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Advertising

Technology

Are You Ready for E-Mail Publishing?

The most cost effective and timely way to get the word out

by Martin B. Schneiderman

Compared to the costs of e-mail, disseminating printed publications is expensive. *PC Magazine* reports that "sending out an e-mail message costs from one-half cent to 20 cents, compared to 50 cents to two dollars for a piece of regular mail." And despite the Web's higher profile, "50 percent more people use e-mail than use the Web."

So why not create electronic versions of selected publications in a format that can be distributed in the body of an e-mail message with links to the Web?

The Council on Foundations' *FN&C Now* e-mail newsletter is published this way, and since 1996, so has the Foundation Center's *Philanthropy News Digest* (PND) [<http://fdncenter.org/pnd/>]. Today, more than 32,000 subscribers have opted to receive PND via e-mail every Tuesday—a jump of 45 percent in the last year alone.

If you're ready to send out an e-mail newsletter, keep in mind the following rules:

- 1 **Keep it short**—A maximum of four screens long.
- 1 **Provide value**—Useful content, not just links to your Web site.
- 1 **Write for scanability**—Folks are busy, so write succinctly.
- 1 **Create and use a style guide**—Format newsletters in a standard way that's easy to navigate and read. Use headlines as separators and a table of contents for publications that run multiple screens.
- 1 **Develop a content formula**—Present time-sensitive information at



The Townsend Group
301/215-6710
Subscriptions
800/771-8187 Editorial
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The Council on Foundations is a membership organization that serves the public good by promoting and enhancing responsible and effective philanthropy. Foundation News & Commentary embodies and promotes the goals of the Council on Foundations, serving as a vehicle for information, ideas, analysis and commentary relevant to effective grantmaking. It seeks to enhance understanding of organized philanthropy by grantseekers, policymakers, opinion leaders and the society at large, but it is directed primarily toward the trustees and staff of donor organizations.

the top, so that readers will open and read the newsletter today. Include reference information so they'll save it for tomorrow. Add special topics to appeal to readers' individual interests.

- I **Avoid HTML-enhanced content**—Not all e-mail software can read HTML-enhanced messages (with backgrounds, color fonts and images), so, use well-formatted plain text for now.
- I **Format for readability:**
 - i Set margins to 65 characters, and when saving text, choose the option **Save As | Text Only with Line Breaks** (in Microsoft Word) to avoid strange line wrapping.
 - i Use caps, white space, asterisks, dashes or other characters to set items and sections apart.
 - i Turn off Microsoft Word's special formatting (e.g., smart quotes) that isn't readable by many e-mail programs and Web browsers.
- I **Provide and test Web links**—Provide "hot" links to relevant Web addresses (URLs), so that readers can get more information. Then test your links and keep them active.
- I **Make a test run**—To ensure your newsletter is formatted properly, send a test copy to addresses using different types of e-mail systems.
- I **Use the right software**—Your existing contact database is your primary source for recipients. Export names and e-mail addresses to your e-mail software, and send it using the blind carbon copy (BCC) option to keep the list confidential. Consider using specialized e-mailing list software such as www.gammadyne.com/mmail.htm and www.infacta.com.
- I **Send audience-specific mailings**—Maintain interest codes to send mailings to different categories of recipients and on topics of special interest. Some mailing list software permits mailmerged names and blocks of text to create personalized content.
- I **Keep your e-mailing list current**—Make it easy for recipients to subscribe, unsubscribe or change their e-mail address by providing instructions at the bottom of each issue. Also, be sure to prune your list of undelivered mail.
- I **Display copies on your Web site**—Archive back issues on your Web site, and make it easy for readers to search and browse content.

Martin B. Schneiderman is president of Information Age Associates, Inc., (www.iaa.com), a firm specializing in the design, management, and support of information systems for grantmakers and nonprofits. He can be reached at mbs@iaa.com.

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