How to Develop an E-mail Library Newsletter: A Cakewalk Approach.

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Abstract: Email is a friendly and cost effective technology for communication. Libraries effectively making use email for marketing their products and services. Library newsletters furnish with promotional and informative description of information products and services for the target audience. Newsletter development for libraries follows the more or less the same processes follow by business newsletters. But content of the newsletter depend up on the nature of library resources, services and users. Like any other promotional tools, success of email newsletter is depending on content presentation, layout, on time delivery etc.

Introduction

Email is a user friendly and cost effective technology for communication. Libraries effectively make use email for marketing their products and services. Brochures, promotional presentations, annual reports, contests, displays, signage and websites are other popular marketing tools used in libraries. The benefits of using email to communication with customers are: building relationships and developing branding loyalty by informing users of new products and services, seminars, events, etc and creating and maintaining one to one relationships with customers [1].

Email Library Newsletter

Email newsletter is electronic format of traditional newsletter distributing on Internet in the format of email as part of marketing campaign. Email newsletters often furnish promotional and informative description of products and services for the target audience. People need to be made aware of the services and products libraries provide and their comparative value. In addition a library must communicate with its customers and governing/funding entities to provide information about what the library is doing [2]. Email newsletters are apt for the promotional and communicative purpose of libraries because of the following reasons:

1. Ability to reach a large number of audience
2. Low cost compared to traditional promotional methods
3. Easy to track user response (e.g. web counter to track users site visit)
4. Round the clock service
5. Instant delivery of message and faster response from users.

Newsletter development for libraries follows the more or less the same processes followed by business newsletters. Only thing to be remembered while developing a newsletter is that it must highlight product and services of library.

Newsletter Content

Libraries can make use of the newsletter to deliver information for various contexts and purposes. Some instances are, newsletters informing latest news from library, arrival of new documents and information alerts in various subject fields. Content of the newsletter depend upon the nature of library resources, services and users. Following contents are appearing in library newsletters:

1. Library news (e.g. About library hour change, new branch opening, staff transfer, library guests, exhibitions, training programs etc)
2. General interest articles
3. Book reviews
4. Schedule of forthcoming events and
5. Reviews of nascent online resources, information products and services.

A library staff must be coordinating all the activities relating to newsletter publishing. Various activities involved in newsletter making (content reporting, writing, formatting and sending) can be pooled among other library staff and they must be conscious about the stiff timeline. Find and depute a person in your staff community blessed with good writing and editing skill to organize the final content. Another way is to outsource the final works to a freelance editor.

Newsletter content must be short and to the point. Content should be picked up in a manner that stays upto date with news from library. Each item in the library newsletter must be distinct and useful to know about activities in library. Decide in advance what amount of content appears in each issue of newsletter and it should be consistent.

Building E-mail List

Main audience of newsletter segmented to library members and therefore collecting email addresses is not a cluttered task. Collecting email addresses of library users from membership desk is the simple way to build an email list for newsletter. Placing an online subscription form in the library website is a simple way to attract a wider audience to newsletter. Remember to place an unsubscribe form in the same webpage and a provision for subscribers to change their email address.

Saving the email addresses in an Excel sheet or in a text file and keeping it in a separate can act as a back up of the list. This back up list will be helpful while migrating between email sending software and recovery of email address after accidental data loss.

Format of email newsletter

Email newsletter can be delivered in various formats. Popular email newsletter formats are

- Plain text
- HTML format
- PDF

A newsletter in HTML format has the advantage of formatting with different color, fonts and graphics. Features of plain text newsletter are of small file size and compatible with any email services. Newsletter in PDF format is easy to create and mange; it can be attached or linked with the email. PDF format of newsletter can be created direct from formatted word document. It is possible to create printer friendly format with PDF document.

Manual formatting of newsletter email client at the time of sending out is time consuming. Either seek the help of a webpage designer to create a well formatted template or make use newsletter templates available online. Newsletter template makes the formatting works effortless. Newsletter templates are set of pre-designed formats for text and graphics on which newsletters can be created. OSWD.org is a good place to find free HTML templates licensed under open source license. Customize the free template suitable for your requirements before use.

Email newsletters do not fill with much graphics. Subscribers with low speed Internet connection feel difficulty while loading images. If content for newsletter is very few (e.g. list of new books in library) list the entire item in body of the email. Another convenient way is to organize huge content in a webpage and include the link of HTML page in the invitation message to the reader. Placing a table of contents inside the web page with internal hyperlinks is helpful to navigate the lengthy body. Header and footer space is essential to give volume, issue number and contact information.

Any word processor software with good spell checking facility can be used for data entry. MS Word is the best available tool for this purpose. A WYSIWYG (What You See is What You Get) web page editor (e.g. Nvu) is helpful to transfer the content from word file to HTML template. Save the document as webpage with HTML extension. Open the HTML page in a browser and check for code errors, working of image links and hyper links.

Select and copy the body of the content using 'Select All' and 'Copy' command from Edit menu of the HTML editor. Open the email sending program and use the 'Paste' command to transfer the HTML formatted text. Email services behave diverse with HTML codes and before sending the newsletter, you have to test the newsletters format compatibility with popular email services (e.g. Yahoo, Gmail, Hotmail). Scanning of email list of subscribers will help to get an idea of email services popular among library users.

Sending out email newsletter

Sending email newsletter to subscribers is different from sending ordinary emails. Email newsletter is to be send to a large group in one instance and should address the reader individually by his name. A mailing list program allows sending out messages to every one on the list of email addresses. It ensures distributing the copies to each address on the list. Libraries can choose mailing list softwares or online mailing list services. Both free and commercial mailing list programs available and most of the free mailing lists provide limited functions (e.g. limitations in number of subscribers). Full functions can be activated by payment. GroupMail (www.group-mail.com) is ideal email list software and having both free and commercial versions. Following features should be considered while choosing newsletter sending software for your purpose,

- Capability to sending both text and HTML format newsletter,
- Provision to create user groups (e.g. faculty, students etc, email addresses in groups help to send occasional announcements to individual user segments),
- Facility to import email addresses from various sources (e.g. importing addresses from Outlook Express address book, CVS files or Excel sheets),
- Automatic deletion of bounced email addresses from the list and
- advance scheduling of newsletter delivery.

Archival of newsletter

Old issues of newsletters can be archived in the library website for the convenience to browse by online visitors. Past issues in HTML, PDF or text format have to kept in library website server and linked against issue names in newsletter archive page. Archiving old issues of newsletter also help to include in index of search engines and get list in search engines result page.

Collecting feedback

Conducting a survey among subscribers is applicable to know how much effective is the library newsletter. Collecting feed back once in a year is ideal. Online survey tools (e.g. www.surveymonkey.com) are helpful to collect the feed back from readers and able to analyze the

result instantly. In addition to annual surveys, give contact details in the footer space of the newsletter to collect valuable suggestions from readers.

Conclusion

Marketing is a complicated problem for libraries because of their wide range of products and services from books to Internet access, and an extremely diverse audience [3]. Like any other promotional tools, success of email newsletter is depending on content presentation, layout, on time delivery etc. Library newsletters should always emphasize services and not become simply a list of new acquisitions [4]. An email newsletter is a compelling tool for libraries to market themselves and stay in touch with the users.

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