

## How to write effective e-newsletters that get read

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Everybody is doing e-newsletters these days. You are probably receiving them from companies you purchased products from, from charities, from friends or family members in the mission field, from your church, from consultants like us, radio stations and much more.

Inbox clutter – a term that did not even exist a few years ago, is now becoming a real issue. And, many of us are discovering the usefulness of the DELETE button. But, we don't delete all emails we receive – as a matter of fact we enjoy reading some of them and use ideas or advice we get from others.

What we are likely to delete are emails we don't find interesting, useful or did not ask to receive, like spam or mass mailings. The same can be said for people who receive your charity's e-newsletters.

The bad news is that the majority of people who receive your emails might not be reading them right now. But, the good news is that you can change this situation by writing better e-newsletters that can be opened and read by your constituents.

### What are the benefits of sending e-newsletters?

Here is a quick list of benefits I have identified but you might think of others too:

1. *E-newsletters can enable your charity to strengthen relationships with its supporters and retain them for the long term.* Inspired donors are more likely to keep giving rather than those who have not heard from you for a long time.
2. *E-newsletters can help strengthen your charity's brand and position your charity in the supporters' minds as an organisation on the forefront of fighting poverty, making a difference to young people, or doing whatever your charity's mission is.*

3. *E-newsletters can help you send timely messages and updates about your work as soon as you receive such news.* Donors don't have to wait for months until your next scheduled magazine to hear about the launch of a new initiative, to respond to an emergency appeal for helping people in a disaster area, or to pray for a particular situation. An e-newsletter can help you get the message out to donors quickly before it becomes old news.
4. *Sending emails to large numbers of people is more cost effective than sending direct mail* and if your mailing list recipients respond to your calls to action you are likely to get much higher returns on investment (ROIs).
5. *E-mail updates or newsletters are easy to create* especially when you are using a hosted email service like Vertical Response (which is free for charities).
6. *You can measure the impact of your e-newsletters* and drive traffic to different parts of your charity's websites, blogs, social networking sites, etc. You can also cultivate stronger relationships with people who are reading your emails because you know who they are.

### **How to write a successful e-newsletter?**

The question is what are the ingredients of a successful e-newsletter? Well, here are a few tips for creating newsletters that will attract and retain your charity's supporters.

#### **Ideas about creating great content**

**Offer news items that are interesting to your charity's donors.** Note here that I said news items that are interesting to donors not to you! What you find fascinating is not likely what donors might find fascinating. So, the first step is to make sure that you are listening to your donors and you are discovering what they find interesting.

For example, donors to a charity helping teachers in Africa might be interested to know what happened at the training days for local teachers in Sierra Leone. How many teachers attended? What did they learn? How are they planning to use that knowledge in their schools etc? – This is the project you told donors about a couple of months ago and asked for their support – this a news item you might want to include in your e-newsletter to offer feedback on how this project impacted lives.

You might also want to share some news or statistics that highlight the types of problems you are trying to tackle, stories and comments from the people you are helping, a photo album featuring one of your projects etc.

Do some research, see how other charities in your field are sharing news and relating to donors online and work out how you can do the same. Bookmark or monitor RSS feeds from useful websites to receive information to help you craft better e-newsletters.

**Use case studies.** Most of your charity's supporters don't really understand the complex problems or issues you might be trying to tackle. What's more they are not likely to give money to an abstract cause. So, if you want more people to engage with your cause use real life stories about how your charity is helping people.

Build e-newsletters around one of your real life stories and make sure you let your field workers or beneficiaries tell the story in their own words. You can position the story in such a way that your donors are included too – by reminding them that they helped make the change happen through their gifts and prayers.

**Offer some spiritual insights or advice to your readers.** A Christian charity can use an e-newsletter to bless its supporters by offering them some spiritual encouragement in the form of short Bible based reflections. These could be spiritual lessons that the leaders of the charity or missionaries have learnt during field trips, answers to prayers and much more.

Charities that are working in areas of education or healthcare too can offer their e-newsletter readers and supporters some specific advice or, ideas about issues that might concern them.

**Make e-newsletters interactive.** There is nothing more boring than being bombarded with information and not given a chance to participate. The growth of social media has broken the power of monologue and has given readers a voice. So rather than shunning this trend you should use it for your charity's benefit.

You can do this by including a quick poll relating to a specific topic that your charity is addressing or to get donor's opinions on specific initiatives. Many people love to have their voice heard, even if only through a quick vote, and they love to hear how others view an issue.

**Make your e-newsletters fun.** Many charities have a serious tone in their communications, but being serious doesn't mean having no sense of humour.

Add some humour to your charity's e-newsletters and updates by including a photo caption competition, a funny cartoon, a link to an odd website, a trivia question, a quote of the day or something else that is likely to amuse your readers.

## **Formatting and technical ideas**

**Keep it short.** Keep the body of the newsletter short by providing headlines and excerpts linking to longer pieces on your website or blog. This enables readers to scan the content quickly then read what might be of interest to them.

**Offer both HTML and plain text versions.** Most hosted email services allow you to set this up automatically. Some readers prefer the nicer HTML look, while others might not be able to view an HTML version due to firewalls and filters.

**Use an interesting and relevant subject line** – to find out how you can do this read my 18 March 2010 **fundraising trendspotter** blog entry at:

[www.redinakolaneci.blogspot.com](http://www.redinakolaneci.blogspot.com)

**Ensure that one of your team members is in charge of producing the e-newsletter.** To maintain brand consistency in copy writing, format, tone and frequency, there should be one person in charge of bringing the e-newsletter together, even if there are multiple contributors.

**Use a hosted email service** – in our work with charity clients we often find that using an email service enables a charity to manage their emails more effectively and gives them much needed options of pre-built HTML's or text emails, nicely designed e-newsletter templates and detailed readership tracking reports. So, unless you have IT people who are looking for more work using a hosted email service might be the best option for your charity.

**Focus on content rather than design.** Today many people are reading their emails on their phones and not really looking at your wonderful designs. Your job is to make sure that the words you are using are telling your story in a clear and interesting way.

