

Why nobody reads your e-newsletter ...and how to fix it



By Joe D'Eramo

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Table Of Contents

Table Of Contents	1
Overview	2
You Don't Have A Customer/Client Newsletter	3
Your Subject Lines Bite	4
Your newsletter is too long or has too many articles	6
Your Newsletter Does Not Serve Your Objective	7
Your Readers Might Not Like Your Tone	9
Your Design Stinks	11
Conclusion	13
Not sure what's wrong with your e-newsletter?	14

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Overview

This troubleshooting guide was first created in 2010 as a quick reference for large and small businesses dissatisfied with the results from their current e-newsletter. This updated version of *Why Nobody Reads Your e-Newsletter...and How to Fix It* offers some simple, yet powerful suggestions to ensure that your e-newsletter captures your target audience's attention.

It's also a great resource for companies looking to start an e-newsletter who want to take advantage of the marketing opportunities having your own publication presents. This ebook will help you make informed decisions on how to develop your newsletter to achieve the results you want without getting in your own way.

As an added bonus, several chapters contain an addendum section so you can get a sense of how the craft of putting out a good newsletter has and has not changed over the past decade.

If you would like specific information and assistance with getting your e-newsletter started, please contact me at joe@hiroadcommunications.com.

Enjoy!

Joe D'Eramo
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NOTE: This ebook does NOT cover the topic of Spam, which is a whole other reason why people are not reading your enewsletter. This book deals strictly with readability issues.

Need help getting your newsletter started? [Contact me today!](#)

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You Don't Have A Customer/Client Newsletter

That's a pretty good reason why nobody reads it. If your company does not have a e- newsletter and you downloaded this report, chances are you know it's something you *should do*. And why not? An newsletter provides another way to get in front of your current and former clients in an unobtrusive fashion.

The Fix:

Get one and commit to putting out an issue at least once a quarter. But honestly, if you really want to reap the benefits, make it monthly.

By regularly publishing an e-newsletter or some other communiqué, you improve the odds of former clients becoming current ones; and lessen the likelihood of current clients, now adequately informed, turning to the competition for a service they didn't know you offered.

That alone more than covers the cost of putting out an e-newsletter (relatively affordable with e-mail marketing programs like Constant Contact, which can run for as little as \$20 per month, depending on your e-mail list. Or even free e-mail marketing platforms like MailChimp.

The goodwill you create with your client base with regular communication is an added bonus. It's a win-win, but only if you do it right.

Why nobody reads your e-newsletter and how to fix it

Your Subject Lines Bite

Perhaps not the best choice of words, but it made you want to read more, right? Your subject lines need to grab your target audience in the same way your headlines for print ads do. Your prospects and customers receive an awful lot of e-mail and if your subject line doesn't make a case for opening the e-mail you're sunk.

Poor subject lines fall into two camps. In one, the subject line tries to be catchy or trendy and ends up having nothing to do with the actual content of the e-newsletter. On the other side, you have the subject line that sits on the page like a manhole cover, doing nothing to entice the reader to click and find out the rest of the story (forgive me, Paul Harvey).

As crude as the above headline might be, you knew what this section was about and the angle. It certainly catches your eye more than a title of "Why subject lines are ineffective." You may choose different verbiage for your publication, but make your subject line catchy *and* specific to the story subject.

The Fix:

To write better subject lines, you really need to focus on the benefit of the story to the reader. If you write a story on a new company offering, the subject line should not read, "Company Y introduces new widget." It should be more like "New widget improves production speeds by 10%". Make it about what's in it for your readers and not what your company just did and you are halfway there.

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If you do not have somebody on your staff with the skill to hit that high note, then hire a copywriter. There are plenty of freelancers out there ready, willing, and able to craft an e-newsletter with subject lines that leap off the page. And for a reasonable price, too.

Addendum:

In 2018, the battle for attention in the in-box rages on. If you want them to open, you have to grab their attention in the subject line.

Why nobody reads your e-newsletter and how to fix it

Your newsletter is too long or has too many articles

Sadly, we've become a society of readers with ADD. There are just so many demands for your readers' attention that if you are lucky to get their attention, you don't want to jeopardize it by overloading them. In other words, if you create an e-newsletter where they have to scroll, they will roll.

The Fix:

Try to keep the length of your e-newsletter to 300-400 words if it's one article. If you have more you'd like to say, you can always add a link to your website with more in-depth coverage.

If you want to have more articles in your e-newsletter, list the headlines of each article and then have a one or two-sentence description of the article underneath with a link to a more in-depth article on your website. Just like your subject lines, your article headlines will have to be attention-grabbing to get them to click.

This tactic offers another advantage in that most e-newsletter programs have reporting functions so you know who is clicking on what. This lets you know which prospects might be interested in what your company offers and gives you some intelligence so you can do some follow up.

Addendum:

When the last edition of this came out, size of article certainly mattered. With the increased popularity of mobile devices, readers aren't as averse to scrolling. You still should not overload them with text. For longer articles, draft a paragraph or two and then provide a link to the entire article

Why nobody reads your e-newsletter and how to fix it

Your Newsletter Does Not Serve Your Objective

You may genuinely want to educate people on your product or service (and a newsletter is a great way to do it). Yet, the prime motivation for educating your audience is to establish your credibility to get your target audience to *do something*.

Whether it's buying more mutual funds, making a charitable contribution, or renewing a membership, there's always an objective beyond putting out information. Your story selection should never lose sight of that fact.

For example, Company Y puts a blurb in their client e-newsletter about their employee Bob Jones celebrating his 40th anniversary with the firm. It's a nice human interest piece and makes a small statement about Bob's loyalty and the quality of Company Y. Yet it really does nothing for the customer other than make them say "Wow, that's a long time," or "When is Bob going to retire?"

Make sense?

The Fix:

When creating a story list for your e-newsletter, take a step back and try to imagine what your customers want to read. What's bothering them, making their day-to-day business life more difficult?

Why nobody reads your e-newsletter and how to fix it

Now, if Bob Jones' department adds a new server that's going to help Company Y process orders 10 times faster than the competition, that gets people's attention. Especially if you are a potential client or a former client who may have stopped using Company Y because of slow service.

If you come up with a blank, ask one or two of them with whom you have a relationship. Most customers, when asked in a casual, non-confrontational manner, will tell you what's on their mind and then some. From there, you have a good start to like your subject lines, your article headlines will have to be attention-grabbing to get them to click.

Addendum:

Giving your readers what they want is only part of it. You must give them the next step or call-to-action as well—even if that seems fairly obvious. So, if they read your article, enjoy it enough to want to receive more similar articles, you have to tell them how to do that: click on the attached link to sign up for future newsletters or our special report. You can even make a case that every article you include in your newsletter must ask for some type of action.

Why nobody reads your e-newsletter and how to fix it

Your Readers Might Not Like Your Tone

Your mother might have said, “it’s not only what you say, but how you say it,” but it applies to e-newsletters as well. How you “talk” to your customers via the words in your newsletter’s articles can greatly affect the publication’s success or failure. Even if it’s a technical subject, your words must still speak to the reader, not at them.

The trap most e-newsletters fall into is one of voice. You see your e-newsletter as a representation of your company. Therefore, you want to use grammatically correct, complete sentences and an impressive vocabulary. But *NOBODY* speaks like that. If somebody does, he/she is in the vast minority. Therefore, you end up with a more “professional” voice, but in reality, you end up talking down to the reader or, worse, boring them.

The Fix:

Write your e-newsletter in a conversational style. Use words you would say if explaining that topic or subject to a person sitting directly across the table from you. As long as your facts are on the money, your e-newsletter will sound “professional.”

Using the word, ‘you’ can help you involve the reader and create this conversational style. That does not mean every sentence requires a ‘you’ reference. Just enough to keep the flow.

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Unfortunately, wanting a conversational newsletter and being able to pull it off are two different things. Most non-writers will try to “write” when asked to produce an e- newsletter article. That’s when you get the thesaurus-ridden copy that’s so dry it’s a fire hazard.

As the boss/editor, determine if you have the personnel to create the kind of newsletter you really want or if you need to contract it out. Again, copywriters do not work for nothing, but when you factor in the final product and anticipated results, as well as the man-hours you save on non-writers trying to write, it’s a bargain

MOST IMPORTANTLY, no matter which option you choose, select one person to write your newsletter. Newsletters that contain articles written by several different contributors sound a bit like conversations with two or more people speaking at the same time. Unless you have bylined stories or columns, your newsletter should speak with one voice—whether that’s done in-house or contracted out.

Addendum:

The fix pretty much holds true. One caveat about conversational tone. There are many interpretations of what that might mean. What’s conversational to one person might seem improper to others. For example, emojis might be all the rage on social media, but probably have no place in your company newsletter.

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Your Design Stinks

Yes, that's harsh as well. In fairness to the "Subject Lines" section, it can play a reason for people not reading your e-newsletter.

How a piece looks can be just as important as how it reads. That does not necessarily mean a lot of glitz and glamour, bells and whistles. Most times, a newsletter simply needs a clean look with stories and images laid out in a logical order.

The Fix:

If you do not have the skill set to use the templates e-mail marketing companies like Constant Contact, Vertical Response and any of the dozens of others offer then ask for help. Typically, those companies will customize a template for you. You may also want to consider contracting a freelance graphic designer or web designer.

Here's one caveat. Writing and designing newsletters are both specialties. Expecting staff you hired for other reasons to produce a newsletter as good as people who do this stuff for a living is a bit unrealistic. Not to mention how creating the newsletter might negatively affect your day-to-day operations if people you hired for one reason are working on a newsletter.

Without knowing your budget, it's easy to say, "contract it out." Particularly if you do not know anybody who does that sort of work (chambers of commerce are a great place to start if you don't). But if you do not have the staff and your budget can stand it, it will be worth it. In general, the pros do it better and faster.

Why nobody reads your e-newsletter and how to fix it

Addendum:

Templates from companies like Constant Contact, MailChimp, Vertical Response, etc. continue to improve and be more user-friendly. Some of these companies will even design the template for you for a fairly modest price. Constant Contact, particular, offers design services and phenomenal customer support. If you can't do it, they will literally do it for you.

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Conclusion

Creating an e-newsletter that gets results—leads and sales—takes planning and execution. From the very beginning of the process, you should:

- Define the purpose of your e-newsletter and set a publication schedule that you'll stick to.
- Select topics that your customers and clients actually want to read about; topics that “scratch their itch.”
- Generate subject lines that grab the reader's attention or, at a minimum, clearly tell the reader “what's in it for him/her.”
- Write your articles in a conversational tone. If you wouldn't say it to somebody sitting directly across from you, don't write it that way in your newsletter.
- Keep your e-mail list accurate and up-to-date.

By following these key points, you give your newsletter the best chance at the desired result: being read. And if they read it, and your articles excite them, the leads and sales will come.

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Not sure what's wrong with your e-newsletter?

Let us have a look at it, free of charge and we'll make recommendations for your next issue.

CONSIDERING TAKING THE HIROAD FOR YOUR NEXT NEWSLETTER?

If so, please use one of the contact methods below so we can get your newsletter on the HiRoad ASAP.

If you have any suggestions or comments regarding this troubleshooting guide, please e-mail them to info@hiroadcommunications.com. Joseph D. D'Eramo President Hiroad Communications 111 Kathleen Drive Plymouth, MA 02360

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