
The 8 biggest newsletter marketing mistakes

By: [Roger C. Parker](#)

Newsletter publishing has always made a lot of sense. It makes sense for firms to target their advertising dollars to clients and prospects that have expressed interest in their products and services.

However, for many, newsletter marketing has been more a source of frustration than sales. This is due to eight closely inter-related newsletter-marketing mistakes.

By examining what hasn't worked in the past, we can come up with a new concept of newsletter marketing that is already working better for others.

Mistake 1. Too much time between issues

The biggest problem of conventional newsletter marketing is the amount of time that goes by between issues.

Consistency is the essence of success. Your goal is to maintain your firm's constant visibility. You have to constantly publish, in order to be there when your market is ready to buy. Otherwise, "out of sight, out of mind."

Think of the oscilloscope on *E.R.*, monitoring a patient's heartbeat in Intensive Care. Every time the patient's heart beats, the trace reaches a peak and the oscilloscope "beeps." But—almost immediately—the trace begins to disappear.

A similar thing happens when you send out a newsletter. Your awareness peaks in the days immediately following arrival of your message. Your firm will be the one thought of should a purchase opportunity turn up. But, as more and more time passes, your visibility diminishes until you're forgotten.

The more time that goes by between issues, the less chance you'll make a sale. The more time that goes by between issues, the greater the chance that your competitors will steal your customers.

Newsletter that come out every other month, or—worse, *quarterly*—just don't make it in today's overcrowded and over-communicated marketplace where your competition is trying to make your customers forget you.

Mistake 2. Too many pages in each issue

Excessive length—i.e. too many pages—is the primary reason that most newsletters cannot be published frequently enough to maintain constant visibility.

The more pages in a newsletter, the more decisions that have to be made, and the more words that have to be written. More pages also means more time producing and formatting each issue, plus higher printing costs.

Readers and publishers both benefit from short, frequent newsletters. In today's busy environment, readers are in a hurry. They don't have time for lengthy preambles. They want to cut directly to the chase. Readers appreciate newsletters that respect their time and that contain as much information as possible in a short, easy-to-read format.

Writers benefit, too. Long newsletters, however, encourage "loose writing." Not only do short newsletters require fewer words, they are easier to plan and easier to write. By limiting publishers to a finite number of words, short newsletters force writers to ruthlessly organize, edit, and re-edit their words. As a result, short newsletters encourage clear, concise writing habits that communicate a lot of information in the fewest number of words.

Mistake 3. Failure to employ multiple distribution options

Traditionally, marketing newsletters have been printed in large quantities and mailed to customers and prospects. This option is becoming more and more archaic, as the costs and delays associated with both printing and mailing have gotten out of hand.

Given the realities of today's paper and postage costs, it is—for all practical purposes—impossible for all but the largest firms to maintain constant customer contact using printed and mailed newsletters.

As a result, many firms have turned to e-mail newsletters—or e-zines—delivered either as e-mail attachments or downloaded from a firm's web site.

E-mail newsletters are efficient to distribute, but frequently handicapped by design and formatting limitations. As a result, most e-mail newsletters suffer from a distressing "sameness." Readability is hampered, for example, by the inability to control line spacing or hyphenate lines.

New technologies, however, permit the distribution of attractively formatted newsletters that are easy to read and project a competent, professional image, whether they're sent via e-mail, downloaded from a web site, or printed for face-to-face meetings using everyday office desktop printers.

Mistake 4. Lack of educational content

Conventional newsletters often suffer from myopia. Instead of focusing on their market's information needs, the newsletters focus on the firm's marketing messages. As a result of this inward orientation, the newsletters fail—because who wants to read someone else's advertising?

The alternative to “advertising in an editorial format” is to identify and provide information your market really wants. This transforms your newsletter from an irrelevant interruption to an “invited guest.”

Education enhances your firm's credibility and creates a “halo” effect that benefits every product and service your firm offers. Your firm becomes a trusted, valuable resource, rather than a “vendor.”

As a result, when talking to prospects for the first time, you're pre-sold and trusted before you even open your mouth. In addition, clients and prospects are likely to pass-along resource-filled newsletters to their co-workers and friends.

Mistake 5. Short-term focus

Educational newsletters have long lives. Each one adds to the equity you have invested in your firm.

Newsletters describing new products or services quickly become “old news.” There's no incentive for clients and prospects to print them out or save them.

But, newsletters describing how to make intelligent buying decisions or informed user tips are as useful a year from now as they are today. As a result, topics can be recycled for use in articles, columns, brochures, point-of-sale-materials, web site text, brochures, teleconference scripts, etc.

Mistake 6. Failure to engage

Clients and prospects are always asking: “What's in it for me?” Unless every element of your newsletter is optimized for answering this question, your newsletter will fail to engage—or involve—your reader, it will remain unread until discarded in a wastebasket or deleted in an e-mail inbox.

Newsletter titles often fail to engage their readers. Often, newsletters contain titles like: *Roger C. Parker Newsletter*. Now, outside of my wife and mother, why would anyone want to read the equivalent of *The Roger C. Parker Newsletter*?

Better alternatives, that target my market's self-interest, might be:

- *Newsletter Marketing Tips*
- *Marketing with Newsletters*

- *Effective Copy and Design*

These telegraph the newsletter's intentions and offer a benefit for reading.

Brag and boast headlines are a waste. Headlines must be written to appeal to the reader's self-interest.

- *Roger C. Parker Introduces New Seminar Topic.* No benefit there!
- But, the same article could have been powerfully introduced with an engaging headline like: *10 Ways to Increase Web Site Sales.*

Newsletter headline writers should take note of the titles of best-selling non-fiction books. These often describe both a problem and the number of steps, or number of days, needed to solve the problem. *The 7 Habits of Effective People*, *30 Days to a Trimmer You!* and *Write a Book in 28 Days!* make even the most complex topic appear doable.

Mistake 7. Hard to read

Readers—being pressed for time—are always just a page-turn, or a click away from abandoning your newsletter. Every element of your newsletter's design has to project an optimistic, professional, "easy to read" image. Typical design problem areas include:

Clutter: pages filled with distracting decorative design elements, like borders, boxes, and shaded backgrounds, interfere with your message.

Headlines: set entirely in upper case letters, (i.e. all capitals), or underlined are hard to read because there is no recognizable shapes to the words.

Lack of subheads: articles without subheads look longer and hard to read. Encourage readership by breaking long articles into a series of shorter, bite-sized chunks.

Text: when set in sans serif typefaces like Arial or Verdana, is often set too small or too large for the column width.

Text wraps: these occur when photographs break into adjacent paragraphs, reducing line lengths and creating excessive hyphenation.

Mistake 8. Isolation

A final reason newsletter marketing often fails is that they appear in a vacuum, unrelated to a firm's other marketing activities.

Success comes from synergy, the *1 plus 1 equals 3* effect that occurs when newsletter *complement*, rather than *compete with*, a firm's other marketing activities. Examples of synergy include:

- *Web sites*: web sites should display current and past newsletter issues and solicit registration sign-ups.
- *Teleconferences*: newsletter can pave the way for upcoming teleconferences, which can treat subjects with greater depth.
- *Articles and columns*: newsletter topics can be recycled as articles in trade publications or local media.
- *Ads, business cards, and postcards*: these represent ideal ways to promote your newsletter and encourage subscription sign-ups.
- *Presentations*: ideas first introduced in newsletters can be used as the basis for presentations at local networking events.
- *Fusion marketing*: newsletter can be distributed by marketing partners whose clients and prospects resemble you.
- *Books*: twelve short educational newsletters provide a framework for writing a book that can further enhance your credibility and visibility.

Conclusion

If your newsletter is not performing the way it should, the problem may be that your newsletters are too long, which means that too much time goes by between issues.

Switching from a promotional—or “advertising”—approach to a reader-oriented, educational approach can spell the difference between newsletters that clients and prospects look forward to, or one that goes by unnoticed.

Even better, distributing both print and electronic versions of your newsletters, and creating a partnership between your newsletters and your other marketing tools, can be the boost you need to profit from today’s competitive marketplace.

For more information

Contact [Roger C. Parker](#) for help with:

- Communication audits
- Copywriting and marketing strategy
- Publication templates
- Web site critiques
- Training

A *\$32 Million Dollar Author*, Roger has written 35 books with worldwide sales exceeding 1.6 million copies. These include *Looking Good in Print: A Guide to Basic Design for Desktop Publishing* and *The Streetwise Guide to Relationship Marketing on the Internet*.

Clients include Apple Computer, Ford, Hewlett-Packard, John R. Deere, Photo Marketing Association, Shearman & Sterling, Microsoft, and Yamaha.

Roger has helped numerous start-ups immediately achieve recognition, putting them on the path to buy-outs as large as \$87,000,000.

For more information, contact Roger by phone at 603-742-9673 or via e-mail at Roger@OnePageNewsletters.com.

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