

# 25 Ways to Use Membership Newsletters

Another free report from Word Engines Press Inc.,  
publisher of **A Manager's Guide to Newsletters: Communicating for Results**

Here are some ways a newsletter might be used to help a membership organization achieve its objectives:

- Attract new members
- Get existing members to renew
- Support member initiatives
- Solicit media coverage
- Encourage more participation by inactive members
- Report on new services (or products)
- Interpret news within the organization's context
- Get members' ideas for new projects
- Attract candidates for elected offices in the organization
- Protect the organization's reputation
- Get demographic or psychographic information about members
- Increase motivation to achieve goals
- Ensure members understand the benefits of membership
- Minimize red-tape or bureaucracy
- Clarify priorities
- Improve relationships with other organizations
- Control the cost of communicating
- Lessen ambiguity or uncertainty
- Report on the election of organization officers
- Standardize procedures
- Ensure consistency in membership qualifications
- Inter-office coordination
- Speed up decision making
- Prepare members for coming challenges
- Find out what members think the organization represents.

We now consider a few of these, and other applications, in more detail:

### **Solicit media coverage**

If your organization takes part in public affairs, as a political party or an advocacy organization, it probably holds some interest for the mass media. Another example is that of trade publications, which stay abreast of developments and news within trade organizations.

Newsletters can enhance media relations in a number of ways. One is to set a context for news stories. An insurance organization, for example, might explain rate changes within the context of losses and broad economic conditions. A group raising money for hospital equipment would put its fund raising within a context of reduced suffering.

For more information about using a newsletter to support or drive relationships with the mass media, see Chapter 10, Media Relations, of A Manager's Guide to Newsletters.

### **Interpret news within the organizational context**

Give some thought to another aspect of media coverage, the interpretation of mass media news about your area of interest. Will your members understand how the media arrived at a certain conclusion? Do members need background information about a news story so they can relate it to their interests or knowledge?

The need to tell the whole story is important in many membership organizations. The mass media normally emphasizes the unusual, or the exception to the rule, rather than the normal or routine. And that can cause trouble if your members aren't well informed.

### **The benefits of membership**

If you hold office in an association or society, you likely know many good reasons for membership. But, do members know, and do they know the relationship between the cost of membership and its benefits?

Individuals change and organizations change. If you joined an organization several years ago, you probably expected (and received) some specific benefits. Since then, though, your needs and goals evolved. At the same time, the organization changed, to respond to changes elsewhere.

Keep your members involved and aware of the benefits by writing about them regularly. Use your newsletter to discuss specific benefits, and ask members if they are taking advantage of them. And, don't forget to use your newsletter to get information from members. Distribute questionnaires with the newsletter, asking members about their needs and objectives.

### **Faster decisions**

Newly elected officials of nonprofit associations can make faster decisions with a little help from your newsletter. A newsletter that provides information about decisions, and the reasons for them helps members prepare for a role in a more senior position. The newsletter provides an ideal format for outlining alternative strategies or positions, in varying levels of detail. And, by interviewing ex-officials or other experts, good advice accompanies the information.

To put all this together, consider an annual (or, quarterly), special issue. In it, put articles and graphics outlining coming decisions, the alternative solutions, along with lists of pros and cons, and opinions from officials or outside experts.

### **Attracting candidates for elections**

Newsletters can be used in several ways to attract candidates. For example: by explaining the importance of the organization, or how its continued existence depends on volunteers running for elected positions.

Also use some space to outline the duties and responsibilities involved with each office. Potential candidates sometimes avoid running because they believe the position involves more responsibility than is really the case. Another strategy sees current and previous officeholders explaining the benefits of holding office.

Finally, remember the importance of recognition. The newsletter should congratulate winners and also-ans after each election, and officially thank office-holders as they leave elected positions.

### **Clarify priorities and lessen ambiguities**

Diversity—of goals, demographics, and a host of other factors—reduces consensus on priorities and promotes ambiguity. Try lessening these problems with a membership newsletter:

- State the organization's purpose in each issue of the newsletter
- Interview senior officials about how objectives will be achieved
- Prepare an annual review of priorities
- Survey readers on their perceptions.

### **Watch out!**

Newsletters are powerful and positive tools, but there are risks and problems associated with them.

One is a tendency to become internally focused, concentrating on the organization's activities, rather than on members. A newsletter with this emphasis is as likely to drive away members as to keep or attract members.

Many large membership organizations have geographically dispersed offices or branches. A newsletter dominated by news from head office (or the originating office) will be a disservice to the organization. Members connected through the branch offices will ask, with justification, if the organization takes their issues as seriously.

### **More?**

To learn more about newsletters, and especially their strategic application, read the new book, **A Manager's Guide to Newsletters:**

**Communicating for Results.** More information is available online, at <http://www.managersguide.com/> or by sending e-mail to [wepress@cadvision.com](mailto:wepress@cadvision.com)

Your comments about this report are welcome, and can be sent to [wepress@cadvision.com](mailto:wepress@cadvision.com)

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