

Promotion — Newsworthy Newsletters

Newsletters seem to be increasing in popularity because they're easy to produce at low cost, and they work. The goals that newsletters can achieve are broad and varied, but as a craftsperson, you probably want to promote your creative work, increase sales, increase attendance at exhibitions and courses, and share your accomplishments. Newsletters can even sometimes lead to media coverage and valuable publicity.

There are plenty of reasons to produce a newsletter, but there is one reason not to: if you're going to do a poor job. If your newsletter will be sloppy, unattractive, boring and haphazard, you'll only be advertising your weaknesses.

To produce a good newsletter that meets your goals, make sure that your plans are realistic. A newsletter should come out repeatedly with new content. Aim for a small, regular newsletter that you can keep up, rather than a big, splashy, expensive effort that you can only manage once, or a weekly or monthly schedule that is too ambitious. Regularity of a newsletter is what is effective. Producing it two to four times a year should be manageable.

Because your newsletter will promote your artistic abilities, you should demonstrate your creativity and style with each issue. Its attractive design will help you gain attention.

Unless you create an electronic newsletter, printing costs may limit the number of colours you use each issue, because full-colour printing is more expensive than two-colour. You can design your newsletter for full colour on one side only. Another technique is to use "shells," which are a year's supply of newsletter paper that has been pre-printed with the name of the newsletter and any decorative borders, with blank areas for the content that changes with each issue. Using shells can give colour relatively cheaply to each issue, while giving you room to be creative in the two-colour areas that will be printed.

Printing options have increased in recent years. You can have it done by a print shop, photocopy shop, or even print it off a computer with a colour printer in small batches as needed. Ask for price estimates and keep track of actual costs in order to determine what's most cost-effective for you.

Although the style of your newsletter is important, the content gives you a significant opportunity to communicate with your readers, and should be used well. Try to provide real substance that will interest your readers. Keep the obviously-promotional bits to a minimum, almost as advertisements.

Some ideas for content are news of upcoming events and reports of recent events, activities and awards won. You can discuss one of your new works, or new techniques, new materials or new media you're exploring. Include some comments from customers who've bought one of your pieces, or from students of your courses or workshops. If you donate works to charities, include a mention of the cause you're supporting. Always include all your contact information, and don't be shy about sales messages that explain what you sell, in which locations, and whether you do commissions or custom work.

Distribution is the next concern after you're created your newsletter. Electronic versions can be sent by e-mail and added to a Web site. A printed, hard-copy version gives more options. You can mail it by Canada Post to past customers, students and browsers who have signed up for it, but you may also be able to have a stack available for pick up at shows, exhibitions, galleries, arts, crafts, art supply shops, libraries, tourist information centres and other places in the community. The more your stylish and interesting newsletter gets into the hands of people, the better known you'll become.