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The why, how and “wow” of newsletter marketing

Print and e-mail newsletters give you a cost-effective way to communicate regularly with clients, prospects, referral sources and the media. According to data from the Financial Publishing Services Co., newsletters cost less per contact than advertising, direct mail, exhibiting or sales calls. And in a report by the Direct Marketing Association, they ranked above other methods, such as seminars and calling on referrals, as the best tool for developing new business.

Distributing a newsletter enables you to increase market awareness of your brand while informing recipients about topics related to the services you offer. You can use them to introduce your firm to prospects, keep in touch with clients, and inform readers about ways you can be of service. Newsletters also provide a reason for a follow-up call and a basis for starting a conversation about the topics covered that can facilitate sales.

As a result, these proven marketing tools can help build, strengthen and maintain client relationships, encourage reader contact, and generate leads that develop into new business. The information newsletters provide enhances your credibility and helps establish your firm as the place to go for expert service and advice.

Why a PDI Global newsletter

While theoretically you could produce your own newsletter, practically that's difficult (if not impossible) and costly to do on a regular basis. Choosing topics and writing articles takes valuable time away from other tasks, and producing a well-written and designed newsletter requires more talent and resources than you may have.

PDI Global newsletters do all this for you — and for considerably less than you could do on your own. In fact, you can save thousands in lost staff time and billable hours, as well as in production costs. How? Let's see.

Say you want to distribute 500 copies of an eight-page bimonthly newsletter with four articles per issue, or 24 articles per year. And you want the same high quality of design and content that a PDI Global newsletter provides in electronic or print formats.

In our experience, it takes about 6 hours to research, write, edit and proofread a typical 600-word newsletter article. At an average billable rate of \$300 per hour for partners (or comparable measure of time-value for top producers), developing the articles would “cost” your organization \$43,200 a year. Add to this typical design (print and HTML) costs of \$500 per issue (5 hours at \$100 per hour) for six issues (\$3,000), and you get an annual cost of \$46,200.

This translates to \$7,700 per issue. Let's say you plan to e-mail your newsletter to 300 recipients, mail out 150 print copies, and have 50 print copies available to hand out. This means you'll need to print 200 full-color, high-quality print copies at roughly \$450 per issue. That would bring your total annual newsletter “costs” to \$48,900.

Of course, that's if you actually do the newsletter or have the design capabilities to do layouts in-house. Many firms find that partners get involved in more important work and never get the time to write. As a result, your newsletter never goes out, and your firm loses a highly effective means of developing more business.

By comparison, a top quality PDI Global newsletter always goes out and costs much less — enabling you to save up to \$35,000 or more a year. Plus, you get outstanding quality, reliability and client support.

How to maximize effectiveness

To get the most from your newsletter program, you'll need to create and implement a marketing plan. This involves the following steps:

1. Identify your target audience

The effectiveness of your newsletter program depends greatly on your ability to reach people likely to generate more business. At a minimum, these include:

- **Clients and former clients.** Since clients are the best source of new business, use your newsletter to keep in touch with them and let them know how you can be of service.
- **Prospects.** These include individuals and businesses with the characteristics that match your client profile. By analyzing your client base, you'll be able to identify the industries, company sizes (revenue and number of employees), household locations (ZIP codes) and contacts (title or role) that characterize your best clients. Use this profile to research and identify prospects you want to contact.
- **Referral sources.** Other professionals such as lawyers, bankers, accountants, insurance agents and consultants can be a great source of referral business. Your newsletter gives you a way to regularly remind your professional contacts of your firm and the services you offer.
- **Staff.** Distributing the newsletter to your "internal clients" is important to maximize communication and cross-selling opportunities.
- **Media.** By sending the newsletter to the local media (newspaper editors and talk show producers), you can increase awareness of your firm, generate opportunities for interviews and quotes and help build relationships that can lead to favorable publicity about your services.
- **Associations and trade groups.** At a minimum, send copies of the newsletter to the board members of all industry associations relating to the niches you serve. Be sure to include a copy for the editor of the association newsletter or magazine, with a cover letter noting that articles can be republished under your byline.

Once you've identified the types of individuals, professionals and businesses you want to contact, you need to build a distribution list. The quality of your list is perhaps the single most important factor in the success of your newsletter program, so develop your list carefully.

If your existing database does not have all the information you want, you may need to build a list through Internet research or by purchasing names from list brokers, trade and professional organizations, or publishers of magazines serving your target audiences. You may also want to ask firm members for suggestions of names to add to your list.

2. Develop a distribution strategy

To maximize readership and effectiveness, you'll need to have both print and electronic versions of your newsletter, so you can deliver it in the format readers prefer. (See our white paper: *Integrating print and e-mail marketing communications*.)

To determine recipients' preferences, you might want to first send a print copy to all contacts on your list with a request to indicate how they would like to receive future copies. Alternatively (or additionally), you can post a PDF of the newsletter on your Web site with a sign-up form gathering contact information and delivery preferences for those who subscribe online.

To e-mail your PDI Global newsletter, you can use either of these electronic options (see www.pdiglobal.com for examples and details):

- **Flex-E-letter** — This powerful HTML template and e-mail distribution system enables you to make every newsletter issue your own by changing the title, headlines, articles, images and colors as you like. Plus, Flex-E-letter's advanced tracking capabilities allow you to see which e-mails bounced, which were opened, and who clicked on

which articles or other links. So you can easily manage your lists and capture information about reader interests that can help achieve your business development objectives.

- **PDF Link** — You get: 1) a PDF file (with the same layout and customization as the print version) of each issue to post on your Web site, and 2) a formatted text e-mail with the newsletter title, brief summaries of the articles and a link to the PDF on your site. You can edit the e-mail as you like for various recipients.

Whichever option you choose, keep in mind that you'll need permission to e-mail nonclients and will have to comply with the CAN-SPAM Act. Among other things, the act requires you to provide a way for recipients to unsubscribe from your e-mail list and forbids deceptive subject lines. Furthermore, make sure you know how you might get blacklisted by servers (so none of your e-mails are delivered) or can avoid having your e-mails blocked by spam filters. (See our white paper: *E-mail do's and don'ts — How to get the most out of your e-mail communications.*)

In addition, you may need a Section 7216 consent form to send a newsletter containing nontax information to your tax-only clients. Failure to conform to Sec. 7216 requirements can result in criminal penalties. (See our white paper: *What you need to know about regulations under IRC Section 7216 and how they affect your marketing efforts.*)

3. Put some "wow" in your newsletter

PDI Global print newsletters offer extensive areas for adding logos, photos, biographies, descriptions of services and other information. You can use the back page to insert custom articles, ads, seminar invitations or news about your business. Also, you can opt to change your newsletter's title and colors, or use a custom-designed front page.

Our Flex-E-letter electronic newsletter option offers even more customization possibilities. You can change the title, headlines, articles and images as you like, insert links, byline articles, include an introductory message, and add your own content. (It also gives you a powerful e-mail distribution and management system — wow!)

Whatever the format, the more often you change the information you present, the more effective your newsletter will be at attracting attention and getting read. Be sure to take advantage of the opportunities PDI Global newsletters provide to strengthen your brand and increase awareness of your services.

4. Make it personal

The more you can personally address a recipient and tailor your newsletter's content to a specific audience, the more it will be read and the greater the impact it will have.

For print copies, you can increase impact by including a personalized cover letter in an envelope — at least to your most important contacts. Also, you can use the back page to run an article on a topic of particular relevance to a certain audience.

For e-mail newsletters, you may want to have one of your partners send the newsletter via a personal e-mail to key clients and contacts. Most e-mail programs will allow you to segment your list so you can distribute your newsletter from different partners with individual messages.

Also, consider using PDI Global's Flex-E-letter HTML e-mail program to create separate editions of your newsletter for different audiences. Flex-E-letter allows you to swap in different articles on topics of special interest to particular groups. These include articles you write, download from your newsletter's content library, or purchase from PDI Global's online Content Store.

To help shape your newsletter's content to your target audience and service objectives, consider participating on your newsletter's **National Editorial Board** (NEB). In addition to suggesting topics for future issues, you'll get to review articles for content, quality and relevance to your readers — and enhance your credentials and professional image, too.

5. Think beyond mail/e-mail distribution

In addition to needing a print newsletter for recipients who prefer that format, you'll want print copies to include in proposals and brochures, hand out at seminars and conferences, leave behind at meetings, and display in your reception area. Also, print copies are better for introducing your firm to prospects and making a stronger impression on key contacts.

Sign in to the online Content Store at www.pdiglobal.com with your user name and password to search your newsletter's content library as a source for articles you can use on your Web site and submit for publication under a partner's byline in local media and association newsletters. Getting published is one of the best ways to build credibility, increase visibility and name recognition, and generate new business opportunities. And, as a content subscriber you will receive a discount in the Content Store on articles outside of your content package. Be sure to ask your PDI Global Account Coordinator or sales person for more details.

While newsletters are proven marketing tools, by themselves they cannot be expected to quickly produce a great increase in business. Effective newsletter marketing requires aggressive follow-up.

At a minimum, this means promptly responding to requests for information, and then calling the contact to see if you can help in other ways. But for maximum results, you need to periodically follow up a distribution with phone calls. While following up with all recipients may be impractical, selecting 25-50 key clients or prospects to call after an issue is sent out can help develop more business.

6. Assign responsibility and track results

To make sure your newsletter marketing plan is implemented, it is important to assign an individual to manage it. This should be a member of the leadership team, such as the marketing director or the partner in charge of the niche the newsletter is for.

Also, set goals for mailings and follow-up, and track results against them. Note how many inquiries and leads are generated by your newsletter, and how many of them result in business. Distributing a newsletter issue may not directly produce a sale, but it often paves the way for one.

For print newsletters, you may find it helpful to mail an issue first-class once a year so you can have undeliverables returned. You can then check the "bad" addresses to see whether they need to be updated or deleted.

You may also find it helpful to conduct an annual newsletter satisfaction survey. Besides getting feedback about your newsletter, a survey enables you to identify individuals or businesses that might be interested in your services, and to find out what topics most interest them. This can give you ideas about which services to market to them. A survey can also enable you to cull your list by removing those who indicate they no longer want to receive your newsletter.

For e-mail newsletters such as PDI's Flex-E-letter option, you can more immediately track delivery, open and click-through rates to gather intelligence about a reader's interests. By embedding links to your Web site or e-mail system in your e-newsletter, you can also facilitate response and find out more about the services or issues a reader is interested in.

Let us know how we can help

Our marketing experts are ready to help you get the most out of your newsletter program. So feel free to contact your PDI Global account coordinator at 800-227-0498 for assistance in developing and implementing a newsletter marketing program that helps you turn more of your firm's potential into profit.