

How to make your charity's newsletters and magazines a compelling read

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If you are looking for ideas to breathe new life to your charity's newsletters or magazines here are 14 topical suggestions that are likely to interest your donors and enable you to raise more money for your cause.

1. Build your newsletter or magazine around a specific theme

You can use one of your charity's main objectives as the key theme for the newsletter and use different stories, testimonies, feedback, prayer requests to reinforce various aspects of that theme.

For example, the Autumn 2008 edition of Urban Saint's newsletter focused on one of their objectives – 'to live adventurously' and different pieces in the newsletter from the CEO's editorial '*Embrace the adventure*' to short impact stories like '*Praying with a Stranger*' explored what does it mean to live adventurously for God today in the context of working with young people.

2. Focus on one initiative or an area of ministry

Think of a specific initiative or area of ministry your charity is carrying out – e.g. training illiterate women in Bangladesh, or building houses in the Dominican Republic. What are its recent achievements? Has it changed over time – if yes, in what ways? What do the beneficiaries say about it? – Always make sure you have a supply of quotes and comments ready from people who benefit from your work not just from your workers.

If you want to focus on launching a new initiative give the readers a few reasons why you are doing so? What are your hopes for this new venture? Make sure you talk about the potential of the initiative or the ministry to change lives rather than spend too much time telling readers how it will work.

3. Offer specific project case studies

Many charity newsletters talk generally about how their projects or their workers are involved in transforming lives but rarely do they offer specific case studies that outline a need the charity is set about to meet, how they went about meeting that need, the obstacles along the way and the final result.

A good example of a project case study can be found at:

http://www.dpmuk.org/Groups/87038/DPM/UK/Newsletter/May_2008/May_2008.aspx - this newsletter piece focusing on DPM's work in Ethiopia offers a good example of a project case study that can inform and inspire supporters to continue partnering with DPM-UK.

4. Inspirational insights from CEO's and other interesting columns

Isn't it about time that your charity replaced the rather boring and cerebral editorial from the CEO with something that is more heartwarming and doesn't sound like a sermon?

I do believe that editorials from CEO's have their place in a newsletter but they don't have to be generalistic and unfocused – they can be interesting and inspiring pieces that focus on pressing challenges the charity faces or let the donor be moved by their experiences of the work. Here is a good example of an editorial that moved me to tears:

You might also make your newsletter or magazine more interesting by adding a 'Frequently Asked Questions', 'Blogs we are following', 'Useful websites,' 'Your views and comments', 'Guest expert advice' sections and so on.

5. Promote legacy giving by celebrating your donor's contributions

Because legacies from generous donors count for a significant percentage of many Christian charities annual incomes and given the fact that average donor is over 70 years of age it is vital that charities celebrate long standing donor's generosity through legacy gifts.

So, how about including a short section at least once a year in your newsletters and magazines to show how legacy gifts can make a difference to your work now and in the future. You might also want to include in this section expert advice on will making and useful updates on financial and legal implications of legacy giving.

6. Introduce your charity's staff to your supporters

What are the people on the frontlines and those behind the scenes in the office really like? Do their life stories and faith journeys add to the credibility of your charity?

60 second type interviews – like those in the London Metro paper- to introduce staff to supporters helps them to relate to them better to them when on the phone or email.

7. Promote your charity's resources

What can your charity offer to interested enquirers or donors? – Prayer guides, articles highlighting outreach or community development principles, Bible studies and reflections from different parts of the world, *powerpoint* presentations for use in small groups or local gatherings to raise awareness of your work.

If you have useful resources to help strengthen relationships with your supporters and increase their interest in your cause then make sure you promote these resources regularly in your newsletters or magazines.

8. Share accumulated knowledge with 'How to' pieces

Over time most charities accumulate a wealth of knowledge and expertise that can be easily shared with people who might be interested in that knowledge.

Take for example Christian charities that have been involved in doing outreach in cross-cultural contexts for decades – they surely have learnt one or two things they can share with UK churches trying to reach out to people from different cultures.

Or charities that are working with children and young people – once again they have a lot to share with churches who don't quite know how to relate to the technologically wired up youngsters in their community.

In these cases reflective 'How to' pieces can offer something of value to present and potential supporters and help them to appreciate the impact the charity can have in their lives and their ministries.

9. Offer general financial updates

People want to know about your charity's financial affairs – they want to know whether you are using the money they give for its intended purposes. So, being open and transparent about financial matters shows donors that your charity is being a wise steward of their gifts.

The recent outrage surrounding MP's expenses has once again brought skepticism about spending of public money, including that of charities to the forefront of people's thinking. In today's highly skeptical environment charities need to fight back with financial transparency.

To make sure that your charity is being transparent about its finances I would recommend inserting some financial information in every edition of your charity's newsletter or magazine – a graph or pie chart to illustrate income and

expenses for that quarter or half year and a basic update on how your charity is reaching or failing to reach its financial targets.

10. Include great photos with captions

Because, as they say, a photo is worth a thousands words make sure that your newsletter or magazine includes plenty of photos that capture the heart of your work. And always include a caption at the bottom of each photo. Why? – Because most readers only skim read long articles the captions and headlines are amongst the few things they are likely to read and remember about your work.

11. Provide fundraising feedback

If your newsletter or magazine goes after a fundraising appeal make sure that you let your supporters know how much money was raised from the appeal and how will the money be used. Also, take time again to thank your donors for their generosity.

12. Educate your supporters with a ‘Did you know’ section

Offering relevant and even surprising facts about the countries your charity works in, the communities you help or about different aspects of your work can help donors to engage with your work.

Here is an example: *‘On June 20th 2009, 150 children completed their final exams in the new school premises built by Mission Direct volunteers. For the first time ever their exam results were amongst the best in Zambia– the main reason for this is the children’s increased confidence fostered by the loving care of Mission Direct’s volunteers.’*

The reader is reminded here, in less than 60 words, of the huge difference Mission Direct is making to these children and their education.

13. Publish your press releases and news about your work

Often charities send press releases to the media and fail to share the same news with their supporters. Whatever you think constitutes news to the outside world should be news to your supporters too. So, make sure that you incorporate information from the press releases into your newsletter’s or magazine’s news section.

Also, if you attract some media coverage draw attention to that in your newsletters – such information widely shared often helps to build your charity’s reputation and strengthen your brand.

14. Involvement tools

Finally make sure also that your newsletter or magazine gives supporters opportunities to participate in your work by inviting them to become prayer partners, regular givers, or giving them a chance to visit one of your projects.

Practical, financial and prayer involvement tools will help you build stronger relationships with your supporters and give them a chance to get excited about and inspired by your work. And the fact of the matter is that delighted and inspired donors are likely to stay on board with your charity for a long time.

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