

Shy No More: The Humble Newsletter Comes of Age

By veteran copywriter and
copywriter's coach, Chris Marlow

The newsletter has always had its place in business, usually as a benign house organ administered by the P/R department. But now the Internet has transformed this “soft sell” standby into one of the Web’s most prolific sales tools.

There are thousands of newsletters published on the Web, some with millions of opt-in readers. Virtually every business type and industry can pick from a wide array of “enewsletters” serving their niche — and most of them are free.

What does the electronic newsletter have that the traditional newsletter doesn’t? What did marketers discover about free online newsletters to cause so many to exist? And how can your company tap into the powerful benefits of this reinvented marketing tool?

Some of the most important characteristics of the online newsletter are listed below. A quality newsletter sent on a regular basis can help you to:

- **Retain and resell valuable customers.** Most of a company’s growth comes from its own client base. In fact, current customers are six to 10 times more likely to respond to an offer than non-customers. Keeping in touch via a regularly published newsletter allows you to “massage” your most profitable database segment and generate increased sales.
- **Turn “warm” leads into “hot” prospects.** Sending a periodic enewsletter to a prospect who has “opted in” to receive your newsletter keeps your company in front of him or her, and allows for interactions that advance the relationship. It doesn’t cost anything more to send your online newsletter to “cold” leads in your house database, and “warm them up” for a subsequent marketing effort.
- **Support online marketing initiatives.** In each electronic newsletter, you can create multiple opportunities to send your reader to a specific Web page via an embedded link. Perhaps you can offer a technical paper on some aspect of your business. Your intrigued reader “clicks through” to a Web page in order to download your “free report.” You then capture their contact data and ask a few questions. The right questions will tell you if this person qualifies for follow-up as a “hot” lead. (This is also an excellent way to gather low-cost marketing intelligence.)

- **Enlist the power of viral marketing, if possible.** The most inexpensive and most powerful form of Web marketing is “viral marketing.” Encourage current customers and prospects to share your message with their colleagues. It’s inexpensive because it costs you nothing when customers and prospects forward your newsletter to their contacts. It’s powerful because there’s an “implied endorsement” by the sender of the message. I used this tactic two months ago to launch my side business of coaching for freelancers. It brought me four clients almost instantly.

- **Build a strong “opt-in” database.** Enewsletters are an excellent vehicle for collecting data. A newsletter with good, useful content (and there should be no other kind) — can help you build an “opt-in” database quickly, using both house files and outside lists. Because your newsletter is 100% opt-in, you can take advantage of other Web-based marketing methods without having to worry about stepping over the line of acceptable email practices — which are becoming increasingly vigilant.

- **Generate revenue.** Once your email list grows to a substantial size (say 10,000 minimum for a very narrow market), you can accept newsletter advertising, if that fits within your corporate philosophy. (In B2B, newsletter ads are usually “text only” ads of five line or so, which are typically inserted at the top, in the middle, or at the end of the newsletter.) These ads are part of the revenue model for most newsletter publishers, but some businesses with substantial online databases and solid demographics taking advantage of the opportunity.

Online newsletters are economical to create and can be distributed at very low cost.

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Award-winning copywriter Chris Marlow has written for the nation’s leading businesses for more than two decades. For information on powerful copywriting, visit: <http://www.chrismarlow.com>

Chris also offers business and copywriting coaching to new, aspiring, and seasoned copywriters who want to accelerate their success. Check out the benefits of coaching at:
<http://www.TheCopywritersCoach.com>

Chris has also created the world’s only large-scale survey of copywriter pricing and economics. Find out what others charge and earn at:
<http://www.FreelancersBusinessStore.com>

And for free information on how to quickly build a profitable freelance business, sign up for Chris’ **Freelancer’s Business Bulletin** at:
<http://www.FreelancersBusinessBulletin.com>

PO Box 1134, Palm Desert, CA, 92261
P: 760-340-2045 / F: 760-406-6200
Email: chris@chrismarlow.com

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