

HOW WE...

PRODUCE EMAIL NEWSLETTERS



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Email has been referred to as the “killer app(lication)” and is probably the most important advance in person-to-person communication since the telephone¹. It is widely used around the world; it is cheaper than print and more accessible than the internet. Studies² show that people react strongly to email newsletters; they create a bond with an audience in a way that a website does not. Email newsletters are not a substitute for other forms of communication such as print or face-to-face but we feel they are an essential part of an effective online information service.

Our information services provide over 40 email newsletters, received by more than 90,000 subscribers around the world over half of whom are in developing countries. This guide shares our ideas and lessons learned about email newsletters: examples of approaches that work for us, explanations of how we produce them (and why) and suggestions about important areas to think about.

ABOUT THE “HOW WE” SERIES

This guide on how we produce email newsletters is the first in a series that draws on experiences we have acquired in over ten years of providing information services.

These are called “how we” guides because they share **our** experience and learning and try to identify good practice. We do not claim there are right and wrong ways of doing these things, and all of our services have applied this good practice in different ways.

The guides provide practical information and useful ideas for people who, like us, design and implement research-based information services.

The content of the guides may be of interest to people in other information, communication and knowledge management roles but the guides focus on the particular challenges and approaches faced by those playing an information broker, mediator or information intermediary role in development contexts.

WHO ARE “WE”?

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) is a research and teaching institute in international development and also provides a family of eight Knowledge Services on social and economic development. These are:

- **BLDS** – the British Library for Development Studies.
- **BRIDGE** – supporting gender advocacy and mainstreaming efforts.
- **Eldis** – a gateway to online information on development.
- **GSDRC** – the Governance & Social Development Resource Centre.
- **HDI** – Health and Development Information.

- **id21** – a development research reporting service.
- **Livelihoods Connect** – covering sustainable livelihoods approaches.
- **Siyanda** – supporting mainstreaming gender equality.

These aim to help people to understand and make sense of the complexities and realities of poverty and inequality. We do this by acting as information intermediaries to encourage access to, and use of, development research and information. We have an international audience of over 265,000 web visitors each month and a print circulation of 60,000. Details of our services are at www.ids.ac.uk/info

CONTENTS

- 1 **Why do we produce email newsletters?**
- 2 **What kind of content is in our email newsletters?**
- 3 **How do we design our email newsletters?**
- 4 **What are our production processes?**
- 5 **What technology do we use?**
- 6 **How do we know if our email newsletters work?**
- 7 **How do we promote our email newsletters?**
- 8 **Useful resources**

KEY TIPS FOR PRODUCING EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

- 1 Consider whether an email newsletter is the right tool for you – you may find that other forms of communication are more suited to your aims.
- 2 Think about the purpose of your email newsletter – this will inform how you design, implement, promote and evaluate it.
- 3 Be strategic in what content you feature – make sure it is topical and relevant.
- 4 Ensure maximum accessibility, navigability and usability in your design.
- 5 Consider the time and resources you have to produce an email newsletter including technical input, copy editing, and interaction with readers.
- 6 Compare software before you decide which one to use – look at delivery, design, subscription and unsubscription, subscriber management, production processes and monitoring.
- 7 Consider which indicators show that your email newsletter is successful and identify appropriate monitoring and evaluation tools.
- 8 Thoughtful promotion will help ensure the right audience knows and uses your email newsletter.

¹ThoughtPiece (sic): Email: Still the Killer App! May 30, 2007 www.blackberrycool.com/2007/05/30/004649/

²Nielsen Norman Group Report www.nngroup.com/reports/newsletters/

HOW WE DEFINE EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

We call our newsletters a variety of different names: bulletins, alerts, reporters, updates but they all have certain features in common:

- A one-way producer to recipient relationship.
- They are open to anyone – membership is not moderated as it is with some e-mail discussion lists.

- They are regular, users know when to expect them.
- They are consistent in content and format.
- They are an editorialised product – they use a narrative introduction and/or editorial selection.

Newsletter (n) shortened form of newspaper and informational letter. Generally used to describe a periodic publication distributed by **e-mail** to an **opt-in** list of subscribers. Newsletters are normally used by organizations or owners of a **website** to communicate with their readers.

Also called **enewsletter**, **eNewsletter**, **email newsletter**, **enews** or **eBulletin**.

Webopedia
www.webopedia.com

1

WHY DO WE PRODUCE EMAIL NEWSLETTERS?



Email newsletters can serve many different purposes. When deciding how to design, implement, promote and evaluate your email newsletter, we think it is important to consider:

- who it is for.
- what you hope your email newsletter will achieve.
- how it contributes to the overall objectives of your service.

It is easy to start designing a newsletter without thinking about the actual purpose of the email newsletter. We recommend keeping a record of the original rationale and purpose of the email newsletter. We find that many people involved in producing our email newsletters have inherited them from predecessors or other colleagues. Not knowing why it was started makes it difficult to assess and adapt.

Be sure that an email newsletter is the right tool for the job – for example, if you want users to interact with each other, then a discussion list or web 2.0 forum may be more appropriate. If you want webmasters to include content on their sites, then a newsfeeder (RSS feed) would work better.

WHO IS IT AIMED AT?

Email newsletters are a cheap way to communicate with large audiences. It is tempting to say that email newsletters are for 'everyone interested in ...' Whilst everyone interested could sign up to your newsletter at little extra cost to you, it helps to have a clear idea of whom your newsletter is primarily aimed at and what it does for them. This will help you to decide on issues such as content, design, and monitoring and evaluation.

You may start with an existing group or network, in which case you have a good idea of their interests and what the newsletter can do for them. This is the case for our Livelihoods Connect service, which is aimed at sustainable livelihoods practitioners, academics and policymakers.

WHAT CHANGES WILL THE EMAIL NEWSLETTER MAKE?

All our services promote access to and use of information to support better informed decision-making. We encourage people to research topics further and form opinions using a range of information and aim to support busy development practitioners and policymakers to:

- access relevant information in a convenient way.
- keep up to date with recent research.

Email newsletters help us to achieve this. Our feedback shows that our readers appreciate a regular update on the latest additions to our services; they can quickly skim emails and follow up on what is relevant to their work.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMAIL NEWSLETTERS AND OTHER ASPECTS OF OUR SERVICES?

Our email newsletters contribute to our overall aims in three ways:

1) They maintain a relationship between our readers and our web and print products

It is good practice for a website service to maintain an email relationship with readers. A regular reminder in our readers' email inboxes helps to ensure that they remember us and visit our websites again and again.

2) They help our services to reach new audiences

We know that if our email newsletters are good, people forward them to friends and colleagues – 68.5 per cent of respondents to our id21news survey said they passed on the emails to other people. This brings new subscribers to all our services.

3) They are an alternative to web or print products

Some of the people we want to reach never visit our websites. They may have poor internet access, or may not have enough time to browse websites. So our email newsletters can also act as stand-alone products, providing all the information readers require so they do not have to visit the website.

2

WHAT KIND OF CONTENT IS IN OUR EMAIL NEWSLETTERS?

Our newsletters include summaries and links to development related research and information featured in our services. Our email newsletters generally feature five to ten items, which we consider to be a reasonable length. If you have much more content, consider increasing the frequency or producing different thematic versions; much less content and you could reduce the frequency. Content must be reasonably consistent – we are often asked to “put this out on your email lists”. If you need to respond to these requests, consider having an ‘other news’ section to accommodate for this type of information.

We have different types of newsletters. Some feature:

ALL THE LATEST MATERIAL

This is perhaps the most common type of newsletter which gives details of all documents, organisations, events and other news added to the website or collection since the last newsletter.

Our Livelihoods Connect Email Update provides a monthly brief on developments in the area of sustainable livelihoods, including new resources added to the website. If it is supposed to be the latest, make sure it really is new – don’t be tempted to recycle!

We have found that information about jobs within the development sector are extremely popular. If you collect this information, include it at the bottom of your newsletter (this will encourage people to read to the end).

THEMATIC OR GEOGRAPHICAL SELECTIONS

Many of our newsletters allow readers to choose the categories they are interested in. For example, Eldis provides 35 different Reporters, whilst BLDS has over 25 Updates focusing on different subject areas and regions. Only offer this if you are confident that there is enough new content on each particular theme to supply a regular newsletter.

A ‘FOCUS’ TOPIC

Some of our email newsletters offer a changing topical selection of material about a certain issue or theme. Eldis

Health Reporters have a different focus each month, providing an introduction to the topic and recommending five readings (for example a recent edition was on climate change and infectious diseases); likewise Siyanda has a different thematic and country focus to each newsletter. This approach makes each newsletter different and illustrates the breadth of our resources and content. However, not all audiences appreciate this; id21 found their readers preferred to receive the latest information about a wide range of issues. Getting feedback from your readers will help you to decide the right approach.

DEVELOPING A NICHE

You may find that lots of other email newsletters already cover your subject. If so, look at what type of content they cover and see what you can offer that’s different. Our Health Development Information (HDI) service feature editorialised content such as summaries, have a different topical focus every month and relate all the work they feature to the bigger debates about poverty, equity and health. This distinguishes them from other health newsletters that only feature lists of articles.

GLOSSARY³

ALT TEXT An alternative text description given to images. The caption describes the most important part of the image to those who can’t see it (e.g. because they have images turned off in their browser or because of a visual impairment). This should always be included due to accessibility legislation⁴.

BOUNCE BACK A bounce occurs when an email message is undeliverable for some reason and is therefore returned to the sender.

HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) The mark-up language used to build web pages and full-colour, interactive emails and links.

LISTSERV A particular brand of mailing list software, the name is often used inaccurately to refer to any mailing list software or even to a mailing list itself.

PLAIN TEXT An email message containing only text with no graphics, colour or detailed formatting.

RSS FEED (Really Simple Syndication) A file format for distributing ‘feeds’ of regularly updated content which can be viewed using an RSS reader programme or online service.

SPAM Unsolicited email messages which may be from dubious or undesirable sources.

SPAM FILTER Software that uses various techniques to redirect unwanted email away from a users inbox.

URL (Uniform Resource Locator) The internet address of a web page.

WHITELIST A list of ‘accepted’ email addresses that an Internet Service Provider, a subscriber or other email service provider allows to deliver messages regardless of spam filter settings.

³ Definitions taken/adapted from glossaries at www.ictshubknowledgebase.org.uk/index.php?id=46, www.kateycharles.com/glossary.html and www.mailworkz.com/glossary.htm

⁴ See recommendation from the World Wide Web Consortium: www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10/#gl-provide-equivalents

3

HOW DO WE DESIGN OUR EMAIL NEWSLETTERS?



When we design our email newsletters we aim for them to be accessible, usable and easy to navigate. Many of our target readers live in countries where internet connections are poor or unreliable. This means that making our email newsletters as accessible as possible is a key design consideration. For example, we do not always follow latest technologies or thinking on design, because these are often based on audience preferences in Europe and the USA.

Usability testing has shown that, on average, people only spend up to 51 seconds reading an email newsletter. This has huge implications for the length, design and format of an email newsletter. If our target readers are busy and scan rather than read emails in detail, we have to grab their attention quickly. There are several issues to consider in terms of design.

HTML OR PLAIN TEXT

This is a huge debate. HTML allows attractive design and easy navigation which readers are more likely to engage with, however it may not be accessible to all readers. Historically we have avoided using HTML so as not to exclude users with slow internet access and/or older hardware and software. Feedback from our readers is split – id21 have found that many readers prefer plain text, whilst others prefer the more attractive and colourful HTML format. Recently, many of our services have started to use logos and navigation within messages which are tested to make sure they still work with different email clients and settings. However the current debate suggests that web-based email services used by many of our subscribers are increasingly blocking images and distorting HTML, so in spite of advances in internet connectivity, HTML messages may still not get through. Ideally you should offer both plain text and HTML versions to cater for different needs. Eldis and BLDS send “multi-part” messages, where readers are sent both and they, or their email

software determines which they see. See www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multipart#Multipart_messages for more information on multipart messages.

OUR DESIGN PRINCIPLES

We have several principles to make sure our email newsletters are easy to scan and use for our readers. These include:

- Don't use full academic references for documents – make it scannable by putting the title of the document in bold.
- Put URLs (website addresses) on a separate line so they are easy to copy into a web browser.
- Try to avoid creating long URLs that go over two lines – readers will have to copy both lines separately. www.tinyurl.com can ‘shrink’ long URLs for you.
- Divide it into clearly defined sections, for example using ***** or ===== to create barriers.
- Use a consistent format that readers will become familiar with. Many of our services have a contents list at the top of their newsletters; others advise against this as readers just scan through and never read the contents⁶.

Layout and colour can also cause problems for blind or visually impaired recipients who use screen readers so it is important to use ALT text for images and keep layouts simple. Finally, some of our services have found that people mostly look at content at the top of each email, rather than scrolling down.

LINKS TO OUR WEBSITES OR LINKS TO THE PUBLISHING WEBSITE

One of the aims of our emails is to encourage people to look for more information. We can do this by linking back to the information on our website, (for example to an abstract or summary) or by linking directly to where the information first appeared, usually the producer's website. The first approach brings people to our websites, enabling us to monitor how they use the website; the second approach takes people to where they may eventually want to be, which

would save them time and effort. The links provided in the Eldis Reporters redirect readers via the Eldis website, which enables them to monitor how many people look at particular content but takes readers direct to the document.

HOW MUCH INFORMATION TO INCLUDE

Our email newsletters include anything from a series of headlines to document abstracts. The amount of information is determined by the purpose of the newsletter; for example, if it is intended to bring readers to our website, it can be limited information, but if it is meant to be an independent product, more information will be needed.

If you want to include a wide range of items it may be better to keep it to one line with links to more detailed information elsewhere. Newsletter editors can respond to personal requests to send documents. BLDS has an email document delivery service that means users can request the full text of a document to be sent via email if it is not freely available online. However, it requires more time and resources to provide this type of service and copyright restrictions can limit what you provide.

LANGUAGE

We try to keep all our products simple by using plain language – for example, we try to avoid using academic jargon. The email subject title is particularly important – if it is not interesting, people will not open it!

SPAM

The content of the email is important for managing spam. A newsletter editor must be aware of spam filters and avoid using words or acronyms that may be blocked, especially in subject lines. This is more difficult for some subjects than others – newsletters relating to sexual health and gender have particular problems. Some newsletters ask readers to ‘whitelist’ them – this means they will not be filtered out by software. Including attachments in email newsletters will increase the chances of spam filters blocking them. See “7 Email Marketing Best Practices” in useful resources for more information on spam.

⁵Nielsen Norman Group Report www.nngroup.com/reports/newsletters/

⁶Best practice for building and designing email newsletters www.ictHubKnowledgebase.org.uk/buildingnewsletters

4

WHAT ARE OUR PRODUCTION PROCESSES?

Our production processes involve technical set-up, editorial work, delivery and list management. It is important that these processes ensure high quality email newsletters that are delivered regularly, but are sustainable within the available resources.

TIME AND RESOURCES

It is important to set aside time and resources for maintaining regular and good quality services. These are important considerations when deciding on several aspects of an email newsletter, such as frequency, the amount of editorial work and the degree of specialised content.

The amount of resources you will need will increase if you choose to produce:

- multiple email newsletters e.g. on different topics
- newsletters in multiple formats e.g. “multi-part” messages
- newsletters with high editorial input

Likewise if your resources are limited then you could reduce the amount of time and money required by doing one or more of the following:

- producing one email newsletter
- producing email newsletters in one format e.g. plain text only
- producing email newsletters with relatively low editorial input

The choices you make will probably end up as a compromise between the purpose for the newsletter and the resources you have available. For example, Eldis has a broad subject coverage and aims to be as accessible as possible, so it produces several thematic email newsletters in multiple formats, but keeps the editorial input low by repackaging content from its other services. Livelihoods Connect is focused on one theme (sustainable

livelihoods) and therefore produces a single email newsletter with substantial editorial input.

THE PEOPLE

Editors create our newsletters, with support from technical assistants and, in some cases, database administrators. Not all organisations take this approach, but we find that this combination of backgrounds and experience gives a useful range of perspectives during production.

- Editors (list administrators) decide the content and are responsible for promoting and evaluating the newsletter. They are knowledgeable in subject areas and are recruited for their writing skills.
- Technical staff set up subscriber lists on request, discuss settings for the emails and issue individual passwords. They also help out with technical problems and monitor spam.
- Database administrators keep subscriber databases up-to-date. Having database administrators allows us to maintain a higher quality subscriber database, provide a more personal service and enable offline subscriptions to email newsletters.

In many organisations just one person writes and manages the production of an email newsletter using a simple software which is able to manage the database itself. See section 5 on Technical Aspects for further information on software you could use.

QUALITY CONTROL

Ensuring the quality of email newsletters is important to maintain trust and credibility – this helps to maintain regular users and attract others. As with any editorial production, checking for quality, accuracy and consistency requires editorial guidelines and copyediting procedures:

- Most of the content featured in our newsletters is material from our services so it has already been through quality

control processes – selection, writing and approval/copyediting. BRIDGE use various staff to check different elements of the message which brings fresh perspectives on how well the message works and helps identify any mistakes.

- For plain text newsletters id21 draft the message in Microsoft Word and then paste this into a blank email, however this risks bringing over formatting that could cause problems for html messages. For html newsletters it is better to use a plain text editor, such as Microsoft Notepad. In general, the fewer pieces of software you use, the fewer problems you are likely to face.

Whatever method you use, you should send a test message to yourself to check formatting, especially apostrophes, dashes, line breaks and accents and most important of all to check your links work. This test is particularly important when using languages other than English.

FREQUENCY

A regular schedule is essential, both for planning production and for readers who expect or prefer a reasonable frequency. Our services send thematic updates of new research every one to four weeks and news from the whole service every month. The frequency of each email newsletter depends on the amount and urgency of the content and the resources each service has available.

Email newsletters can become part of a recipients’ routine, so if it does not arrive at the same time each week, they miss it. Studies suggest that Tuesday to Thursday are the best days to send newsletters⁷. Our email software enables us to hold back messages for delivery. This means that an editor can prepare the newsletter in advance.

⁷ Email Marketing Best Practices www.spamanalyse.com/newsletter-articles/7-email-marketing-best-practices.html

5

WHAT TECHNOLOGY DO WE USE?



Delivering an email newsletter requires specialised software – we strongly advise not to deliver one from a normal email account. The type of software you choose depends on your requirements and resources available. It is always a good idea to do some research and assess the strengths and weaknesses of different systems.

There is a lot of generic material on the Internet (see useful resources). We have also provided some suggestions of things to consider, outlining why we use “Lyris” (see box). Other available software that is free to download include:

- **Listserv**
www.lsoft.com/products/listserv.asp
- **Majordomo**
www.greatcircle.com/majordomo
- **GNU Mailman**
www.list.org

Factors to consider when choosing email distribution software include:

DELIVERY

- Will it enable you to send large emails?
- Is there a limit on the number of subscribers it can deal with?
- Does it let you know how many messages were successfully sent/received?
- Does it let you send messages to segments of your list, based on criteria you set?

DESIGN

- Will it support messages with html, with images and plain text?
- Will it enable personalisation, such as individual greetings?

SUBSCRIPTION AND UNSUBSCRIPTION

- Is it easy to subscribe and unsubscribe? (this is essential and unsubscription is a legal requirement under EU data protection law⁸)
- Do subscribers need to remember a password to unsubscribe? (they should not need to)
- Can people subscribe by email and on a web page?

If you produce several newsletters or different formats of the same newsletter, readers should be able to manage their subscriptions in one place – the software **must** be able to manage this process for you.

SUBSCRIBER MANAGEMENT

Make sure your software has adequate facilities for dealing with bounce backs and unsubscribing non-functioning addresses. Your database should essentially manage itself with this tool.

PRODUCTION PROCESSES

- How much work is required to deal with the technical aspects of sending newsletters? Can anyone learn to do it, or does it require specific technical skills?
- Can it be integrated with your content databases?
- What testing tools are available before sending it to the whole list?

MONITORING

Will the software tell you what you need to know to monitor the performance of your newsletter, such as how many subscribers you have and if emails are successfully received?

See “Choosing bulk email software” by Sue Fidler in useful resources for more tips.

ABOUT LYRIS

It is officially called Lyris ListManager but we just call it Lyris. We currently use Lyris to deliver all of our newsletters, having tried and tested other software in the past. Our experience suggests Lyris is suitable for us for several reasons:

- It is an established, flexible and trusted platform.
- It can deal with huge numbers of newsletters and thousands of subscribers – the IDS Knowledge Services are a busy communication hub.
- It is sophisticated in terms of how it manages subscriptions. For example, Lyris can keep track of email addresses that bounce back – you have the option of setting your own rules so members can be taken off a list after a particular number of bounce backs (we use three).
- People are able to subscribe and unsubscribe themselves.
- You can submit messages (and commands) by email or from a web page.

However, Lyris may have limitations for some organisations:

- Lyris is expensive to licence – if you have limited financial resources, or you are committed to using open source software, it may not be right for you.
- It is particularly expensive if you only have a few members – however, if you have less than 300 subscribers, you can download a free ‘mini’ Lyris (see www.lyris.com).
- Lyris does not easily enable readers to subscribe to multiple lists – our technical staff had to write programmes in another software programme (Cold Fusion) to enable this.

⁸Data Protection Guide www.ec.europa.eu/justice_home/fsj/privacy/index_en.htm

6

HOW DO WE KNOW IF OUR EMAIL NEWSLETTERS WORK?

Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) of email newsletters is useful for:

- learning about whether we are meeting our audiences' needs and adapting our services accordingly
- planning future email newsletters and services
- accountability to our takeholders.

There is no standard way to evaluate email newsletters; we are always looking to improve our practices. What we monitor depends on the purpose of the newsletter. Some of the evaluation questions we use are given below along with some methods of collecting data we use to answer them:

HOW MANY SUBSCRIBERS DO WE HAVE?

Monitor subscriptions: We regularly record the number of people on our email lists. However, we do not assume that everyone who signs up to an email list is reading or using it. People may not get round to unsubscribing from an email newsletter they no longer want. A good bounce back policy provides a more accurate estimate of current subscribers.

WHO ARE THEY?

Ask questions when people subscribe: The data we have is mostly based on the information we ask readers when they sign up – but we have to balance this with not deterring them from subscribing by asking too much. Also, people may change jobs or organisations whilst still signed up to the same email newsletter, so the information may not still be valid.

DO OUR EMAIL NEWSLETTERS MEET OUR READERS' NEEDS?

We collect a variety of feedback from readers about whether or not our email newsletters are useful to them.

- **Unsolicited user feedback:** We often get unsolicited positive feedback about how useful our emails are (often a simple 'Thanks!'). Occasionally, we are told a link does not work – this shows that people are reading our newsletters! Unsolicited feedback can often be more powerful than solicited feedback because it suggests someone values the newsletter enough to take the time to write to you.
- **Solicited user feedback:** All our services invite feedback from readers at the end of every newsletter. This allows us to get a sense of what people think about them.

WHAT DO READERS DO WITH THE INFORMATION IN OUR EMAIL NEWSLETTERS?

Evidence about how newsletters are used is more difficult to gather. For example, it is hard to collect information about email newsletters are forwarded and if these new readers then subscribe. We use the following approaches to find out more:

- **Surveys:** Many of our services use questionnaires to ask people about how they use our newsletters. In a survey you could also ask users if they forward their newsletters to friends/colleagues. Surveys are also useful for understanding more about who our readers are. Some of our services use Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) a website that allows people to complete a questionnaire online. This provides us with a summary of the results so that we do not have to spend time inputting data.

- **Interviews:** Although surveys provide some useful information, we have found that respondents rarely give full or specific examples. We have tried interviewing some readers by telephone or in person to get more in-depth information. Using a semi-structured questionnaire, Eldis conducted phone interviews with some of their readers to find out more about their work, how Eldis could improve their service and to document examples of people using their service.
- **Focus groups:** Livelihoods Connect bring their Network members together through workshops and this is an opportunity get more in-depth discussion and feedback.
- **Monitoring popular themes/content:** We use our web statistics to track how many people click on a link to one of our websites. Siyanda use 'query strings' on the URLs given in their newsletter so that they can track 'click throughs' and trace trends such as which topics are most popular.
- **Monitoring external use:** We monitor how often email messages or links are reused on other websites by searching for links or parts of the text from a newsletter using Google.



HOW DO WE PROMOTE OUR EMAIL NEWSLETTERS?



Promotion is a key consideration for all our services. We work hard to increase the number of subscribers to our newsletters and ensure the right people know about them and use them.

Once you have reached a critical mass of subscribers, word-of-mouth can do some of your promotion for you, especially if you encourage your readers to forward email newsletters to their colleagues. However, you will still need to invest some time (but not necessarily money) in getting the people you want as subscribers, to hear about your email newsletter, particularly at the beginning.

IDEAS FOR PROMOTION

Our Knowledge Services have used several approaches to increase subscriptions:

- Some services have created short descriptions or announcements of their newsletters and asked other relevant newsletters or announcements about a specific issue of a newsletter to feature this – for generic newsletters, you should only do this once or twice, which may encourage people to subscribe.

- Email newsletters with a changing topical focus (such as Eldis Health Reporters) have sent short announcements about a specific issue of a newsletter to topical lists or posted them on relevant blogs and discussion lists which encourage people to subscribe.
- We tell people when their content is featured in our newsletters and ask them to forward it to their networks.
- We use 'send to a friend' functions to encourage readers to pass on our emails to friends and colleagues, or send them to other networks (check the formatting remains the same when it is forwarded).
- We enable people to sign up offline, for example at conferences. This is good for getting lots of people to sign up, but you need to have database administrators to input email addresses manually.

MAKE SUBSCRIBING EASY

It is important to feature the option to subscribe prominently on a website. Even more vital is not asking people to answer too many questions during the subscription process – the more questions asked, the less likely someone

is to subscribe⁹. Eldis only ask about the type of organisation the subscriber works for and which country they are in. This is important for monitoring and evaluation purposes. This data has to be stored separately as Lyris only stores email addresses and real names.

You need to make it easy for people to unsubscribe as well. In fact legislation in some countries requires instructions on how to unsubscribe to be included in email newsletters. If people no longer want to receive your email newsletter but are put off by the process of unsubscribing, they may mark your email newsletters as spam which could mean that other people at their organisation may not receive your email newsletter.

DATA PROTECTION AND PERMISSION-BASED MARKETING

We are covered by European Union data protection laws, which restrict how we use our mailing lists and how we promote by email. It is important to check out the legislation that covers your country before designing your email newsletter. For more information on EU data protection laws, see www.ec.europa.eu/justice_home/fsj/privacy/index_en.htm

⁹ 7 Email Marketing Best Practices www.spamanalyse.com/newsletter-articles/7-email-marketing-best-practices.html

USEFUL RESOURCES

TOP 12 BEST PRACTICES FOR PUBLISHING AN EMAIL NEWSLETTER

Larry Chase's best practice for web marketers www.wdfm.com/email-best-practices.php

7 EMAIL MARKETING BEST PRACTICES

Focuses on getting past spam filters, mechanical and human looking at issues of subject lines, delivery days. By Dejan Bizinger www.spamanalyse.com/newsletter-articles/7-email-marketing-best-practices.html

EMAIL NEWSLETTER USABILITY

165 Design Guidelines for Newsletter Subscription, Content, Account Maintenance, and RSS News Feeds Based on Usability Studies www.nngroup.com/reports/newsletters/ Nielsen Norman Group Report

BEST PRACTICE FOR BUILDING AND DESIGNING EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

Focuses on design and usability considerations for both HTML and plain text newsletters. By Sue Fidler www.ictHubknowledgebase.org.uk/buildingnewsletters

BEST PRACTICE FOR SENDING EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

Makes the case for why small NGOs should be using specifically designed software to send bulk emails, not PC or web based email programmes (e.g. Outlook, Yahoo) by Sue Fidler www.ictHubknowledgebase.org.uk/bulkemail

CHOOSING BULK EMAIL SOFTWARE

Highlights the options available, key features to look for and gives an overview of some of the most commonly used tools in the small UK NGO sector. By Sue Fidler www.ictHubknowledgebase.org.uk/bulkemailsoftware

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