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ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

Print is not dead — or why a printed newsletter is a useful tool

If you ask if print is dead, the Google search responses are a resounding NO. At least in a business context. And schools are part of the education business in your community. Therefore, printed materials are a medium school staff should understand and commit to using as part of their community engagement efforts.

There are many arguments against printing. The cost is high, the use of paper is wasteful, the process is slow and the old-school tool can make you seem out-of-touch and behind the times. And combined with mailing costs and delivery timelines, the notion of direct mail to your parents, business, communities, etc., seems positively old fashioned and even ridiculous. Why would you mail something that you could email, post, text or Tweet?

It's about reach

There are some compelling reasons for reaching people through their mailboxes. One of the main reasons to budget for mailings is it gives you another way to reach your community. In most communities, an average of only 20-25 percent of voters have a direct connection to schools. Printed materials may help you reach more of your non-parents, an important tax-paying audience.

Mailing a newsletter can help spread or reinforce your messages by adding another platform for your messages. A regular mail plan can also support your communication efforts during a bond or levy election campaign. Many states do not allow substantially different or greater communications about election issues during a campaign. If you have a print plan that typically includes direct mail, you can usually justify using it during your campaign.

It's about relationships

An article in *The Business Journals* offers three reasons to rethink the death of print:

1. Print establishes an emotional connection: "Custom-designed printed materials captivate the eyes and hearts of an audience." Holding paper in your hands can attract attention and leave an impression.
2. Print triggers a response: "Customized formats with individualized messaging increase engagement and response among consumers." According to the United States Postal Service, 81% of direct mail recipients read or scan the printed material daily, and direct marketers estimate that 65% of consumers have made a purchase as a result of receiving printed materials.
3. Print informs: Print is informational, reliable and can be saved and referred to.

<http://bit.ly/2T2CzaE>

For subscription information, contact WSSDA at (800) 562-8927 or (360) 493-9231.

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Businesses love print

Printing

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Schools may benefit from taking business advice about direct marketing. In addition to the tips from *The Business Journals*, *Forbes* expands the list of benefits to include credibility, branding, targeted marketing, greater engagement and fewer print ads to compete with for the reader's attention. <http://bit.ly/2KpWfkR>

An argument for printing

Your mailer may not be read longer than the time it takes to travel from the mailbox to the recycling bin, but people are likely to remember that you made an effort to communicate with them, which can improve your credibility and trustworthiness. And the minority of readers who read newsletters from start to finish will have something new to discuss with their families and friends.

Unless the content is date-specific, your newsletter can have a shelf life as a source of information about your school district for several weeks or months. Be sure to display copies in your district and school offices and deliver copies to local community groups with kiosks for local information. Your chamber of commerce may be interested in copies for its lobby. You can also leave copies with local realtors who may want to share news about schools with clients.

Although social media is a great tool for reaching people, it isn't comprehensive and it does omit members of your audience who are not regular users or are not engaged with your district. Direct mail can help you get to people who are not a social media audience, do not visit your web page and are not paying attention to schools.

A printed piece can also reinforce messages you post digitally. Messages must be repeated before they resonate. The recommended number of repetition ranges from seven to 20 times in multiple different ways.

Newsletter tips

An effective print newsletter should contain your primary messages, your positive stories and upcoming events that are open to the public. It should have contact information and a professional design. Also, consider adding a QR code to marry your printed news with your digital content.

Try not to think of it as extra work. Ideally, it is a repetition of messages you have already developed. It can simply be a new format for the same messages you use on other platforms.

For greatest impact, follow these design and content tips:

Publish regularly. Keeping on schedule helps your credibility. It is common to underestimate production time for a newsletter. Be sure to account for enough time to write, design and edit your publication.

Repeat your messages. Don't be afraid to use material you used elsewhere. The same content, adjusted for different outlets can and should be repeated. Use it in your newsletter, on the Web and in social media. Repetition will help your messages stick and will make your newsletter project less burdensome.

Use descriptive headlines. Effective headlines are complete sentences with verbs.

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Mix up the size of your headlines. Vary headline length to increase reader interest. Use larger headlines for higher priority articles.

Write a strong lead. Start with the important information that helps readers understand the point of the article. If they know what the story is about, they may be more likely to continue reading.

Vary column width for a more interesting layout. There is nothing wrong with the standard three-column design; however, varying the layout will make your publication more interesting.

Use photos. Photos draw readers in and make the content more memorable. They have been shown to dramatically increase readership – in print or on social media. Omitting photos is a sure way to lower readership of your publication.

<http://companynewsletters.com/mistakes.htm>

A note about sustainability

A valid concern for printed materials is sustainability. Arguments in support of periodically printing materials point out that paper is the most recycled material and is a renewable resource. “Paper often comes from managed forests or farms, which replant about four million trees every day (four times more than they harvest.)” *<http://bit.ly/2KeQ1p6>*

Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant