

# breaking news

## FIVE STEPS FOR SMOOTH NEWSLETTER PRODUCTION

### STEP 1 before you begin

When deciding whether or not to do a newsletter for your agency, ask yourself: Why am I doing this newsletter? What are my goals? Will anyone want to read this? Have I considered all the costs, including staff time, and can I afford it? Will my staff have the time to do this on a regular basis? Gather examples of other publications which you think demonstrate effective writing and design for use during your planning meeting.

### STEP 2 planning

- > Schedule a planning meeting, and make it your goal to have a clear list of newsletter topics, lines of responsibility and deadlines before you adjourn. The first time you meet it may take several hours or several meetings, but for subsequent issues you should find that one hour and a maximum of six participants is sufficient.
- > Include all the key players early in the process, either by having them attend the initial meeting or by soliciting their suggestions beforehand. Remember to include people who are working directly with your clients or on your key projects, as they are most likely to know about timely topics.
- > Identify your best proofreaders. Include people who will notice the small mistakes in grammar, spelling and details as well as people who can identify important errors in content.

### STEP 3 content

- > Consider an overall theme for each issue of the newsletter, but if there are no obvious themes, don't force a theme at the expense of the publication or your timeframe.
- > When choosing article topics, ask yourself: Is this interesting? Is it useful? Will anyone want to read it? Can it realistically be researched and written in the given time frame? If not, don't include it.
- > If you must include some less-interesting items for diplomatic reasons, try to make them as relevant and useful as possible for your readers. Try to limit the number of such items per newsletter to no more than 25 percent.
- > Develop several backup article ideas in case some of your first-line articles don't pan out. Any ideas you don't use can be considered for use in the later issues.
- > Decide on a tone for your articles and keep to it. Avoid the common trap of being folksy, even in a staff newsletter—strive for friendly yet professional, at a minimum.

### STEP 4 design

- > Develop the initial design and have it approved before your first content planning meeting so that you'll know how many articles you'll need and how long they should be.
- > Confirm that the application you use to design your newsletter will be accepted by the vendor who will be printing it. Ask your vendor what you can do to make the printing process go more smoothly—it will save you money and time.
- > Make sure that your layout and artwork are a good match for your printing process. A photocopied or laser-printed newsletter can look great if it's designed to work in that medium.
- > Do not begin layout until the articles have been thoroughly edited, proofread and then reviewed again by the writers, and all artwork has been compiled.
- > Put your most interesting article on the cover. If you need to announce deadlines, events or other items that are timely but not as interesting, use a teaser to announce them and lead the reader inside for more information.

### STEP 5 wrap-up

- > Do a quick evaluation at the end of each newsletter to see where things could have gone better. Keep your notes in your newsletter file for the next issue.
- > Keep track of expenses related to the newsletter so you can evaluate actual costs of overall production. Don't forget to include staff time as an expense.