

Developing an E-Mail Newsletter

This article, being distributed via an e-mail newsletter, shares why and how Tudog engages in this monthly ritual and what benefits we derive from doing so. The introduction of our newsletter, now in its 55th edition, was part of a marketing strategy launch in 2002 to establish and demonstrate Tudog's expertise. With 55 versions under our belt, we realize we have something to share on e-newsletters too.

The creation of a newsletter is a serious decision because initiating one without the infrastructure and commitment to sustain it can wind up doing more harm than good. Your e-mail newsletter, once launched, will create an expectation among recipients and if you fail to deliver on that expectation it could lead to a backlash as your customers call your reliability or commitment into question. The infrastructure you need includes content sources, graphic sources, and the e-mail capacity to send the newsletter. The commitment is eased when you create a timetable that details when the content needs to be concluded, when the graphics need to be completed, and when the newsletter needs to be edited and then ultimately sent. In choosing your send date, you need to think about the other newsletters your readers are likely to receive and make sure that you do not become just one more newsletter in their inboxes. We recommend you send it during a time of the month when there is traditionally less traffic. For example, Tudog sends its e-mail newsletter at the end of each month because most of our competing newsletters are sent either at the beginning or middle of the month. We have found that this increases our readership by approximately 20%.

The construction of a successful newsletter has 6 phases. They are:

1. Content

The newsletter you send stands or falls on the relevance and quality of the content you incorporate. If your website is meant to entertain your content needs to be entertaining. If it is meant to educate, your content better be educational. Tudog does not believe in using the newsletter for self-promotional purposes, as we think that readers rapidly grow tired of reading commercials and self-serving material. There are other forums to engage in self-promotion. Your newsletter is a service to your customers and needs to be written from the perspective of what they need, and not from the view of how it can serve you. By having your newsletter serve your customers, it will ultimately serve you too.

2. Frequency

You need to decide how often you are going to issue your newsletter. There are two primary considerations that need to make up the decision. The first is how often your customer base would engage your newsletter. If your sector is flooded with newsletters, you may conclude that there is an excess of reading material and that a quarterly newsletter is appropriate. Conversely, you may notice that there is both an absence of other newsletters and a hunger for information, leading you to conclude that a bi-weekly newsletter would provide you with an excellent opportunity. The second consideration is your internal capacity. You do not want to create an expectation for a newsletter that exceeds your production capacity. How many newsletters you are able to release each month needs to be the underlying driver to the decision how often your newsletter is released.

3. Design

How your newsletter looks is crucial not only because it represents your company, but also because it could determine how people receive the newsletter and whether or not they are drawn to read it. A well designed newsletter includes a clear delineation of all areas of content, integrated, relevant images, and an identity that is consistent with your company's identity. It is important that you view your newsletter as an extension of your company and that its personality is representative of the image you transmit to your sector.

4. Database

Your database is the list of people to whom you send your newsletter. Your list should be extracted from your client/customer base, prospective clients/customers, and your sector influencers. You should make sure that everyone receiving your e-mail newsletter either requested it or has a way to be removed from your list (clearly and easily marked in your e-mail). Your newsletter can be sent via snail mail, but the costs of printing and postage make e-mail a much more realistic and cost effective option. Using e-mail, you are able to send your newsletter as HTML, text, or in PDF format. You should select your format based on customer preferences. Tudog uses PDF after our inquiries indicated that our clients were most interested in receiving our newsletter in that format. Your clients/customers may prefer a different format, but it should be noted that the content, design, and frequency are not influenced by format.

5. Marketing

Your newsletter needs marketing support so that it can reach out to a wider audience and better serve your company as a marketing tool. The support it receives can be as simple as being listed on your website (with a sign-up option) to advertising and special attention. Tudog markets its website by permitted reprints of our articles in magazines and other newsletters, drawing attention to the company, our expertise, and that our newsletter offers continuing exposure to the ideas and hints we publish.

6. Testing

We recommend that you test your newsletter before you send it out to your widest audience so that you can benefit from the feedback of your test group and ultimately send out the best newsletter possible. You should select a random group of people (between 50-200) to send your newsletter to, alongside a brief questionnaire asking for reviews on your look and content. Once you have their responses and incorporate some of their comments, you will know your newer version is close to the needs and wants of your target market.

Your e-mail newsletter is an excellent way to reach out to and become meaningful to your clients/customers. Embark on an e-mail newsletter only if you have the resources and commitment to sustain it. Done properly, it is a powerful and continuing tool for exposure and reinforcement of your expertise.