

Using e-newsletters

An e-mail newsletter as another channel of communication for your congregation. Many churches are converting existing print publications into electronic newsletters (e-newsletters), which can be produced for a fraction of the cost of their print counterparts (postage, printing and labor), and delivered to a larger audience instantly. Many people also prefer getting newsletters electronically, because they can read it at the computer, print it out for later reading, or store it for future reference.

Benefits of e-newsletters

1) **E-mail newsletters are fairly simple to produce.** If your church already publishes a “print” newsletter or bulletin, the text can serve as foundation for an e-mail newsletter. It’s simply a matter of cutting and pasting it into an e-mail program or format.

2) **E-mail newsletters can be more timely.** There’s no extra time to print, collate, address, affix postage, mail and deliver. In addition to providing information about upcoming events and activities, an e-mail newsletter can serve as an emergency communication tool when you need to mobilize church members for urgent action.

3) **E-mail newsletters can be posted on your church web site,** so potential/future members can log on to get a “flavor” of your congregation and its activities. And, an e-newsletter is a great way to drive people to your web site. Instead of including a whole article or a registration form in the newsletter, include a lead-in paragraph and have the reader log on to your web site for the whole story or the registration form.

4) **An e-mail newsletter can facilitate immediate response/feedback.** Simply by hitting “reply” and adding a message, the e-newsletter recipient can respond to a request, confirm receipt of important information, or take other action.

Things to do

1) **Develop an e-mail database for your congregation.** Ask if they want to be on the e-mail list, and be considerate of those who do not. What segment of your audience do you want to reach? Determine how the information will it be distributed to people who can-

not access e-mail? Use personal e-mail addresses, not company/work e-mail addresses. Others may wish to be added to your e-newsletter list. Local newspaper reporters, for example, may wish to scan the newsletter for possible story ideas.

2) **Decide regular content.** Will the e-newsletter be the same as your “print” newsletter, just distributed electronically. Will it contain different content, complementing the print newsletter?

3) **Determine format.** Your options for distribution are:

- **Text only e-newsletter** – Text is copied from the word processing program it was created in to the body of the e-mail that will be sent out to your distribution list.

- **Text attachment e-newsletter.** Text is sent out as an attachment in the word processing program it was created. For example, many people have Microsoft Word software. But, be aware of the software version. Older version of Word may not be able to read newer versions, for example.

- **pdf attachment e-newsletter.** Adobe Acrobat reader software is free to download, and most people have it on their computer, so it eliminates the problem with different word processing programs. However, you may need to buy separate software to create “pdf” documents.

- **Text and attached HTML version.** The text version is part of the e-mail message, with the HTML version sent as an attachment that the recipient can choose to click on.

- **Online e-newsletter.** The e-newsletter would be added to your web site, and you would simply send out an e-mail message to your mailing list with a link to your online e-newsletter to let everyone know that the latest edition is out.

- **HTML only e-newsletter.** Most e-mail programs will allow you to send HTML formatted e-mails, but this is not recommended as some recipients will have trouble reading the e-newsletter.

Attachment advice:

It is always a good idea to create a text version of your e-newsletter. Often, a recipient’s e-mail program may have trouble reading an HTML formatted ver-

sion, so this ensures that your recipients will be able to read the newsletter regardless of their e-mail software. While the HTML version is more eye-catching, the text version is the safe bet.

Some churches I know create and attach both a pdf version and a text software (Word) version in the same e-mail. That gives the reader the option of opening it in either form.

If using attachments, be aware of filters. E-mails with separate attachments (pdf or Word documents) may be recognized as “spam” and automatically be placed in the recipients “trash” or separate file, which they may not check on a regular basis.

4) Use a regular format of how your newsletter will look. Find one that is simple, easily read and use it consistently. That will make it easier to both create, and read. Be sure the e-newsletter fits the dimensions of standard pieces of paper, so recipients can print them out if they desire.

5) Determine a regular schedule, and stick to it. Recipients will get used to seeing the e-newsletter at a regular day/time, making them more likely to open and read it.

5) Develop a name, and include it in the “Subject” line. People often delete e-mails without a subject because they may be unsure of the content or source.

6) Use a gatekeeper/editor. Have one person responsible for sending out the e-mail newsletter (with an emergency backup).

7) Seek feedback. Make sure that an e-newsletter responds to the needs of the audience.

Content ideas

Regardless if it is a print newsletter or e-newsletter, content is important. Quality, timely and relevant content is vital as a communications tool for your church. Ideas include:

- a message from the Rector/Vicar or other church leader. Such a message provides a personal touch, sharing what’s on his/her mind, while simultaneously trying to keep everyone informed about the church’s activities. Keep it short; this is no place for a sermon.
- updates and reminders on church activities, services and events: Who, what, when, where, why, and how?

Things to avoid

1) Don’t send to people who do not wish to receive it.

2) Avoid overuse. Just like regular mail, too much becomes “junk” mail. Stick to business.

3) Avoid making newsletters too complicated, with large photos or images that increase the size of the document. If recipients are on dial-up service, or have limited computer capacity, downloading the e-newsletter may be too time-consuming, if not impossible to download. It may also “fill up” their e-mail inbox and prevent them from getting other e-mails.

4) Learn how to send e-mails without exposing all recipients’ e-mail addresses (see “Mailing list management”).

5) Avoid attachments you may have received from other Internet sources. There may be imbedded viruses that can infect your entire recipient list. Use virus detection software.

Mailing list management

1) The easiest, lowest cost method for managing e-mail addresses is to create an address book in your e-mail software program. Manually enter e-mail addresses into a specific e-recipient address book.

2) Use the “Blind Carbon Copy function (Bcc)” in your e-mail program so that every address doesn’t show up at the top of the e-mail. People may not want their e-mail addresses shared with everyone, so this provides some privacy. On the downside, some recipient’s filter systems may recognize large list of recipients as “spam” and block delivery.

