

WHY DO EMAIL NEWSLETTERS?

Many small not for profit organisations have yet to take advantage of email communications for a variety of reasons – some genuine and some which are out of date excuses. This article sets out to explain why almost everyone has the audience, the content and the capability of using email to communicate.

E-News

Email newsletters have been buzzing around the third sector for many years (in web terms), and the majority of large organisations use them to communicate with donors, supporters, campaigners and other special interest groups.

Email newsletters can take many forms, from brief e-alerts with a single story to the more common newsheet style with 4 or 5 paragraphs leading to a webpage with the full article. Whichever format they take they are normally a précis of events, asks, and news stories to encourage supporters to feel part of an organisation and continue or develop their support by educating them about the issues.

E-xcuses?

Small and medium charities have been slower to take up this new communications medium for a variety of reasons, and many still ask why they should, what benefits it will bring to them.

Part of this reluctance comes from knowing it is another job to add to the pile of tasks to be done by already stressed and overworked staff and volunteers. But part also comes from forgetting that communication with our supporters, beneficiaries and peers is one of the best ways to raise the profile, and the income, of an organisation. That may sound harsh, but often when we have our heads down battling to do the day to day tasks the strategic development issues are hard to hold onto and even harder to put into effect.

The old arguments about the age and profile of our audiences no longer holds up as an excuse not to take on e-communications. Approximately 65% of the UK population use the Internet, 70% of them have broadband and 90% of all web users use email. With the growth of silver surfers keeping in touch with grandchildren by email and shopping online, there is no longer an easy opt out from using this type of communication.

The final excuse for not doing emails is not having email addresses. When we know that 65% of the audience use the web and 90% of them use email it must be possible to get a fair proportion of our supporters email addresses. Add to that that our target donor audience are by necessity the better off, and there is a good chance that they use email: the correlation of wealth to Internet access is obvious. And bear in mind that stakeholders, like volunteers, are emotionally involved with the organisation and want to engage.

Whether you take on doing a newsletter at the moment or not you should be asking everyone for their emails. On donor forms, sign up forms, at events and of course the web, take every opportunity to ask people for their email addresses.

E-Communication

There are many reasons why email is an ideal way to communicate and many audiences it will work with. Some of the ways you might use email include:

- **Donors:** communicating appeals, stories and updates on your work to build their knowledge, understanding and support for the cause
- **Campaigners:** keeping them up to date, calling them to action, encouraging and feeding back
- **Events:** informing your volunteers and supporters about local and regional events, giving them updates, calling for help and inviting them to participate
- **Volunteers and Speakers:** giving them news, calling them to action, asking for their help and encouraging their good will as part of the 'family'
- **Beneficiaries:** informing them of services, changes and updates, offering support and interaction with the charity
- **Schools:** if you have a schools or teachers resource then email is a great way to tell them something new and keep them engaged
- **Peers:** are you developing best practice, doing research, working in new fields? Email is a cheap and easy way to build a peer network and gain recognition

The list goes on – almost any type of audience can form part of an email cycle, even if it is ad hoc news which gets sent out only when you have something to say.

And content is critical. If you don't think you have enough news for a monthly newsletter it is better to tell your audience directly that you will send them something when there is something to say than lose their support and patience by sending them filler.

But before writing off the monthly email newsletter as too much work, or using the excuse that you don't have enough stories, try thinking outside the box about what your audience wants to hear. On a printed newsletter you may feel that you need solid and strong stories to publish. But email newsletters can be much more relaxed and personal. Our supporters are interested in the minutia of charity work, about the daily work we do, and they like to feel that they are inside the organisation, part of the team. So rather than waiting for the big story or the annual event, tell them small things more frequently and build the relationship.

E-Advantage

So why should you be doing email newsletters?

- **Cost:** the average cost of a letter is over 25p per item. Email is 1p or less. So for every letter you can send 25 emails – one letter pays for two years of email newsletters
- **Timing:** emails are instant, once you hit the send button it will land in the recipients in tray within minutes and most are opened the same day. So if you have important news, time sensitive events or an urgent need for volunteers they will get it almost immediately.
- **Results:** with email you can instantly see how many people opened an email and who clicked on links, so you can very quickly get a response and see what they like and what they want, then you can refine your message based on real results – presuming you are using a proper email tool (see the knowledgebase article [Best Practice for Sending Email Newsletters](#))

- **Interaction:** as mentioned above the public want to engage with the charity sector. They want to know what we do and how we do it. Email offers us a real opportunity to send short, personal and engaging news in a regular basis. Whether you have donors, supporters, volunteers or beneficiaries communicating with them will develop the relationship.
- **Fundraising and Brand building:** the mantra of direct marketing has always been about one-to-one communications. We personalise our mailings and packs. With email it is much more immediate, personal, and can be segmented easily and cheaply to suit the audience. It is an ideal opportunity to spread the word and build stronger ties with our supporters, ultimately developing your brand awareness and recognition and increasing their involvement which leads them up the donor ladder.
- **Ease of use:** people think of emails newsletters as a chore. But they are quick and easy compared to a printed newsletter. No endless copywriting, layout and printing, no envelop stuffing or reliance on an agency to get the mailing pack right. With the proper email tool and a template set up for repeated use, writing 4 or 5 one paragraph stories should be quick and easy, and remember that they can be more personal and less formal than the printed edition.

So whatever your size, whoever you can talk to, email is a cheap, cost effective, easy to use and immediate – the ideal way to communicate and build relationships with donors, supporters and stakeholders alike.

E-xample

A classic Small Not For Profit Organisation Example:

- Allotment Association with 400 registered names.
- Disposable annual income c £2,000.
- No staff, committee of 6 volunteers.

Before...

Bi-Annual newsletter has always taken days to get together:

- Stories to collect
- Printing and copying, then envelop stuffing and labelling. AGM annual notification is the same.
- Three mailings per year with a cost of each (with photocopying and 2nd class stamp) 45p and about a weeks work from a small, tired group of volunteers.
- **Total spend £550. Hassle – huge.**

After ...

In 2006 the Association put up a request for email addresses on a form at rent taking and an email sign up on the website. Gathered 210 emails within 6 months and the list is slowly growing – and remember that allotmenters are usually grumpy old men who do not fit the best profile for Internet users!

Committee requested and received permission at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) to send out AGM notices by email where possible and now posts AGM papers on the website.

Now:

- The Association does monthly email newsletters from February – October (the allotment season) giving news of events around the area, farmers markets and Association News.
- The newsletter talks about improving the site, committee plans, fundraising and has even converted people to the search engine Everyclick.com and is **raising over £30 a month**.
- Total cost of 200 E-news ten months a year £20.
- Printing and postage costs more than halved and hassle cut dramatically.
- Total cost for AGM notices offline £60, online £2
- **Annual cost of communicating with members now c £82**. And best of all the association has more people volunteering, coming to meetings and taking an active part in the site – because they feel more engaged and involved.

E-finale

So whatever your audience, however small your organisation, email newsletters can offer you a great way to engage with your audiences, and the more you engage the more they will participate, whether with time or money. The old excuses are over, email is cheap, easy to do, and at least 60% of your audience has email. And honestly, what excuse have you got left?



<http://www.ict hub knowledgebase.org.uk/whydoenews>

16th May 2007

www.suefidler.com

Sue Fidler Ltd. VAT No: 888323679
Registered Office: 38/39 Bucklersbury, Hitchin, SE5 1BG

sue@suefidler.com

Reg Co. No. 05921202
Registered in England and Wales