

Producing Troop Newsletters

What is a newsletter?

Many Scout troops and groups use newsletters as a way of conveying information to the members and adults. A newsletter is essentially a regular jazzed-up letter that contains the latest news and information about the troop or group. You will probably have received something like this from your school or a club that you are member of. It will have most likely contained lots of news about what has happened since the last newsletter, articles about future events and plans, a section of dates for the diary and a number of important announcements.

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The reasons for a newsletter vary but the benefits are generally:

- Lots of letters can be brought together into the newsletter so less letters need to be given out.
- Because the newsletter has a lot of important information and is more interesting than some letters, it is normally not lost or damaged as readily.
- News and articles showing off what people have done and achieved can be incorporated and will get read as they are incorporated with important information.
- People become accustomed to them and hence make sure that they pick one up at release date.
- Information can cross sections of the readership, so if it is a group publication, Cubs can read about what Scouts get up to and can make other sections more inviting for moving on to.

There are some drawbacks though:

- If there isn't much information, the newsletter still needs filling.
- The newsletter must go out on time as people are expecting it, so deadlines must be met.
- It can be more work producing a newsletter than just letters as it means that stories need to be written as well as just the important information.

An example of a newsletter produced by an American troop.

Why produce one for the troop or group?

Producing a newsletter can be a rewarding experience and is a lot like having your own newspaper company. You get the honour of having your work read by many people and seeing their enjoyment in reading it. It also works towards a number of badges including:

- Creative Challenge
- Administrator
- Photographer
- Public Relations
- Writer
- IT Staged Activity Badges

This means that it is an experience that will not go unrewarded. One of the great benefits of this task compared to many others, is that it is one that we can give you a lot of help and support with.

How to get your content

Due to the nature of newsletters, you need to keep in good contact with the leadership. Where else will you get information such as up and coming events, competitions and important issues? So in order to undertake creating a newsletter, you need to get as much information that is of interest to the troop as possible from the leadership and convert this into a something written.

This is quite an easy task. All you need to do is speak to the leaders and note down whatever information you can get. Alternatively, it could be very good to start up e-mail communication with them.

How frequently should they be produced?

There is no point giving out a newsletter every week. Some people will not be there for one reason or another and will not receive it and there isn't enough news and information generated to fill a newsletter every week.

We believe a monthly newsletter is about the right period of time between publications. This allows enough time to get all the information and put it together and enough news and information to give an interesting read.

What to do with the information

When you get all your information, sort it all out in to some kind of order and remove anything that you think people aren't going to be interested in. You should order it in terms of importance and also in terms of topic. For instance, you are not going to want to put an event that is happening in six months time as the main feature. You will want the main feature to be something more immediate. You are also not going to want to put a report about a prize that someone has achieved in-between two articles of up and coming events as mixing it up like that will get confusing for the reader.

Layout

When you have decided on an order, you are going to need to think about how it is going to be displayed to a reader. You will notice with a magazine, newspaper or newsletter, that the format and layout of the pages is almost always unchanged from one issue to another. This is to give the reader some familiarity with what they are reading. This is what you should also do. This means that once you issue your first newsletter, you won't be able to change your mind later about the layout so get it right first time. Spend some time drawing on blank sheets of paper some rough designs, look at pre-made templates on your computer and juggle things around a bit until you are happy.

Adding some graphics or clipart to the layout will make the newsletter a bit more eye catching. Although don't go overboard with different fonts, styles, colours and clipart as it can soon start looking quite tacky. Another thing to note, is that a newsletter doesn't need to be too complicated in format. The main thing that the reading is interested in is the content so try and make the content as readable as possible.

Once you are happy with the template layout that you have produced, save it to come back to for your future issues. This will save you a lot of time as you won't have to make it from scratch again later.

An example of a UK group newsletter

Turning the information into articles

With a layout completed and information to talk about, your next task is to turn the information from notes to something

people can read. This is probably the most important step. When approaching this, it is best to write each of the articles separately in a word processor first and then copy them into your layout. This will mean that you can chop and change them with ease and it will make it easier to check spelling and grammar. Most of the information that you need for this is contained in the Article Writing resources page. Follow the advice on that page and try and make it as interesting and grabbing as possible for the reader.

Once you have each of the articles written, you have a bit of a jigsaw puzzle on your hands. You need to try and get each one of them to fit into your layout in the places that you have allocated for them. This sometimes isn't an easy task. You may have something that runs over a page or something that doesn't look quite right. You will also need to juggle where any photos or pictures are going to be with respect to the article.

It is good to try and avoid having articles running over a page. If it is going over by only a line or a few words, try editing and rewording the article to fit it on one. If however it is going over by a paragraph or two and going over the page cannot be avoided, try and make sure that it doesn't go over in the middle of a sentence as that makes it harder to read.

An example of an American group newsletter

Getting it to press

The final thing you need to do with this task is to get the newsletter checked, printed and distributed to the rest of the troop. Simply e-mail it to a leader or hand it to them on disk and they will do this for you. This will make sure that you haven't made a mistake like got a date wrong, save you on the printing costs and ensure that it gets to the next scout meeting and is in the hands of the rest of the troop.

Food for thought

This is probably quite a lot to take in, but one of the best ways to learn and get inspiration is by looking at some work that other people have done in a similar effort. I have found that this Google search gives you lots of pages with newsletters that other groups are using. It also leads you to some advice over how to make them.