



## Five Reasons e-Newsletters Get Trashed

By Dianna Huff

I've been collecting B-to-B e-newsletters from various companies for about six months. My intent was to showcase one or two in my own e-newsletter, but I realized early on that many of the newsletters I received weren't really that good—and in fact, a few were downright bad. If I hadn't been saving them, I would have trashed them.

What are some of the reasons people delete e-newsletters without reading them?

### 1. Irregular Publishing Schedule.

If you're like many companies, your newsletter's publishing schedule is supposed to be monthly or bimonthly, but in reality it's "whenever we get around to it"—with that "around to it" stretching out to once every six months.

**Tip:** One reason for publishing an e-newsletter is to remain top of mind with prospects and customers. If you publish infrequently, people will forget who you are—and will be more likely to delete your newsletter when it does come in. Also, "spam" complaints are more frequent when the newsletter is infrequent. If your in-house staff is swamped and can't keep up, consider hiring an outside writer to help keep your newsletter on schedule.

### 2. Too Much Content.

Companies who publish infrequently tend to overcompensate by overloading their newsletters with content. One e-newsletter I received had nineteen articles: eight feature articles, six event descriptions, four product blurbs and one application note.

**Tip:** The worst online sin you can commit is to make your readers think. Everyone is overloaded with information—and having to skim through nineteen articles is too much work. Rather than posting so many articles in one newsletter once every six months, increase your publishing frequency to monthly or bimonthly and spread content over several issues.

### 3. Content Focused On Company's Products Or Services Only.

A number of the newsletters I received were well-designed and easy to read. However, the content focused solely on the company's products and services. Sales-oriented copy aimed at getting people to click through and buy on the website does nothing to build relationships with customers and prospects—which is the whole point of sending out an e-newsletter (or should be anyway).

**Tip:** Yes, you want to sell your products and services, but you must give people information they can use. One company that did this well is Accent Technologies. In their newsletter, *Presentation Directions*, they had an article on how to choose vendors by the quality of their PowerPoint presentations. 3M Touch Systems featured a helpful case study showing how they solved a problem

for one of their clients.

#### 4. Sidebar Clutter.

Have you noticed how media “white space” is being filled with unnecessary clutter? News scrolls, weather information, graphs and charts, and station ID logos fill our TV screens. It's happening to e-newsletters too—with many newsletters using the left- and right-hand margins to list additional information.

**Tip:** At a conference I attended, Steve Krug, web usability expert and author of *Don't Make Me Think*, showed a video of a person's eyes traveling over a website looking for information. It was incredible to watch as the subject's eyes rushed over the computer screen, looking for the one thing he needed. Even though information is mostly electronic these days, we still read left to right, top to bottom. Help your audience read online content by eliminating unnecessary clutter and following standard formatting and design guidelines.

#### 5. Not Formatted For Printing And Saving.

Are you one of those people who print newsletters for reading later? I am, and I know a number of others who do the same. If your company publishes an e-newsletter, do the following: print it out. Did all the information make it to the page or was it cut off on the right side or not included at all?

**Tip:** Make it easy to print information to be read later. Planet Ocean, publisher of *Search Engine News*, has a “Print and Run” feature where you can print the entire newsletter from one web page.

Don't let your newsletter get trashed. Give readers valuable content, keep the design clean, make it easy to read (and print!) and stick to a regular publishing schedule. You'll see a noticeable increase in click-through rates—and, over time, an increase in leads and sales.

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