



WRITING E-NEWSLETTERS

These Seven Tips Will Help Spread Your Nutrition Messages to the Masses

By Carol Meerschaert, MBA, RD

As a dietitian, you probably do most of your communicating through e-mail, a personal website, blogging, social networking, or one on one. But if you wish to reach a larger audience, publishing an e-newsletter may be the answer.

An e-newsletter will help you reach hundreds, thousands, and in some cases, millions of professionals and clients with your services and nutrition messages. You can customize them, send them out quickly with the click of a mouse (or a tap on your trackpad), and get feedback about the number of subscribers and website traffic patterns in seconds.

Alice Henneman, MS, RD, an extension educator at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Lancaster County, went where no dietitian had gone before when she started her e-newsletter *Food Reflections* in 1996. “My career goal has always been to expand the number of people I can reach and help,” Henneman says. “I try to package accurate, helpful information about food, nutrition, and food safety in a way that’s fun, timely, and easy to read in my *Food Reflections* newsletter.”

The following are seven steps you can take to begin publishing an e-newsletter and tips to take the one you already have to the next level.

1. Start Scanning

Before you start an e-newsletter, you’ll need to scan the Internet to determine what’s already being published. You probably receive many e-newsletters from aggregators that offer interesting news headlines and marketing e-news that delivers upcoming event notices. Think about why you subscribe to these publications. Make a list of the things you like and don’t like about them. And look at the font, color, article length, images, and the frequency of the publications.

2. Think About Your Subscriber

The marketing acronym you want to consider is WIIFM, “What’s in it for me?” The key to e-news success is to think about what your potential audience wants to read, not just what you want to say. So talk directly to the readers and solve their problems. Reading about how attending a cooking class will save them 10 hours a week in the kitchen is much more attention grabbing than reading about your experiences as a cooking instructor for the past 10 years.

“The reader is giving you their most valuable resource—their time,” Henneman says. “Give them value in return.”

3. Set a Goal

Do you want to just inform clients or prompt them to call you for an appointment? Is the goal of your e-newsletter to serve as a public relations tool to position yourself as an expert in a certain specialty area, or are you selling your book? Will your audience want technical information with scientific citations or quick and healthy recipes with colorful photos illustrating the ingredients and cooking techniques?

The No. 1 reason people unsubscribe to e-news is because it’s sent too frequently; the second reason is because the content becomes repetitive or boring over time. To keep things fresh, Henneman sends *Food Reflections* every other month and has added a second e-newsletter called *Cook It Quick*. “In *Cook It Quick*, I give tips on how people can quickly prepare healthful, inexpensive foods that taste good,” she says. Henneman also sends shorter e-newsletters than she did in 1996.

4. Test, Test, Test

“Test and retest your e-news,” suggests Nicole Woodson of High Road Solution in Ashburn, Virginia. She supports online e-news platform BlueHornet and assists clients with electronic communications. “We’re still in 1999 when it comes to e-mail. There isn’t one agreed-upon standard for e-mail,” she says.

For example, your e-mail may look great on your computer but appear differently when viewed in another program such as

Outlook or Yahoo! In addition, some e-mail programs remove color, and many businesses block images. So make sure your message comes across without the images, Woodson says. You can view your e-newsletter using just the preview pane in your e-mail when you send yourself a test. “Make the reader want to open the newsletter or click to download the images by writing a compelling subject line and opening content,” she says.

Theresa Wright, MS, RD, LDN, of Renaissance Nutrition Center, Inc in East Norriton, Pennsylvania, offers a warm introduction to her e-newsletter and information about her workshops and classes. Wright replaced printing and mailing flyers for her weekend workshops and weight-loss groups with an e-newsletter in 2007. As a result, attendance has increased and costs have decreased. “As a dietitian in private practice, I sell my life in one-hour segments,” Wright explains. “When you calculate the money you can save by replacing print with electronic, don’t forget to add in the value of your time.”

5. Drive Traffic to Your Website

Instead of sending the entire newsletter via e-mail, you can send teaser text and host the full article on your website or blog. This drives traffic to your site and allows you to repurpose articles you’ve written. In addition, you can “use your e-newsletter to send fewer e-mails by combining several announcements into one communication,” Woodson says. Wright always

includes several program announcements in each edition of her e-newsletter.

If you don’t have a website or blog, you can still send e-news. Just ensure your contact information is easily accessible so readers know how to reach you and get more details.

6. Segment Subscribers

To keep content relevant and more specific to what readers want, segment your subscriber list. Most e-mail service providers offer tools that enable clients to sign up for articles that discuss only those subject areas in which they’re interested. You can offer them a choice of recipes, diabetes news, weight-loss tips, and more. Readers can select more than one subject area. Today’s sophisticated e-news tools facilitate creating newsletters with common and specific content. This ensures you’re not sending weight loss information to clients with anorexia or articles on feeding infants to patients who see you for fertility issues.

7. Analyze Your Metrics

After you send your e-newsletter, make sure you log in to your provider’s site and check subscriber numbers, page view information, and website traffic patterns. The open rate is one indicator of how well your message was received. Look at the metrics over time. If your rate stays steady or increases, that’s good. If it decreases, you might need to make your message more appealing to readers. A few people will probably unsubscribe. If many unsubscribe, this is an indication that you’re either sending your e-newsletter too often or not sending the information people want.

With technology, today’s RD can develop a client base that spans the continent. Keep in touch with them by using the right tool to send the right message. This will help build your business and your dietetics career.

— Carol Meerschaert, MBA, RD, is a writer and consultant in Paoli, Pennsylvania.

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