

Newsletter Format and Distribution Tips

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- I. FORMAT (Paginated vs. Inbox)

You will find there are two formats for newsletters: those designed to be printed out in hard copy, and those designed to open automatically within one's email inbox. We'll call the first type "paginated" (numbered pages) and the second type "inbox" (one long scroll). Both can be offered to your readers for free in online versions, though each has a unique advantage. Only paginated is designed to be printed in nicely formatted hard copy pages, and only inbox will pop up automatically directly in one's email without clicking anything additional.

To decide whether you want paginated or inbox, ask whether having professional-looking hard copies might be useful, or whether making reading automatic right from one's email inbox is more important. Again, both can be online and free. It's just the ease of printing versus the ease of viewing that differ. Printed copies are handy, while automated viewing might result in more views since there is no in-between click required of the reader.

- a. Paginated Format (Better for printing, good for online viewing)

Sample: <http://www.sacramentoreason.org/2015-06-june-sacramentoreason.pdf>

Sometimes it is handy to have print copies of your newsletters – to set on tables at events, hand out to visitors somewhere, or to send to members by postal mail. The format most appropriate for printing pages is the "paginated" format, with numbered pages that are printer-friendly for a professional look.

The downside is that these paginated newsletters cannot be seen immediately when a reader opens their email from you. An in-between click is always required – either to an online link or to open an attachment.

To notify your readers by email that a new issue is available, you email them a "teaser" trying to get them to click a link or open the attachment to the email. Those who do click through will see an online PDF of the newsletter in another browser window. They can print these if they wish, or read it online page by page. The look is clean and professional, whether online or in hard copy.

To create a paginated version, which can be read online or printed in hard copy, use any publishing software such as Publisher, Word or LibreOffice. (LibreOffice is free for either PC or Mac.) You will then either store the saved newsletter as a PDF file online giving readers the online link, or you can attach the newsletter PDF file to individual emails sent to each reader.

b. Inbox Format (Better for no-click online viewing, poor for hard copy printing)

Sample: <http://eepurl.com/Z9gqz>

Some groups opt for the inbox format, which can be embedded directly into an email, so the reader sees the newsletter on their screen when they open the email – no additional click-through is necessary. This might increase actual readers but is not a format which can be printed nicely into hard copy, if needed.

Software to do this is popularly Mailchimp.com, which has professional templates and many features to help you. You can also use Zapier.com to auto-populate your new subscribers into the Mailchimp subscriber list so that you don't have to remember to add them manually.

Newsletters created and sent using Mailchimp are assigned unique online links in case you ever want to provide anyone with a link to the current or archived issues, as you see in the sample above.

II. DISTRIBUTING

If you have a list of subscriber contact information, distribution is simple. Either mail a hard copy or email an electronic copy or link to each subscriber. However, some groups present difficulties for distribution, particularly Meetup groups and social media because you do not have individuals' contact information.

a. Meetup Groups

Meetup groups offer no access to member contact information. You can ask members to opt in by sending you a message with their personal addresses, but this might not generate much response, and is counter to the anonymity of Meetup sites.

Another option is to become a member of each Meetup group you want to receive your newsletter, then ask the admins of the Meetup sites to make you a manager with email capability. Once you have email capability, you can create a custom mailing list within the Meetup page, which you can edit to remove anyone not wishing to receive your newsletters, or add new members of the Meetup each time you mail. Members can also opt out of receiving emails from the Meetup on their own, so it is highly versatile. (See Protecting Your Privacy below when mailing to Meetup groups.)

b. Social Media

You can post your new issue announcement on Facebook, Twitter and other social media by providing a link to an online version. Both paginated and inbox formats can have online links. The link for a stored PDF file would be the website address where it is stored. The link for a Mailchimp inbox

newsletter is available from the Mailchimp site, which automatically assigns a unique URL for each “campaign” or newsletter, found under “Social Share”.

III. PROTECTING YOUR PRIVACY

To protect your personal contact information, consider creating an email account in the name of the newsletter, such as admin@sacramentoreason.org, or acquire a free email account such as a gmail account. Use the newsletter name and email account when becoming a member of local groups, so that the newsletter can act in its own name within that group. This is handy if you want to make announcements of new issues or other newsletter announcements. Your name is protected.

For Meetups, make the newsletter a “member” of the Meetup group, with managerial email status. For example, the *Sacramento Reason* newsletter, Sacramento Reason is the name of a Meetup member of each local Meetup group. Sacramento is the first name. Reason is the last name. The email address is a separate email address for the newsletter. You can then log in to the Meetup site under the newsletter name, then send out your announcement under that name to your custom Meetup list letting members know that your newsletter is now available. Meetup members will receive an email from your newsletter name and newsletter return email address. Your privacy is protected.

IV. MONEY, SPONSORS AND THE FREEDOM WITHOUT THEM

The upside of having sponsors is the ability to mail hard copies to readers or print a large number of hard copies for other purposes. The downside of having sponsors is first the burden of finding and keeping them, second the tension of worrying over what content the sponsors might find objectionable, and third the necessity to dilute your newsletter space with advertising.

To have the most freedom, not only of your content but also of your time, try not use anyone else’s money. You can produce a professional, popular newsletter without money. If you need to print hard copies once in a while, supporters can usually be found to help with the cost for one-time printing because one-time needs are usually for a good cause that will elicit special support.

Since most everyone is online, there is no longer a reason to mail hard copies. Try to offer electronic versions only, without advertising, for your routine, regular issues. You’ll thank yourself.

V. ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR A GREAT NEWSLETTER

Professional-looking CoR Templates (paginated format) and regular monthly columns are available to you free. Loads of additional, valuable layout and content Tips to create a great newsletter are embedded within the free templates, which apply regardless of format. To receive the templates, layout and content Tips and monthly free columns, just ask! Email Judy at newsletterhelp@unitedcor.org.

Most of all, remember to have fun and keep the stress low - for everyone. Happy newslettering!