

Making a Company Newsletter Work for You

Why should I start a newsletter?

The top three reasons for starting a company newsletter are to bring **current customers** into the store more often, attract **new customers**, and **increase sales**. Although there's a certain amount of work involved in starting and continuing a publication, the positive results are often worth the trouble.

What can I put in a company newsletter?

Anything that will **appeal to customers** can go in the newsletter. The way the information is presented is just as important as what is said.

- If you talk about a **new product**, explain how it will **help the customer** or customer's horse look, feel, or perform better. Add a **coupon** for 10% off the first purchase.
- When you announce a seminar, lecture, or demonstration, emphasize **why the customer should attend** (door prizes, merchandise samples, coupons to the first 50 people, chance to meet a "big-name" rider or trainer, in addition to learning something).
- **Pictures** catch the reader's interest. Feature them as often as possible.
- **People like to read about themselves** and their friends. Ask customers to send pictures and news items about their horses, their activities, and their successes.
- A newsletter is a good way to make customers aware of the **wide range of products and services** provided by your store. In an article about how to store feed in the barn, for example, include a text box announcing that you can provide locks, latches, barn door hardware, and even complete plan kits for building a barn.
- Put names with the faces. Highlight a different **company employee** in each issue. Include a picture along with the employee's job description, experience, training, family, and special interests.
- Keep the content light and appealing. Consider including **puzzles, games, cartoons, and trivia questions** (first reader to call with the right answer gets a free product).
- Articles or tips on **horse care, nutrition, feeding, tack, and health care** are usually of interest to horse owners.
- **Q and A columns** are informative, short, and easy to read. Ask your customers to submit questions, or think of questions you have frequently heard from horse owners. *Note: unless you have a column written by a veterinarian, be careful not to appear to be giving veterinary advice in your newsletter.*
- Need to fill a page or two? Reprint all or part of an **Equine Review article**. Your affiliation with Kentucky Equine Research is a "plus" for your company.

Where do I get a mailing list?

You want your newsletter to end up in the hands of **people who will read it**, not drop it immediately into the recycling box. Developing a list of **horse owners** who have asked for the publication is the best place to start. Your **current customers** should head the mailing list. If you don't already have an address list, offer customers a chance to fill out a subscription form when they visit your store. Have

space for them to add names and addresses of **friends, family members, and riding buddies** who might also be interested.

How else can I distribute my newsletter?

If you have a display table or booth at **horse shows and community festivals**, allow people to sign up for your free newsletter. When you have people register for door prizes or a raffle, have a box they can check if they want to be **put on your mailing list**. Any time you talk to a **youth group or riding club**, ask members if they would like to receive the publication. Always take copies of **back issues to give away**, and include a postcard to return or a number to call for people who want to start getting the newsletter regularly. And, of course, keep a stack of current newsletters somewhere in your store so that anyone who comes in can **pick up a copy**.

Should I mail the newsletter or send it electronically?

Electronic newsletters offer significant **savings in printing costs and postage**. On the other hand, some people prefer to read a **printed copy**, and paper copies can go places electronic transmissions can't (handouts at a horse show or youth group meeting, for instance). **Neither format will fit every need**. You might want to start with whatever will easily reach the greatest number of interested readers, and later give customers an option on how they want to receive the newsletter.

How often should the newsletter be published?

What is the most practical schedule for your business? How much information do you have to share with your customers? Does new information come in on a regular basis? It's a good idea to **plan the content of the first two or three newsletters** before you start to publish. If you run through everything you want to say in three layouts, a **quarterly** publication is probably best. If, on the other hand, you have more content than you can fit into the available space, maybe a **monthly** or **bimonthly** publication will suit your schedule. Don't make the mistake of committing to a frequent publishing plan and then realizing that you can't keep up with that schedule.

How can I tell if the newsletter is increasing sales?

To find out whether people are reading and responding to the newsletter, **build a signal into each issue**. For example, an article about how to use a new product might include a **coupon** to use when purchasing the product. If customers use the coupons in the next few weeks, those sales have probably been triggered by the newsletter rather than because someone happened to see the product in your store. Even without a coupon or special offer, the newsletter may boost sales by explaining how a product can benefit owners or help them solve a problem with their horses. As show season approaches, print an article on how high-fat feeds improve coat condition in halter horses. Build a small in-store display of your high-fat feed, add a sign saying "Your halter horse will love SLICK-N-GLEAM as featured in our newsletter," set a stack of reprints by the display, and then **track sales** for a month.

What else do I need to think about?

- What do people want to read about? Ask readers for suggestions.
- Keep articles short. Many readers are in a hurry.
- Don't let the newsletter get too long. Most people will read, or at least scan, two to four pages; an eight-page newsletter will probably be set aside for later (and maybe never picked up again).
- Use type that is large enough to read easily, a layout with plenty of "white space," and a variety of headline styles.
- Avoid the tendency to cram as much material as possible onto each page.
- Have a competent person (or two or three) proofread before you publish.