



# Client newsletters help grow the business

*10 best practices for creating an effective client publication*

**By Tim Morawetz**

Communicating with clients on an ongoing basis is a vital task in every service business. For years, newsletters have been a proven means of staying in touch with clients, telling them new things about your practice, and ideally, encouraging them to do more business with you as well as refer their friends and colleagues to your practice. This article presents 10 best practices – organized into the categories of strategy, design, writing, and distribution – that can help you produce more effective client newsletters.

## STRATEGY

### **1. Know why you're producing a newsletter, and is it working?**

Most clients have trouble finding time to read for pleasure, let alone for practical reasons! So, your newsletter needs to provide them with valuable news, unique insights or actionable information in an attractive and easy-to-read format. With a few issues under your belt, it's worth finding out what clients think of your newsletter. This can be as simple as asking their opinion in a phone-call, including an evaluation form with the newsletter, or even convening a live focus group. Craft your questions to reveal whether you're achieving your goals, and to solicit their ideas for making the newsletter more relevant to their individual needs.

### **2. Continually reinforce your distinctive service offering or process.**

Chances are, your practice tries to distinguish itself from the competition through the services you offer, the processes you employ, or your client-service philosophy. Your newsletter should echo and reinforce these broad messages whenever possible to help remind clients why they chose to do business with you.

### **3. Be sure it reflects other aspects of your 'brand.'**

Your client newsletter is another extension of your brand image, alongside your letterhead and reports, your sales presentations, your website and emails, your reception area décor, and even the way your team answers the phone. Your clients may be puzzled if your newsletter is inconsistent or not up to the calibre of these other 'touch-points.'

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## DESIGN

### 4. Create a distinctive newsletter brand.

In the same way that people learn to recognize a consumer product through its packaging, your clients should come to identify your newsletter through its own consistent branding. This branding begins with the masthead (the title block on the front cover), which should contain the newsletter's name, descriptor, issue date and possibly a graphic symbol or logo. Good newsletter names have a 'physical' quality (i.e., can be talked about without having to include the actual word 'newsletter'); may contain a journalistic reference (often including a word like News, Update, Gazette, Bulletin, Reporter, Times, etc.) to convey newsworthiness; and may link to the practice's name, mission or corporate symbol. Beyond the name, find a typographic treatment and colour palette for the overall newsletter that's in keeping with the practice's external branding and personality, as well as other communications elements.

### 5. Organize your content the way newspapers do.

Just as newspapers have distinct sections (e.g., news, sports, business), an effective client newsletter is organized into clear departments, ideally located in the same place issue after issue. It's helpful to identify these departments using headings at the top or bottom of each page, and use colour where possible to further distinguish these sections. You might even develop graphic icons for each section or type of story. Don't forget to number the pages, and include a 'Contents' or 'Inside this issue' box on the front cover to direct readers inside.

### 6. Identify each story's importance, then highlight its contents.

Newspaper designers indicate to readers which stories are most important by placing them at the top of the page ('above the fold'), and by using larger or bolded type in headlines. A good front page has an asymmetrical layout with several different stories to attract the reader's interest, often continuing stories on an inside page so more than one story can appear on the front. Instead of having a single headline to grab attention, use a lead-in headline or a subhead to deliver more information. Use 'pull-quotes' (short quotations presented in larger type in the middle of a story) to add visual interest and reinforce key points.

### 7. Incorporate graphics, charts and photos.

To avoid a long expanse of plain text, add relevant visuals that support the story's message, and give them a descriptive caption. Wherever possible, present data in graphs or at least tables instead of sentences, again interpreting their meaning in a brief caption.



## WRITING

### 8. Be personal, but professional.

Write in a friendly, conversational tone – not too stiff or formal, yet not too casual. A brief opening greeting containing a seasonal message works well, and provides an easy opportunity to thank clients for their business and to invite them to make referrals to your practice. Don't assume everyone understands industry jargon, so explain acronyms and provide brief background explanations on current issues being discussed.

### 9. Match the writing style to the type of article.

When announcing new service offerings, When commenting on industry trends, use a personal, conversational style. When introducing new services, consider a more objective, journalistic style of writing. If you're giving instructions, use bullet points or numbered steps to clarify desired actions.

## DISTRIBUTION

### 10. Produce and distribute it cost-effectively.

While some clients may still wish to receive a hard-copy newsletter in the mail, most clients are able to receive and read a PDF version. You can send the actual PDF version as an email attachment, but to avoid clogging clients' inboxes with large attachments, it's better to send an email with a link to the online PDF version. To help minimize the size of the PDF file, be sure that photos are scanned at an appropriately low resolution.

Overall, creating a 'must-read' client newsletter requires a significant and ongoing investment of time and effort. However, when planned and executed effectively, a newsletter is a powerful tool in helping distinguish your practice and fostering client loyalty.

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