sending unsolicited emails. If you do this you are not only putting your newsletter in danger, but your entire business. It can quickly destroy your credibility and some people may even take legal action.

Some products advertise that they have thousands of targeted email addresses that you can send your newsletter to. Unless you can prove that these people gave permission for their emails to be included, it will cause you many problems to use the product.

You are much safer slowly building your list with people who choose to read your newsletter. Using a mailing list program that verifies subscriptions will help build trust and prevent any unsolicited emails being sent.

Place sign up forms on every page of your web site. Not just a link, but an entire form. One they can enter their email into and be subscribed. If need be, allow them to enter any additional details afterwards.

Invite all of your readers to pass your newsletter on to their friends and associates. These people will be your target audience and are likely to subscribe. The testimonial of your friend makes this more probable.

Testimonials are excellent proof that your newsletter is worth the time it takes to be read. Scatter your testimonials on the page where your visitors find out about your newsletter. There is more chance that your testimonials will be read from this, than if you linked to a page of testimonials.

Planning Your Newsletters

With each newsletter you must:
- Remember your target audience
- Remember the purpose of your list
- Determine the purpose of the newsletter
- Determine the content of your newsletter

Newsletter Purpose

The purpose of your newsletter could be:
- To inform the reader of an event involving your business
- To make a sale
- To solve the reader's problem
- To generate a lead
- To build trust in your business

If your newsletter's purpose is to make a sale or generate leads, you should first build a strong reader base that trusts your business. It can take five to ten emails, possibly more, to build trust with your readers.

Newsletter Content

Pay attention to the problems your customers and readers are facing. Take note of questions asked and write articles based on them. By answering their questions, you can build trust and convert readers into customers.

One of my clients told me that his web site had only made one sale in more than a year of operation. He had consistent visitor numbers but was unable to convert them into customers. I wrote a newsletter defining ways to convert visitors into customers. It was very successful because it solved a problem for my readers.

Writing Your Newsletters

When writing your newsletter you should look at:
- The title and subject
- Your writing style
- Non-article related content
- Correct spelling
- Dot points (bullets)

Newsletter Title
This is the most important part of your entire newsletter. If your title is not catchy, your newsletter has less chance of being read. You have only a few seconds to catch your reader's attention, so make the most of it. Use the title as the subject of the emails.

One example of a bad title is "Fouraster Newsletter". Sure it's the Fouraster newsletter, but what is the newsletter about? When this was the title of my newsletter, I got no response. When my title was "7 Simple Ways To Turn Visitors Into Customers" I had instant response from my readers. It appealed to their problem and it caught their attention.

Remember: Your readers are only interested in solving their problems. If you can keep this in mind when forming your title, you take your readers into reading your newsletter.

Writing Style
When writing your newsletters, you should choose one style to be used for every newsletter. You style can be:
- Formal
- Informal
- Sales oriented

I have found the informal approach to be the most effective. If you write your newsletter like a letter from you to the individual reader, your reader will find it easier to read. Use the same style as if you were writing to a close friend. Do not push a sale, instead inform the reader, solve their problem and keep the advertising to a minimum.

The formal and sales oriented approaches can scare off readers, because they know your priority is to make a sale, instead of solving their problem. The formal approach would be suited to presenting statistics or similar information. The strictly sales approach would be more like a price list and you should consider using a separate subscriber list for a sales oriented newsletter.

Emotive language can be effective when used in moderation. Too often documents are filled with words in capitals, exclamation marks (!) and many exclamation marks or question marks (!!! or ???). While they are excellent for creating excitement and encouraging thought, overuse can cause readers to question your quality.

Non-article Related Content
It is a good idea to include legal information (such as copyright details) and contact details on your newsletter, provided they are not obtrusive. Also include subscribe and unsubscribe instructions. You should also invite your readers to send your newsletter to their friends.

Advertising can be effectively placed at intervals in your articles, but this can deter readers. It is better to leave advertising out of your newsletters, that way you can concentrate on solving your reader's problems.

Advertisements draw your readers away from your business, and chances are you would make more money from your business than the advertising revenue. Readers will understand that this information is not related to your article if you use separators.

Correct Spelling
There are few things more important in any written document than correct spelling. Word processors spell check documents with ease, so there is no excuse for poor spelling. The occasional typo will slip through thorough checking, but obvious spelling errors can damage your credibility.

To check for spelling errors, typos etc. write your newsletter in a word processor and send it to 10-15 friends. Have them read it over and respond with any feedback. At the same time you can test their reaction to the content. Don't let them be nice, let them know that this is serious and it needs to be approached objectively.

Although it can often take 3 or 4 checks before you come up with the final newsletter, the time spent is definitely worth it. Your newsletter plays an important role in making your business work online, so treat it seriously and dedicate appropriate time to it.

Dot Points
Dot points, bullets, numbered lists, etc. are an excellent way to present information. They are easy to read and easy to sift through for information. While sentences flow better, bullet lists are much easier to sort and search, because each item is easily identified.

Formatting Your Newsletters

There are many aspects of formatting to keep in mind:
- Title formatting
- Header formatting
- Highlighting words
- Line length
- Paragraph length
- Newsletter length
- Colours and images
- Fonts

Title Formatting
The title and subject of your newsletter should be in title case. That is, capitalise the first letter of every word (except joining words such as: and, or, to etc.). Most word processors can do this for you. You could also use colours or bold formatting for HTML based newsletters.

Header Formatting
Headers should also be in title case, but should be smaller than the title (if possible). You can also use bold formatting or colours for the headers. An important note to remember is to keep headers closer to their related paragraph than any others. Use this document as an example.

Highlighting Words
Many techniques can be used to highlight words, including:
- Bold and italic (underlining is used in draft documents to determine words to be printed in italics. For this reason, it is bad practice to use it).
- Words in capitals.
- Surrounding words with "*".

Be careful not to overuse highlighting techniques, as this can make it difficult for the reader to flow with the sentence.

Line Length
Although text can be automatically wrapped, your readers might be forwarding your newsletter to their friends, thus incurring > or similar markings before each line. This can cause the newsletter to become distorted when wrapping. Using a line length of 60-70 characters can solve this problem.

Paragraph Length
Reading from a computer screen strains the eyes and can even cause damage. Paragraphs 50-60 words in length are easy to read. Because of this, your readers are more likely to read your entire newsletter. The strain of larger paragraphs can cause them to stop reading.

Newsletter Length
The entire length of your newsletter depends on how frequently you send it. If your newsletter is only 1 or 2 pages long, it is not only easy to read, but it is easier to print and read offline. You should always keep in mind that your newsletter might be printed, and be generous on their resources. Consider how much time your readers have and adjust the length of your newsletter accordingly.

Colours and Images

If you are sending HTML newsletters, colours and images can either make them more attractive or destroy them. Your readers have to download each image, so keep file sizes small. Animations can be distracting when trying to read your newsletter.

Do not use bright colours, and use a colour scheme for your newsletter. Background colours and images make it hard to read your newsletter. Colours can be effective with headers and titles, but can interrupt the flow of reading when used mid-sentence.

You want to make it as easy as possible for your subscribers to read your newsletter. If you don't, chances are they will not read it and will possibly remove themselves from your list.

Fonts

For viewing text on screen, sans-serif fonts are easier on the eyes. Serif fonts are better suited to printed text. Leave it up to your reader to use the settings in their email program. Often the font you choose will not be on the reader's system, so they won't see it the way you intended.

Tracking Newsletter Results

The two main ways to check your newsletter results are:
- Looking at your site statistics
- Asking your customers

Site Statistics
Your site statistics are an excellent means of checking response to your newsletter. You should see a significant boom in visitors, followed by a slow decline back to your normal visitor rate. This decline can last for a few days to a week.

The boom may not be significant at first, because you are building trust with your list members. But soon your newsletter is the reason they return to your web site.

The boom usually occurs to the specific areas of your site that you linked to in your newsletter. An easier way to accurately track response is to create pages specifically for each newsletter. That way you can determine exactly how many people followed the links.

Customer Response
Ask your customers if they read your newsletter. If so, ask them which newsletters inspired them to take action. This will help you establish what works and what doesn't.

Conclusion

Well that's it. That's all I can say at this stage. Keep checking back at my web site (www.fouraster.com) for updates to this document. You can also subscribe to my fortnightly newsletter. The newsletter contains articles and updates to help your business succeed online. Please pass this on to friends and associates (especially business owners) in appreciation of the knowledge you have gained.

If you find someone else claiming to have written this article, please inform me. It's hard to protect knowledge I know others may steal and sell. It's not that the information held here is by any means considered a secret, there are no real secrets about marketing online. I want to protect those who could access this information for free from paying.

Regards,

Steven Brown
Manager, Fouraster
steven@fouraster.com

Fouraster, Helping Business Succeed Online
www.fouraster.com