Initial Ideas to Consider and Questions to Answer

Begin the process of developing your e-newsletter by considering ideas and questions to answer. What is your affinity subject or thesis message that you wish to communicate? What do you hope to accomplish through use of this e-newsletter? What will you call it? Think about development of a purpose/mission statement and a name or title for this project.

Content Quality and Sources

What will your e-newsletter contain? Focus upon quality of content vs. quantity. It is far better to send a short meaningful message that you know your readers will actually read, as opposed to filling e-mail in boxes with lengthy messages that have little substance. When it comes to weighing fluff over substance, lean towards substance. Let quality rule the day and do not be concerned about quantity (that your e-mail letter may be too small). One of your goals concerning this project is to influence your readers. You will accomplish this goal by providing them messages they will want to read, save, and share with others.

What are some of the sources to scan for newsletter content? Explore related Internet sites, e-mail lists, e-magazines, hard-copy magazines and newspapers. Scan related books, Internet articles, DVD's, audio CD's, VHS, audio cassettes, and other forms of media you can think of. Develop a method of storing the results of this research effort for future use. One method is to start a "Message Candidate" folder on your computer. This is where you can start a simple text file that will contain related URL links or media titles as reference material for future messages.

Soon, you will find yourself busy surfing the net and your e-mail in-box for information, articles, resources that may be of interest to your readers. Perhaps you have found a book which expertly communicates your theme or purpose. Contact the author or publisher and see if you can obtain permission to promote the book through your newsletter. Obtain permission to use the Table of Contents, Foreword, and one chapter, in a future letter. Let the author/publisher know you will give appropriate credit, copyright, and "used with permission" statements. Also to help you obtain this permission, let the author/publisher know you will include contact and/or subscription information so your readers can access ordering data to purchase the book, subscribe to the

magazine, or visit the associated web site, etc. Make sure you include information about the publication (regular and e-mail addresses, phone numbers, URL addresses, etc.). You want your message to draw attention to your theme as well as the source. Why? Should, by chance the author or writer of the book or article read your message, they will see it as a means of furthering their efforts or enlarging their market as opposed to copyright infringement for purposes of gain on your part.

Use of Copyrighted Material

You will want to consider the legal risks associated with using copyrighted material in your newsletter. Having produced a form of newsletter myself, I have used copyrighted material for the past seven years and have received no negative contacts from related authors, writers, or publishers of same. However, I always include the associated copyright statement and the following statement at the end of each message, regardless if it is copyrighted:

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NOTE: In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. section 107, this material is distributed without profit or payment to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving this information for non-profit research and educational purposes only.
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This method communicates to everyone involved that you are not profiting from the article or material you have shared, and you are providing the same for "research and educational purposes only." Thus the only party that *does* stand to gain *is* the original writer or author of said material, by distribution of related subscription and contact information. Your newsletter is thus viewed as a conduit for access to related materials and ideas, as opposed to being a threat to the market of sources you have shared. It is an unspoken "quid pro quo" relationship between yourself and the creators of the resource materials you draw attention to.

Subject Line

Prior to sending the forwarded format, you will want to delete the "fwd:" that appears on the subject line, and the original "to-from" data that appears at the beginning. Which brings to mind the content and purpose of your subject line. You will want to consider how to use this line to your best advantage. Most e-mail readers delete or save messages based upon the content of the subject line. Try to avoid using the same line each time (example: "A Special Message for Teachers"). You will want to develop a subject line that makes it easy for readers to archive, and/or share your message with others. If each message has the same subject line, it makes it difficult to locate, share, or refer to a particular message you sent.

I use an acronym of my organization along with the serial number of the message, followed by a short subject line related to the content of the message. Here's an example:

 CEANet1681: SepCon 2004, More Info and Links

This way your readers have three ways of archiving your e-letters (by organization, serial

number, and subject), all of which are available in the subject line. This prevents accidental deletion by readers based upon actual subject, since every subject line coming from you will contain the same acronym/number at the start of the line. In the case of CEANet messages, this subject line start takes ten characters, leaving the remainder of the line to include the actual subject of the message. If you use only the actual subject, some messages will be deleted by readers, thinking they've received spam, or information unrelated to the them. Starting your subject line with an acronym and serial number, followed by the subject, leaves readers with little doubt as to the source and content of your message.

Development of Format

Before considering the format of your newsletter, you will want to consider its title and beginning information. This is the standard layout which will appear at the beginning of each and every newsletter you will distribute. I call it a "start block." It will be seen as a type of trade mark, peculiar to your letters. I start each message with the following start block:

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========================================
Christian Education Awareness Network (CEANet)
                 Message ____
========================================
Internet: http://www2.whidbey.net/jmboyes
E-mail: CEANet@list.whidbey.net
========================================
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This block is a "stamp" which readers grow accustomed to whenever they scan their incoming e-mail. When they see this block at the start of a message, they will know immediately this is an important, quality-filled newsletter from your affinity organization. And, if by chance, they forward and share this message with others, new readers (potential members of your newsletter list) will immediately have your contact information, up front. This particular start-up block also provides a means of serializing your letters for future reference (note: the blank next to "Message" for insertion of a message number).

Once this title block is out of the way, you can consider the remaining format of your newsletter. Do you wish to share a complete article? Do you want to provide readers with several brief single paragraphs, each followed with a URL link to the remainder of the article on the Internet? In some cases, you can provide an entire related newsletter below your start block, after a short introduction by yourself. Make sure you do not forget to include the research and educational distribution statement at the end, no matter what format or content you use.

One way to make sure you have a start block and distribution statement on each of your newsletter messages is to use blank format with this information already provided. Develop an e-mail message with these features, then use this same message by forwarding it. This way, all you have to do is cut-and-paste your message content into the forwarded copy. You will have the original blank format with the start block and distribution statement all ready to be forwarded for your next message.

A Few Format Details

Get rid of the left side forwarding symbols (example: >) which appears on the start of each line of a message that you are forwarding. You can turn off this feature using the Tools, Options, Send, Mail Sending Format, Plain Text Settings Tab within Microsoft's Outlook Express e-mail software. Make sure the "Indent original text with" box does not have a check mark in it. This will make it much easier to edit and forward messages as you will not have to delete each and every one of these little symbols.

Consider using only the plain text format, as plain text e-mails (by themselves) do not have attachments, and do not contain html source code, both of which are sources for virus distribution. You do not want readers to delete your message because it was created in the html format with a graphic (attachment). Some readers will not open a message with an attachment because of the genuine concern it may contain a virus. I recommend sticking with the plain text format.

Keep your line length down to no more than 55 characters. This is a compromise between the standard text line appearing on an 8" x 11" format report, and newspaper article lines. Reading long lines of text that stretch across a screen can be a bit of a chore, and strain on the eyeballs. Line length adjustment using MS Outlook Express is accomplished using the same "Plain Text Settings" tab mentioned above.

Sending Long URL Addresses

There will be times when you will want to share access to a particular document or file that contains a long URL address. If the address is longer than 55 characters, it will be broken and will have to be cut and pasted back together by your readers, prior to use within their Internet browser. To avoid this problem I highly recommend use of the TinyURL web site. Here's a blurp from the TinyURL website:

Are you sick of posting URLs in emails only to have it break when sent causing the recipient to have to cut and paste it back together? Then you've come to the right place. By entering in a URL in the text field below, we will create a tiny URL that *will not break in email postings* and *never expires*. Here's an example:

Turn this URL:

http://www.mapquest.com/maps/map.adp?ovi=1&mqmap.x=300&mqmap.y=75&mapdata=%25 2bKZmeiIh6N%252bIgpXRP3bylMaN0O4z8OOUkZWYe7NRH6ldDN96YFTIUmSH3Q6OzE 5XVqcuc5zb%252fY5wy1MZwTnT2pu%252bNMjOjsHjvNlygTRMzqazPStrN%252f1YzA0o WEWLwkHdhVHeG9sG6cMrfXNJKHY6fML4o6Nb0SeQm75ET9jAjKelrmqBCNta%252bsK C9n8jslz%252fo188N4g3BvAJYuzx8J8r%252f1fPFWkPYg%252bT9Su5KoQ9YpNSj%252bm o0h0aEK%252bofj3f6vCP

into this tinyURL: http://tinyurl.com/6

Which one would you rather cut and paste into your browser? That's the power of TinyURL!

TinyURL!™ http://www.tinyurl.com

All you need to do in order to "shrink" a long URL address is first go to access the site page with the lengthy URL in question, then go to http://www.tinyurl.com (have this in your Favorites, Links folder). The most recent address appearing in your browser window prior to accessing tinyurl.com, will appear along with a tiny version of the same which will allow access to the page you wish to share in your letter. This reduced version will be stored on your clip board for cut-and-paste purposes if you are using Internet Explorer 4.5 and above.

Final Format, Proofing, Etc.

With MS Outlook Express you can cycle your message through the Outbox without actually sending the message. This will format your message into the 55 character limit and allow you to read through your message for a final proof and spell-check. You will also have the opportunity to fix any formatting problems prior to actually sending your message to your newsletter list. If you are using other e-mail software, check for related features available to accomplish these tasks.

Setting Up Multiple Recipients

MS Outlook Express e-mail software allows you to set up a group or groups of recipients to receive your message(s). This is accomplished using the Address Book part of the program. Once a recipient's name and e-mail address have been added to the Address Book, they can be entered into the particular group you are sending messages to. A New Group can be started using the New Group tab on the File pull-down menu, or the clicking on the "New" button in the upper left-hand portion of the Address Book display. You can store up to 50 members per group, thus MS Outlook Express has its limitations.

Related Web Resources and Samples

Gammadyne Mailer: http://www.gammadyne.com/mmail.htm

Eudora http://www.eudora.com/

Everything E-mail: http://everythingemail.net/

321Free: http://www.321free.com/listings.php?catid=9&subcat=36 (be sure your pop-up blocker is turned on)

Another Sample use of TinyURL -- 321Free: http://tinyurl.com/4b6lg

Sample of Completed CEANet e-mail message: http://www2.whidbey.net/jmboyes/hshqrts.htm
(scroll down below Homeschooling Headquarters graphic)

Access to Transcript of this Newsletter Presentation:

http://www2.whidbey.net/jmboyes/nsltr.pdf

Affinity-Related (CEANet) Website: http://www2.whidbey.net/jmboyes

Tiny URL Address for CEANet Website: http://tinyurl.com/3o2n

E-mail Address for James Boyes, CEANet Host: CEANet@list.whidbey.net or
jmboyes@whidbey.net
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Personal Notes, References, Etc.
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