7 Keys to Writing Email Newsletters…

…That People Actually Want to Read

You want to engage your customers. You want to keep your business top-of-mind for your target audience. You want to increase sales. But how? Aha! *An email newsletter!* You throw everything you have into it, and you send your little e-miracle out into the world. You envision your customers finding you in their inbox, their delighted expressions, eyes devouring every word, fingers clicking every link. Filled with pride and anticipation, you check your open and clickthrough rates.

And then you cry a little bit.

The hard truth is, just because you pour your time and energy (and heart and soul) into an email newsletter doesn't mean people will open it, much less take the time to read it and act on it. E-newsletters are one of the most common types of emails to send -- but they are also some of the hardest to do *well.*

A critical question to answer before you begin: *do you really need an email newsletter?* Sounds basic, but it's important. Do some research in your industry and determine if an email newsletter is actually an effective form of communication with *your* target market. Does your target audience subscribe to email newsletters? If so, what kind? Do you have the time/budget/resources to produce the kind of e-newsletter your target audience wants? What is the goal of sending your e-newsletter, and can that be accomplished through this platform?

Here's the thing: the answer might be no. *And that is okay.* If that's the case, make the smart decision to direct your resources toward a platform better suited to your particular target market. If, however, you determine you *should* proceed with an email newsletter (or you have an existing one that needs help), we've compiled 7 crucial tips to be successful.

7 Tips for Creating Email Newsletters People Actually Want to Read

1. Focus.

You've determined you should create an email newsletter. So, answer this question: *Why* are you sending the e-newsletter? If it's to tell all the people all the things all at once: *stop it.* It's too much.

Good email newsletters are not a weekly information dump; they are focused. Rather than including general information about every aspect of your business all at once,

choose one vertical, or choose a particular industry topic, and create a theme around it. Each email should have a common thread to tie it together.

2. Define the Relationship.

Expectations can make or break any relationship. So, set the expectations regarding your e-newsletter right there on your "subscribe" page -- *and be specific.* Tell potential subscribers exactly what kind of content will be in the newsletter, and tell them how often they'll hear from you. Not only does this improve your potential subscribers' experience, having provided this information up front is a great way for you to lower your unsubscribe and spam rates later on.

3. All about that… subject line.

Okay, so your e-newsletter has subscribers now -- but how do you get them to actually open *this specific email?*

It's all about the subject line.

You have to get creative with the email subject lines. It's tempting to keep the same subject line each time -- it will be familiar, and your subscribers will recognize your e-newsletter by it, right? Well, yes, that is probably true. But unfortunately, it's also boring. Repeating the same subject line offers no intrigue, no incentive to click *this one. Right now.*

A much more effective approach is to come up with new, creative, and engaging subject lines each time you send your e-newsletter. Need some help? Check out these tips.

4. 90/10 Rule (Don't be that guy.)

Even your most devoted customers can only tolerate so many sales pitches before they tune you out. Writing a good email newsletter is like being a good friend: stop talking about yourself so damn much. You know that guy. Don't be that guy.

You also know that company. You know, the one you subscribed to that one day and then everyday thereafter flooded your inbox with "Buy! Buy! Buy!" Think about it: were you happy to see their emails in your inbox? Or did you roll your eyes, click delete, and eventually unsubscribe altogether?

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What if that same company would've sent you emails with relevant, educational, and timely information? Information to help you, interest you, or entertain you -- not just ask something of you. Totally different experience, right? Bottom line: *the content of your email newsletter should be 90% educational and only 10% promotional.*

5. CTAs give me ADD.

We all know the Call-to-Action (CTA) is critical. So don't muddy the waters with too many of them. Choose one primary CTA to highlight above and beyond the others. You'll likely need multiple CTA's in one newsletter, but they don't all need equal emphasis. Position the non-primary CTA's as more of an afterthought, kind of like, "if you get around to it, click here too."

Don't expect your readers to bushwhack their way through a cluster of CTA's and hope they figure out what's most important. Clear the path and show them.

6. Minimalism.

Email newsletters are notorious for looking cluttered, so when it comes to the design & copy of your email newsletter, the minimalist approach has it in the bag. Your two most effective weapons against e-newsletter clutter are concise copy and adequate whitespace. So, channel your inner Kon Mari, and purge the page. Edit ruthlessly, ensuring your copy is tight, clean, and concise. Then, maximize the whitespace in the design. Utilize margins, spacing, and image placement to visually alleviate the cluttered feel.

One note about images: be sure they include alt text. Alt text is the alternative text that appears if an image doesn't load. Many people don't have images enabled in their email, which creates a problem if your email newsletter is image-heavy (and an even *bigger* problem if your CTAs are images). Alt text will show your readers what to click even if the image isn't enabled.

7. Bye, Felicia. (A.K.A. Make it easy to unsubscribe.) (Yes, really.)

You've worked hard to determine your e-newsletter's focus, you've laid out specific expectations on your subscribe page, you're writing short and engaging subject lines, you've developed a strong content balance, and your CTA's are clear and inviting on an uncluttered page. Your subscriber numbers are rising, as are your open and clickthrough rates.

But you can't stop staring at that "unsubscribed" number. Your email newsletter is *amazing*. So, why do some people *still* unsubscribe?

Stop. Stop worrying so much about your unsubscribe numbers. You want your emails delivered to people who will be happy to see them and who actively engage with your content. So really, by removing themselves from your list, unsubscribers are doing some valuable targeting work for you. Leverage this as an opportunity, and don't bury your unsubscribe link in a miniscule footer or ambiguous wording -- you don't want anyone marking your newsletter as SPAM because they couldn't figure out how to unsubscribe instead. Having a clear unsubscribe process keeps your subscriber list thriving and healthy.

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