

7 TIPS FOR CREATING A SUCCESSFUL IT NEWSLETTER



I've yet to see an IT group that is 100% happy with the level of communication it has with the rest of the organization. To help improve communications, many groups try and produce a regular newsletter to provide the boarder organization with more information about what's going on in IT. If you are thinking about doing this in your organization, consider these tips to help make it worth the time invested.

Make a Commitment

The need for a newsletter often comes as a reaction to some specific event. After all, how many times have you said, "if a user just knew x, we could have avoided this whole situation"? As IT professionals we are often predisposed to be a "fixer". We see that end users don't know something they should, so we immediately go into fix-it mode and try to blast out our vast amount of IT knowledge to the rest of the organization. The problem with the reactionary approach is that it is very difficult to maintain the initial motivation and momentum that comes from trying to fix a problem. A newsletter (or regular communication) is not a service desk ticket that must be resolved and forgotten. It is a commitment to providing communication to end users on a regular interval that will help them be more successful. Know this at the beginning and make a real commitment to publish on a regular basis. This means assigning specific tasks to specific people due on a certain date. Working on a newsletter "as time permits" will rarely lead to a successful outcome.

Help Don't Tell

In order to create interest, you must be in the mindset of helping your end users. If you want end

users to get better at password management, you must approach it from their point of view. Instead of writing about "password requirements for organization x", put yourself in their shoes. Approach the situation from their point of view. If you need to, talk to a few people about why they are having trouble understanding the requirements that they need to follow. Then, you'll be able to come up with a newsletter article similar to "Having trouble resetting your password, here's three tips make it easier"

One other way you can approach this is to pretend that you are reading a newsletter from another group. As an IT professional, why would you read a newsletter from the finance department? Personally, I would only read it if I thought there was something relevant that would help me get my job done. I might actually read an article titled "5 tips for submitting your departmental budget." Make sure you write to draw the attention of non-IT staff.

Have a Content Strategy

Your newsletter may ultimately fail or reach a narrow audience if you don't plan your content well. Know what's going on in the larger organization and line up your newsletter content to match. For instance, if you are going through an audit, include information that is relevant to helping end users meet audit requirements. If there are quarterly financial reports due, create articles like "how to leverage the company intranet to submit your reports on time"

When developing your content strategy, it can also be useful to vary your content throughout the newsletter. While you may follow a general theme "like meeting audit requirements" consider what types of articles can help meet compliance. You could have one article that is a "how-to", one article that is a story about "how jane used data analytics to meet quarterly results", and one that explains an audit requirement like "5 things you need to know about audit control 3.4.5."

Use Imagery and Multimedia

I've seen so many IT groups try and create newsletters that were plain text (and boring), because the sysadmins and [security](#) don't like HTML emails. If you want your IT newsletter to be read and be helpful it needs to be enticing and visually appealing. Include an image with each article that provides a visual representation of what the article is about. If possible, include imagery from inside your organization. For any how-to articles, include a short video clip walking users through doing something.

Don't Make it too Long

Creating an IT Newsletter can seem very overwhelming at first. Start off small and build from there. It's perfectly acceptable to release your first email newsletter with only 3 articles and a few helpful links. Get on a regular schedule of producing content, even if its small. Then, you can see if it's too much or too little and adjust accordingly. Remember, you are making a commitment to regularly providing information to the organization. Build the habit within your team first. Then if you want to add more you always can. Creating a newsletter is a marathon, not a sprint. Don't burn your team out early in the process and cause the newsletter to fail after just a few publications. It will take months to get your readership up.

Show Personality

Whether you realize it or not, your IT organization has a personality. If you don't know what it is, ask around see how people categorize your group. Are you the "IT Overlords" or "The Nerds in the Basement" or the group that "Gets things done"? If you have a positive image, embrace it, and incorporate it as a theme in your newsletter. If you have a negative image use the newsletter as a chance to create a new image of what you want to be known for. For example, if your group is known as the IT Overlords name the newsletter something like "The facilitator" If you group likes to go out for lunch, you can even include a quick article at the end of your newsletter titled something like "We went to restaurant "x" for our lunch meeting...here's what we thought.

The main point here is to let the organization get to know the IT group a little bit. Create a positive persona for your group. After all, IT groups are service providers, and enablers of business. It's much easier to trust someone you know rather than trusting the "basement dwelling overlords".

Talk About the Future

Include in your newsletter something about future projects or events that the IT group is providing. Business / IT alignment can be challenging in any organization. By talking about the future in the newsletter you enable a conversation about alignment. You might even have a VP stop by and say, "I saw your article in the newsletter about project X. I'm excited about the project and would like to hear what it does for our area" You might also hear "I read about project X and I'm not sure what its in line with what we are doing in sales. If you did project Y instead that would really help us out.

The newsletter won't solve all your alignment issues, but it can play a vital role in creating the conversations that lead to better business alignment.