

With APN's plans to shift the focus of the *Hotline* to broader political coverage, it should continue to be an option for subscribers. By summarizing and analyzing current political events, it provides the

most up-to-date source for a wide variety of users. We anticipate that increasingly it will become a standard source for students in political science and related disciplines. ■■

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# The library newsletter: Is it for you?

By **Sylverna Ford**

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*Newsletters can be a vital public relations tool for the library administration.*

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**D**uring the Spring of 1984, a decision was made to start a newsletter at the University Libraries of Carnegie Mellon. The first issue of the newsletter was produced in October of that year. Since that time a total of eleven issues of the newsletter have been produced. For nearly three years the newsletter remained under the editorship of the original editor. In the summer of 1987, I inherited the responsibility for editing *Resources: The CMU Libraries' News*. Editing a newsletter was a new experience for me and I found that I had many questions for which there were no immediate answers.

I spent several days considering the hows and whys of producing the newsletter. Turning to the professional literature for guidance I learned, to my chagrin, that there was not much available. Little has actually been written on producing a library newsletter; certainly the necessary planning process has not been addressed. The articles that have been written are primarily geared to commercially produced, for-profit publications. This

dearth of information prompted me to document my own experience. Out of that grew a working guide which in time evolved into the guidelines and specifications for the newsletter of the Carnegie Mellon University Libraries.

## Why a newsletter?

In the commercial markets, the newsletter seems to be emerging as the medium of the new era. There are newsletters addressing almost any subject you can think of.<sup>1</sup> There are thousands of newsletters being produced today; they range in price from free to hundreds of dollars per year—and they keep coming. Newsletter production is a business in its own right. What does the newsletter have to offer that makes it so attractive in the marketplace? What is the impetus behind the increased interest in this form of publication? Simply

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<sup>1</sup>“Starting Your Own Newsletter,” *Changing Times* 40 (April 1986): 77.

put, is it all driven by the need or desire to communicate?

Effective communication is one of the principles of organizational excellence. For years, corporations have put major emphasis on maintaining open and meaningful communication with those within as well as outside of the company. Libraries too, have begun to recognize the need to keep the public and employees informed. And just how is that done? How does an organization, large or small, maintain good communication? How does a company or library let staff and the general public know what is going on within the organization? While there are any number of ways of dealing with this problem, in recent years, the newsletter has gained growing support as a viable communications tool. A newsletter produced within the organization provides a quick, easy and economical way of keeping people informed of what is going on in the organization. It updates staff on policy changes, changes in personnel, new projects, changes in organizational direction or emphasis and serves as a link between staff who may not see each other on a regular basis. Besides spreading news within the organization, the newsletter is also often distributed to friends of the organization, donors, visitors and others.<sup>2</sup> In fact this publication can serve a major public relations role. Just as the newsletter has gained support in the corporate world, it is also being incorporated into the communications programs of other organizations. Libraries, large and small, are among the organizations now using the newsletter as part of their overall public relations program.

As might be expected, library newsletters are as different as the organizations they represent. Each library will have its own needs and expectations for this publication. While the final product will be tailored to the needs of the particular organization, much of the initial planning is the same for every newsletter. For the library faced with the decision of whether or not to initiate a newsletter, there are certain factors that should be carefully considered. Forming the foundation for the production of the newsletter, these factors include: purpose, audience, image, costs, staffing, and quality control.

### Purpose

Before the first word is printed, it is essential that there be a clear statement of purpose for the publication.<sup>3</sup> Why should the library produce a newsletter? What does the library hope to achieve through the newsletter? In some cases the newsletter may be a public relations document, its sole purpose being to make the library look good. In a large organization that has staff spread throughout a very large facility or in different locations, the purpose of the newsletter might be to foster a sense of unity. For a library that is dependent on outside sources for funding, the purpose of the newsletter might be to appeal to potential donors. It is possible that the

newsletter will serve a number of different purposes. It is important that the purpose(s) be considered and decided early in the process; many of your decisions on other factors will be directly affected by the overall purpose of the newsletter.

### Audience

The content and style of the newsletter are often determined by the intended audience. If the newsletter is intended only for people within the library, then using library-specific terminology or examples will not be a problem. If on the other hand, this publication will be distributed to people outside of the organization, it will be important to use terminology that will be familiar to a more general group of readers. If the newsletter is to be sent to wealthy community leaders who might become donors, it will be important that it be done in a style that will be pleasing to that group. In many cases, deciding the purpose will also decide the audience at least in part. It is hard to determine what you want the document to do without also considering for whom. It is important however, to consciously identify the audience and to be sure that the stated purpose and the targeted audience are in fact compatible.

### Image

As a publication of the organization, the newsletter will represent the library for many readers. Decide what image you want the newsletter to project and keep that image in mind as you make other decisions related to the content, production, and promotion of the document. Though content is the most important factor that will establish the newsletter's image, style and tone are also significant. Determining what your newsletter will do and for whom, will also set many of the parameters of style and tone. You will want your newsletter to assume a style that will fit the expectations of the audience to which it is directed. Whether the style should be formal or informal will depend upon the library's relationship with the primary audience and the image that you hope to project. Tone too, contributes to the newsletter's image and should be in keeping with the overall goals of the publication and the desired image. Will the tone be light and airy, chatty, friendly, or businesslike? As you decide on the image that the newsletter will project, you will also have to determine whether it is a tool of management which portrays the management opinion on all issues, an employee instrument giving voice to employee concerns, an independent publication providing an open forum for all issues

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<sup>2</sup>Harrie Vredenburg and Cornelia Droge, "The Value of Company Newsletters and Magazines," *Industrial Marketing Management* 16 (August 1987): 173.

<sup>3</sup>Lyle L. Erb, "The Company Publication," *Public Relations Quarterly* 31 (Summer 1986): 32.

of concern, or an unopinionated source of facts. In order for the newsletter to be effective, it is important that the overall image be appropriate for the organization and the document. The image must also be in keeping with the established purpose of the publication.

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## *Your stated purpose and targeted audience must be compatible.*

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### **Costs**

Though a basic newsletter can be produced relatively inexpensively, there are real costs that should be carefully considered before deciding to begin a newsletter. Some costs are immediately evident while others may be hidden and thus may not be considered initially. In making the decision to start a newsletter, it is important to consider all of the cost factors that are involved in the actual production of the publication. Whether or not the newsletter is cost-effective will depend on the expense associated with these factors. Consideration must be given to such factors as the costs of equipment and technical support, writing and editing articles, the layout and design, and finally the production process including the selection of paper and ink and the printing, collating and distribution of the final product.

For many libraries, the cost of equipment and technical support will be the single largest expense to be considered in the newsletter decision. To be most cost-effective, it is desirable to begin production using equipment that is already in use in the library. Certainly it is still possible to produce a newsletter using a typewriter, and many may choose to take that route. A computer can simplify the production process; however, management may not be willing to purchase a computer just to produce a newsletter. On the other hand, the availability of computers and the various word processing packages offers options and benefits that could make the acquisition highly desirable. If you are serious about producing a newsletter, don't overlook the benefits of a computer. Desktop publishing software, such as Pagemaker by Aldus, Ventura Publisher by Xerox, and ReadySetGo by Manhattan Graphics, can greatly facilitate layout and design work; these packages vary in price and capability. For libraries that already have computer equipment, the decision in this area will be

centered around selecting appropriate software or determining how to schedule time on the computer for the production of the newsletter. These factors will in turn be affected by the organization's expectations for and commitment to the newsletter.

The cost of each article is directly tied to the salary level of the person who writes it; the higher the salary the more expensive the article. For that reason, as well as because of the opportunity for professional development, some libraries will choose to make writing of articles a responsibility for junior staff members. If, however, a higher salaried person is really the only one who has the knowledge or expertise to write the particular piece, it may be more cost-effective to have that person do it than to have someone else spend hours trying to gather the information, even at a lower salary. Whether you solicit articles from the entire staff, designate reporters, assign articles or leave it to the editor, acquiring articles for the newsletter will cost something in staff time. Remember to factor in article cost as you evaluate the factors that will affect the cost of the publication.

### **Layout and design**

The layout and design of your newsletter will have a direct impact on the cost of its production. As you make decisions related to the overall design of the document, keep in mind that you are also making decisions that will affect how much it will cost to produce each issue. You must decide: the size of the pages, the length of the newsletter, the number and width of the columns, the width of the margins, the size of the type, any standard features to be included, how artwork and/or photographs will be handled, whether or not to print the pages back to back. Though it is necessary to maintain some flexibility in the design and layout, it is wise to have a basic plan in place before you begin.

### **Production**

Decisions made in the production phase can more than double the cost of the final product. The frequency of publication, the type of paper or ink to be used, the use of color, the printing technique requested, the complexity of collating, and the amount of lead time allowed, can all affect the final cost of the newsletter. Prior to committing to producing a newsletter, it is advisable to meet with prospective printers to get some comparative data on available services and the related costs.

### **Distribution**

Early in the decision-making process you must decide on whom you want the newsletter to reach. It is just as important that you consider how your publication will reach its target audience. The best publication is totally useless if it does not reach the people for whom it is intended. Within the organization, an internal mail system can distribute the

newsletter to each employee. An alternative is a multi-tier distribution in which key people receive bundles of the publication and assume responsibility for distribution to staff. Placing stacks of the newsletter in the staff lounge or cafeteria is another way of getting it to library personnel. If there are regular staff meetings, the newsletter could also be distributed at some point in the meeting.

When the newsletter goes outside of the library, there are a number of ways to reach the target audience. While a direct mailing may be the most precise method of distribution it is also the most expensive. If you are working with a long mailing list, first-class postage can become a major expense. You might determine that it is not necessary that the newsletter be mailed first class; a cheaper postal rate will get it to its destination a bit later but often quite a bit cheaper. Though much less precise, you might also choose to identify several places where your targeted readers gather and place copies of the newsletter there. If you want to reach library users, you can do this by placing copies in key locations throughout the library such as near the catalog, by the circulation desk, by the elevator or in reading rooms. Distribution costs will be determined by the size and location of your audience and the level of precision that you want to achieve in your distribution.

Having determined the cost factors, you must seriously consider whether or not your library can afford such a publication. Keep in mind that the production costs will become an ongoing expense. If the newsletter is to be successful, your library must be willing to pay the necessary costs on a long-term basis. If you decide to publish a newsletter determine in advance how much you are willing to spend on the publication and for what time period. Establish a newsletter budget and be sure to share that information with the person responsible for producing the newsletter.

### **Staffing**

An integral part of all of the costs related to the production of a newsletter is the staffing. Just as you will pay for the time of the people who write the articles, you will also pay the cost of the production staff. The involvement of every individual in any stage of the production carries a cost, whether it is a fee paid directly to an individual or a part of the salary of someone already on the library payroll. If one of your objectives is to produce a low-cost newsletter, it is important that you pay attention to the expense of the personnel who are involved in producing the publication. Consider the level of expertise and knowledge required for a particular task and try to match that with the qualifications of the personnel. If you are doing a small in-house publication that will be published no more than three times a year, you probably don't need a person with a degree in printing and publishing to get the newsletter done. Determine if you really

need to have a high-salaried executive do the job or could part or all of it be done by a lower-salaried assistant. On the other hand, be careful not to under-staff as well. Successfully publishing a very large, sophisticated publication will require an individual with a particular background and experience. Don't try to produce a major publication if you don't have access to the right manpower and expertise. Keep in mind also, that the start-up period is likely to be quite different than the ongoing operation. You might need greater expertise to get the newsletter going than to maintain it. Know what is involved in producing your newsletter and utilize people with the appropriate levels of expertise.

### **Quality control**

Since the newsletter invariably represents the library, it is important that attention be given to the overall quality of the publication. A shabbily done newsletter will not reflect favorably on the organization that publishes it. Be sure that your production process includes definite checkpoints which provide the opportunity for form and content to be scrutinized prior to the final printing. Include a series of proofreadings and reviews that not only check for typographical and grammatical errors but also for accuracy of facts, completeness of articles, consistency of form, coherency and overall appearance. Establish quality standards and make their enforcement a part of the production process.

### **Forging ahead**

If after considering these production and cost factors, you determine that publishing a newsletter is right for you, the next step is to plan your document and develop guidelines for its production. While ideally your production guidelines should be in place before you begin production, often you cannot make a final decision on the guidelines until you have actually tried some of the tasks. If you are starting a new publication, it is best to begin with draft guidelines and test them through the production of a few issues. If your guidelines stand up under the test of actual application, you are then ready to adopt them, to make them official. Once you have adopted your guidelines, remember to share them with those who contribute to the newsletter as well as with the production staff. Keep in mind however, that newsletter production is not a static business, new technologies are constantly changing the field. You should be prepared to modify both your practices and your guidelines as your library changes and as you develop new expertise or acquire new technology.

### **Guidelines**

The guidelines for the production of *Resources* were finally committed to paper during the fall of 1987. Prior to that, production was guided primar-

ily by the memories of those who were involved in the production of the newsletter. As I began to formalize the various practices, it was both necessary and useful to consider each one on its own merit. Rather than adopting a practice because we had always done it that way, I had to determine whether or not we should continue it and if so, I had to decide upon the best way to get the job done. This re-

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## *A poorly done newsletter may tarnish your library's reputation.*

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view gave me the opportunity to not only document practice but to evaluate it as well.

Having written guidelines has been a tremendous boon to the production of the CMU Libraries' newsletter. Not only the members of the newsletter committee but also other interested parties including contributors can refer to the guidelines; this clarifies the production process and considerably reduces misunderstandings. It not only guarantees consistency from issue to issue but it also provides a sound basis for decision making as new situations arise. It also means that the next editor will know exactly what was done with previous issues and will have a starting point for her work. The guidelines also provide a basis for evaluating the publication over time.

### **Conclusion**

While it will not be appropriate for every library, the newsletter can be an important part of the overall communications program. If well thought out and properly planned, the library

### **For more information...**

*Resources: CMU Libraries' News* (13 pages, June 1988) is available to the public from the Carnegie Mellon University Libraries. The manual is a summary of the guidelines and specifications for the production of the Carnegie Mellon University Libraries' newsletter. The purpose, distribution, submission of articles, proofreading, layout and composition are some of the issues covered. The booklet is available for postage and handling at \$4.00 per copy. Send a check or money order to: *Resources* Editor, Hunt Library, Carnegie Mellon University, Administrative Services, Pittsburgh, PA 15213-3890.

newsletter can be a valued source of useful information and a good public relations tool. If you think this type of publication might have a place in your library, take the time to consider the factors that are involved in producing a newsletter. Evaluate your resources, both human and material. Decide on the level of commitment you are ready to make to this endeavor. Develop a plan for the production, distribution and control of the newsletter; prepare to do a good job.

The benefits of a well done newsletter cannot be denied; the expense of a poorly done one must also be recognized. If it is not done for the right reason, not directed to the right audience, or not properly presented, the newsletter will simply become another addition to a growing accumulation of worthless paper and an exercise in futility for the staff members who labor over it. Worse yet, a poorly done newsletter will detract from your PR efforts and tarnish the reputation of your library. Before throwing your hat into the arena of newsletter publishers, it is important that you know what you are getting into and be sure that you want to do it. Only after considering the pros and cons can you make a sound decision. If you accept the challenge, good luck and welcome to the world of newsletter publishing! ■ ■

### **Take me out to the ACRL Game!**

The Cincinnati Reds will meet the Los Angeles Dodgers on April 5, 1989, the opening day of the ACRL Fifth National Conference. Mary Ellen Elsbernd, conference local arrangements chair and collection development librarian, Northern Kentucky University, stated that the game will be "ACRL Night at the Reds." She invited all conference attendees to come out to the ball game.

Elsbernd stated that a lucky ACRL member could throw the ceremonial first pitch, "if we get a good crowd for the game." She added that the pre-game ceremonies could also feature ACRL members and be projected on the large screen video monitor in the stadium.

The game will be played at the Riverfront Stadium, just minutes from downtown hotels. Game time is 7:35 p.m., "conveniently timed to be 35 minutes after the close of the ACRL Exhibits Reception," Elsbernd stated.

The tickets for the lower level box seats will be \$8.50, plus \$1.00 postage and handling. An order form for the tickets will be in the registration materials sent to all ACRL members in late November. Deadline for ticket orders is February 28, 1989.

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