

the lead, Brown's second paragraph lists the particulars of the event, including the time, date and place.

For events that might not be timely or for immediate publication, Brown tries to emphasize how the information can be used in a feature story or company profile.

The press release can also be included

McFadden, who specializes in high technology public relations, said that a media kit can help successfully kick off a media tour, trade show or product announcement.

Depending upon the budget, McFadden said kits will cost between \$2 and \$10 each depending on how much information you include. He said that every

To be ready when the reporter calls, public relations professionals suggest that you have a copy of every release or media kit that you have sent a reporter.

Unfortunately, most companies wait until they have a major announcement or experience a disaster before collecting material that might be needed to build a foundation for a story.

## Newsletters can open company communication

BY ELIZABETH G. HOWARD

It includes everything from in-house birthdays and benefit information to sales promotions and quarterly financial reports. It serves as one of the strongest forms of intra-office communication, yet it is often placed at the lowest rung of priorities within a business — the newsletter.

Whether you have a staff of one or 1,000, a newsletter is one of the best ways to get important information to the masses. Whether its printed daily, weekly or bi-monthly, a newsletter can help create a warmer, more open and more communicative atmosphere within a company.

"What I always stress is the development of a sense of community," says Dales Garrison, owner of the consulting firm Editorial Services. "A good newsletter will create a concept of community, among employees or customers."

But before you decide to plunge into the world of publishing, there are a few things you need to ask yourself first.

• Who is it for? The most important information needed before you start is: for what audience is the newsletter geared? Is it for the employees or for stockholders or for nonprofit fundraising? This information will affect not just content but distribution as well.

When it comes to distribution, there are many options. If the newsletter is for out-of-house, the most logical way to distribute is by mail. In-house publications are usually distributed via employee

### Further Reading:

- "Effective Managerial Communication through Employee Newsletters," by John Waltman.
- "The Newsletter Handbook: How to Write and Publish a Newsletter," by Wesley Dorshheimer.

mailbox. But, in the era of online technology, another option has cropped up — electronic distribution.

Allen Salah, systems analyst for Electronic Imaging Consultants, says that one of the trends available now is the "electronic newsletter." It is built on a system computer and can be mass-mailed to employees. This is especially efficient if employees are scattered in different locations.

• How much do you want to invest? Think of this in terms of both time and money. A newsletter is not a small project. Once it's started, both employees and customers come to depend on it. And for some, it might be the only way of receiving news from the company.

This question leads to more specific questions like:

• How do you want to print it? Will it just be run-off on the photocopier or do you want to have it typeset at a local printer? This factor will help decide what kind of graphics you can use later. Clip art is OK for the photocopier, but a newsletter with photographs needs the extra attention a printer can give it.

• Who is going to write it? It can be a

major undertaking but like all projects, somebody has to be in charge. If someone in-house has the skills and the time to do it, it could save money. But Garrison says that the duty of producing shouldn't be "dumped on" someone who already has a full workload.

One way to take some of the stress off is to appoint a "contributor" from each department.

• Who is going to put it together? It can be the X-ACTO knife and rubber cement or the four-color overlays for color photographs. Whatever you want, you will need someone to lay it out and paste it up. This can be done, once again, in-house. There are also other options.

A local quick print store can take the copy, create a format for it and print it, sometimes overnight. But for a higher tech newsletter, you might want to turn over the bulk of the work to a printer who can scan in photographs, lay out electronically and print in almost any format imaginable and on any paper. More options, for more money.

• What computer program is right for me? Salah works with many companies on pre-press consulting and has worked with nearly every word processing program available. He says that your program should reflect your need. If you are putting out an in-house product, it's likely one of the word processing programs you already have will be sophisticated enough to do what you need. But Garrison and Salah agree that QuarkXPress is one of the most useful programs on the

market for desktop publishing. Another program for that kind of work is Page-maker. Both are available for Macintosh and IBM-compatible computers.

• What about content? In the haze of type faces and page sizes and computer programs, sometimes what you actually put in can get lost in the shuffle. But Garrison says that it is important to remember that the newsletter is a form of communication, one very different from

See NEWSLETTER, on next page



### Promote Your Business

#### Tips for a better look

- Don't forget about white space — Don't try to cram too much information in too little space. The right amount of white space can make a good newsletter even easier to read.
- Graphics are good — from photos to clip art to cartoons, graphics break up the monotony and make the product more fun to read
- Bigger is better — Type size should never be less 10 points high. A bigger type size is more friendly to the eye, not to mention easier on it. Eleven-point type is ideal.

# NEWSLETTER

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verbal. Don't forget about that sense of community.

"You can achieve that by writing stories about people," Garrison says. "Don't focus too much on the products, or the business aspect of work."

You can achieve this, Garrison says, with the help of graphics and feature stories. Graphics help to break up the copy and can convey humor or information, often in a more efficient manner.

Feature stories are written with people in mind. They give information in a colorful way, often by focusing on the people aspect of the story.

"Good feature writing is very important," Garrison says. "The technique is really humanizing. It tells stories, and that is a wonderful thing."

Garrison does caution writers on the use of humor. What is funny out loud doesn't always translate on paper. To lighten up the product, Garrison suggests buying a syndicated cartoon or hiring a professional cartoonist to develop a

strip for your company.

If your newsletter is for out-of-house, you probably want to take a different spin on the content. Since these are most often for promotion or for fundraising, Garrison stresses the soft sell.

"What you do is strong enough to sell your product," he says.

Once again, Garrison says the best technique is feature writing. It humanizes the product and makes the information interesting to read. Along those lines, he also recommends testimonials from happy customers and case histories on how well the product has done.

- What about consultants? Not a bad idea, says Salah, especially if you are starting totally from scratch and just need help getting off the ground. Most consultants will give answers over the phone to many of the questions you'll have without a charge.

The key to a successful newsletter, Salah says, is doing your homework and deciding what you want before you start.

"In general, the end result will be what you have to have to start with," Salah says.