



About the Author:
Elizabeth Carter, founder of Freelance Writing Solutions, writes copy that gets results for small and mid-sized businesses. Her newsletter, Copywriting Secrets, offers monthly tips that help subscribers communicate strong messages to their clients.

Why would someone read your newsletter? Give readers something useful — not advertisements!

What Are You Getting in Return?

How to Maximize Your Newsletter's ROI

Does your newsletter make you money? Your newsletter may serve many purposes – lead generation, sales conversions, or customer retention. But bottom line, your newsletter should pay for itself. If it doesn't, it's time for a change.

So where do you start? First, no less frequently than once a year, block off a few hours to review your newsletter archives and sift through any results or data you've collected. You'll probably find room for improvement.

If this seems a bit daunting, don't worry. This report will help you assess the "health" of your newsletter and give you guidelines to build a polished, creative document that gets noticed and — most importantly — gets you results.

Clarify your purpose

Before you begin, establish a clear mission for your newsletter. Ask yourself:

- **Who reads this newsletter?** Be as specific as possible; good answers include "women aged 40 – 65, socially active, with annual incomes above \$100,000," or, "CIOs of manufacturing companies with annual sales between \$5 - \$20 million."
- **What problems do these readers have?** Be specific! "Our target audience wants to look their best – not their age," or, "Our readers need to keep their software systems running smoothly without any hassles."
- **How does this newsletter solve these problems?** "This newsletter educates women on the many strategies for looking young," or "This newsletter informs CIOs of the latest CRM developments."

Sample Newsletter Mission Statements

#1 (good):

“Energy Quarterly” targets homeowners in the western suburbs of Chicago who have purchased heating or cooling systems in the past five years. It is delivered 4x/year and presents easy-to-implement energy conservation tips and current news in the energy industry.

#2 (not so good):

“Creative Thinking” gets sent electronically to anyone who has a website to let these prospects know more about our design firm and what we can do for them.

Establishing yourself as the go-to expert in your field will get you more results than any advertisement.

In other words, precisely identify what your readers can expect from your newsletter. Let the title of the newsletter make this self-evident in; don't get too cutesy or creative and leave readers scratching their heads wondering what your newsletter offers them. Don't be afraid to make your newsletter's mission statement front and center. Make a compelling case to subscribe to and read your newsletter.

It's not about you!

Your newsletter establishes relationships. It may also nurture leads or convert prospects to buyers, but it does that through relationship building. This involves a certain amount of trust; the client or prospect must trust you to not waste his time, and you've got to earn that trust by offering genuinely helpful content.

People won't bother to read a thinly veiled ad disguised as a newsletter. A short sales message is okay, but the sales content should never exceed 30% of the whole. Any more will turn off your reader.

Of course, becoming a recognized expert in your field is the ultimate sales message. But if you do include a short ad, keep the focus on your reader. Talk about benefits, not features.

Testimonials are my favorite way to sell yourself without sounding obnoxious. They show how you solved one customer's problem – and suggest you can do the same for the reader. This subtle sales message builds instant credibility and also lets you introduce your reader to other products and services he might not know you offer.

The call to action with a newsletter is a little different than traditional ad – but still important. At the end of the newsletter, let your readers know what to do next. Try a simple short message at the end of each article: “If you found this helpful, you might also like [this article](#) on our website [include a specific link],” or “For more information on..., call our sales staff at ...” Let your readers move themselves through the sales process!

Write great content

It's not enough to have crisp, clear, well written articles. People have to want to read your newsletter, and your newsletter has to compel them to want to know more.

What to write?

Case studies are incredibly popular; they get read more often than other types of articles, because they build curiosity. People are always curious about what other people are doing – true for both B2B and B2C markets.

A good case study follows a simple formula: identify a customer's problem, clarify the challenge, explain how you solved the problem, and describe the outcome. Focus on measurable results, but take care not to paint your customer in too negative a light.

Readers also love tips and how-to's. Share this useful information with your readers, and present it in short, easy-to-scan articles or sidebars.

Try fresh sources of content for your newsletter. Ask other employees – especially your sales staff – what they're seeing in the trenches. Ask other non-competing experts in your field to contribute articles about topics related to your industry. Ask clients to contribute articles about how they've solved some particular problems. It's a great way to give your readers plenty of opportunities to stay involved.

How to write it?

I've got three rules for fantastic writing:

- **Be bold.** Build suspense with a short, compelling first sentence. A startling fact or statement will surprise your reader and make him want to read more. Or follow the Wall Street Journal's formula and start with a real-life situation or anecdote, but don't give away the ending of the story until the end of the article.
- **Be brief.** Don't waste your reader's time; find the shortest way to say every single sentence. Eliminate unnecessary words. Here's my trick: After I write my first draft of an article, I cut it by 20%. I always end up with a stronger piece. Every sentence should build upon the previous one, and every paragraph should end with a reason to continue on to the next one.
- **Be clear.** Make specific, provable claims. Use statistics whenever possible, or use quotes to demonstrate a point. The famous writing advice "show, don't tell" still holds true. Avoid weak phrases like "I believe," or "It's possible." Don't be afraid to take a stand – you're the expert, after all.

And you can give your newsletter a little personality. Remind the reader that a real human being wrote each article. Cold, impersonal newsletters don't stand out, so go ahead and inject a little humor or zip to your articles. Play around with different layouts. Try a little quirkiness, if it fits with your image, and make a memorable impression.

Words not to use:

- * "That"
- * "th" with dates (e.g., use "January 5," not "January 5th")
- * Qualifiers like "very," "like," or "a little bit"
- * Subjective phrases like "I believe" or "it may be"

Words to use sparingly:

- * "Is" and "are"
- * Adjectives and adverbs (e.g., use "he screamed," not "he cried loudly")

Your newsletter is only as good as your list.

A double-opt-in subscription process may lose a few potential subscribers but gives you a more qualified list.

Action is important! Invite readers to investigate further on your website, and make it easy for them to share your newsletter.

Bringing It All Together

So you've developed a clear purpose for your newsletter, and your content delivers on the promise you've made to your readers. Where else can you look for improvements?

Build a great list

If you're mailing to the wrong list, all your efforts are for naught. Your list has to complement the mission of your newsletter. Consider:

- Is your list targeted enough? A list with thousands of names might look impressive, but if your open rate is abysmal, you're wasting your time. Survey your list and see whether you can segment it into more targeted populations. Also, make sure you have specific names and specific addresses, or your newsletter will end up as junk mail.
- Do you need to grow your list? Offer potential subscribers an incentive to sign up – such as a free special report on a topic of interest to the reader. Not only are such incentives proven to improve conversion rates, they also help position you as the go-to expert. And when you ask prospects to subscribe, clearly explain the benefits your newsletter gives them. You might even create a sample newsletter to send as a thank you and to warm the reader up for the real thing.
- Are you mailing often enough, or too often? Test different frequencies of mailings. For print publications, quarterly might be enough, but semi-monthly might work too. For electronic newsletters, monthly is safe, but would bi-monthly work, too? Survey your subscribers, or if your list is large enough, gradually increase the frequency of your mailings until your unsubscribes jump, to determine the right number of mailings for your audience. Make sure you can live with the schedule you set.

Get the most from your website

Are your newsletters posted on your website? They absolutely should be. And keep your reader actively moving through your sales funnel by offering relevant links back to your website for more information. Try offering only short teaser introductions to articles – three or four sentences – and then direct readers to your website for the full article. And include your call to action at the end of each article, such as “For more information on ..., click [here](#).” Such links provide valuable statistics on click through rates, letting you further refine your content.

The best newsletters create a feeling of community with their readers.

Is subscribing to your newsletter easy? Your website *must* include a subscribe function. Spell out the benefits of subscribing, offer a free incentive, and position the sign up box clearly. For electronic newsletters, include a “forward” button to make it easy to spread the word, and a “subscribe” link for the benefit of these new readers.

Your readers can work for you

Create opportunities for readers to get involved with your newsletter:

- Survey your readers about hot topics and share the results with everyone.
- Let readers “Ask the Expert” about whatever’s on their minds.
- Ask for feedback on every issues – and then print the comments to resemble a newspaper’s editorial page.

Forge a sense of community within your readership. You’ll keep each newsletter fresh and reflective of what your readers want to see.

Success is not an accident

Test everything. You will never know what works and what doesn’t until you’ve tested it against a control. The test doesn’t have to be fancy or elaborate, but without it, you’re shooting in the dark. Try out every change on a small segment of your list first before you adopt large-scale transformations. What you find might surprise you.

During your annual newsletter “check up,” remember to account for changing marketing conditions. What worked last year might be stale this year — but you’ll never know until you test it.

Where to go from here

Some of the changes I’ve outlined for you are easy fixes, and some require more effort and maybe even outside help. But all of them will inject your newsletter with freshness and energy and, if applied meaningfully, will give you measurably positive end results.

Still, producing a great newsletter on a regular schedule takes time — something most of us don’t have enough of. If you’d like someone to

guide you through this whole process, or if you need a little help getting an article or two written, read on.

Freelance Writing Solutions gets it done

If you need help producing a newsletter that consistently delivers outstanding results, consider Freelance Writing Solutions.

I can:

- Generate fresh content ideas and topics
- Research background information for articles
- Interview your employees or your customers
- Write crisp, energetic copy your readers will love
- Edit your own content to make it zing

Contact me today!

For more information on how you can maximize your newsletter's ROI, call me at **630.330.9825** or send me an email at **Beth@FreelanceWritingSolutions.com**.

I look forward to hearing from you!



Freelance Writing Solutions

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