



THE KIWANIS CLUB NEWSLETTER GUIDE

WHY DOES A CLUB NEED A NEWSLETTER?

If your Kiwanis club doesn't publish a regular club newsletter, it should. Yes, a club newsletter can be a significant expense. But it's an investment that pays good dividends in member involvement and satisfaction.

Your club is an organization, and its effectiveness depends on communication. You simply can't announce everything that's happening at each meeting, even if every member attended every meeting. Meetings should be devoted to good fellowship and an interesting program, not endless reports and announcements to a captive audience.

Club newsletters provide a handy form of communication that delivers the same information to every member. The club newsletter is a meeting reminder, a calendar of coming events, and a reporter of club and board actions and plans. It also serves as a permanent record of your club's history and the lives of its members. It provides Kiwanis education and increases member satisfaction by recognizing individual contributions to the club's success.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD A NEWSLETTER BE PUBLISHED?

Ideally, a club newsletter should be published as often as the club meets. At a minimum, a monthly newsletter is better than no newsletter. Since the purpose of the newsletter is communication, frequency is the most important consideration after content.

HOW SHOULD A NEWSLETTER BE DISTRIBUTED?

Regardless of the schedule, the club newsletter should be mailed to every member. The newsletter delivered to a member's home or office can be read at leisure and can be referred to again if some item of information needs to be recalled. The member who has been out of town for an extended time will find his club newsletters waiting to bring him up to date.

Newsletters distributed at club meetings often are given only a quick glance and left behind, and they don't reach the members who will benefit most—those who didn't attend. As a compromise between effectiveness and cost, some clubs distribute the newsletter at the club meeting and then mail it to the members who didn't attend.

There are many ways to economize on paper and printing—they might even be donated. For most clubs, postage will be the largest expense item in the newsletter

budget. Very large clubs may be able to obtain and benefit from a reduced-rate postal permit. But most clubs do not mail enough copies of each issue to qualify, or save enough in postal costs to make the paperwork, special sorting, and other requirements worthwhile.

One club in a small town has a newsletter editor who hand-delivers each issue to every member, but this idea isn't practical for most clubs. You might consider having the postage for each issue underwritten by a member or his or her business, in return for a special credit line like, "Mailing costs for this issue were donated by John Smith," or "by John Smith Insurance Agency." The total yearly postage cost of the newsletter is large for the club, but the cost of a single issue is small enough to appeal to the generosity of individuals when the donation is voluntary and properly acknowledged.

More and more clubs are sending their newsletters to members via fax or e-mail and also posting their newsletters on the club Web site. A fax newsletter can be just a black and white version of the mailed newsletter. An e-mail newsletter is pure text, so it's important to be as concise as possible. Distribution of both fax and e-mail newsletters to a selected member list can be handled very efficiently by computer. Newsletters posted on the club Web site can include color and photos. But Web newsletters don't reach readers automatically. Each time a new newsletter is posted on the club Web site, an e-mail announcement should be sent to every member with Internet access, calling attention to the new issue and providing a handy link.

Electronic distribution of club newsletters can reduce the cost and labor involved in mailing each issue. However, some members do not have fax machines or computers with Internet access. It will always be necessary to mail some newsletters in order to serve all the club's members.

WHAT ABOUT PAID ADVERTISING?

Some clubs (usually the larger ones) do sell advertising in their club newsletters or include a directory for paid listings of members' businesses or professional services. The ads often simply reproduce the member's business card. This kind of paid support certainly can help to defray newsletter expenses. If you have a special-rate postal permit, however, check the rules; paid ads may disqualify you for the special rate or require a different postal rate for that percentage of the newsletter used for advertising.

Of course, advertising also involves the editor in additional, time-consuming tasks—selling, billing, collecting, accounting. As with special-rate postal permits, be sure that advertising earns enough to make the additional work worthwhile—especially from the point of view of the person who has to do the work. Otherwise, the cost of publishing and mailing a club newsletter should be accepted as a normal and necessary administrative expense and included in the club dues.

HOW SHOULD WE PRINT OUR NEWSLETTER?

Some clubs publish glossy, typeset newsletters with screened photos and stylish graphics, and some clubs maintain an office with a full-time administrative secretary too. For the average club, however, style has to take second place to economy. The vast majority of Kiwanis club newsletters are reproduced from typed copy and black-and-white "line" (not shaded) artwork – just like this page.

More and more of the typing is being done on computers, however, with word-processing software giving the finished product a more professional look. This guide was prepared using Microsoft Word. Many other word-processing and desktop publishing programs are available.

The most important aspect of a good club newsletter is content. Inseparable from this prime concern is legibility. The newsletter doesn't need to be fancy, but it does need to be neat and easy to read.

Offset printing, popularized by "instant printing" shops, and the new generation of photocopy machines provide clean, sharp reproduction if your original copy is clean and sharp. An editor's most useful resource is a good business typewriter with a carbon (not cloth) ribbon or "letter quality" computer printer.

Some computer-savvy editors in small clubs are using desktop publishing software to prepare very professional-looking typeset pages and are then printing their newsletters on color computer printers, which allow them to scan in color photos as well. It takes a while to print 20 or 30 copies of the newsletter, but the results are impressive.

PRINTING AND MAILING IS NOTHING COMPARED TO ADDRESSING ALL THESE NEWSLETTERS!

You really only have two choices. You can address newsletters the hard way – writing or typing each address on each copy—or the easy way, by machine. Check among your members. More and more Kiwanians have personal computers at home or work. These were invented to manage and print out information like names and addresses. Have your club roster placed on a computer file to print out on self-adhesive labels, which can then be affixed to your newsletters in just a few minutes.

If you don't have access to a suitable computer, it's just as easy to use a photocopier to duplicate your mailing list on self-adhesive labels (suitable "copier labels" are sold in office supply stores). Just type the names and addresses on a master form. Then photocopy it on labels when you are ready to mail each issue. If you use a sheet of labels as the base for your master form, it's easy to peel off deleted members or replace entries when an address needs to be changed.

WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN A GOOD CLUB NEWSLETTER?

As the club's primary means of uniform and universal communication, the newsletter needs to contain many different types of information. Here is a general list:

- Announcements of future club meeting programs and other club activities.
- Capsule report on the previous meeting(s).
- Reports on committee and club achievements and recognition of individual contributions and accomplishments.
- Items of general interest about members – birthdays, anniversaries, trips, promotions, honors, hospital stays, etc.
- Information on forthcoming division, district, and International activities (club-level publicity helps their success).
- Kiwanis education items (see “Kiwanis Education Spots for Club Newsletters”).
- Information on official actions by the club board, when applicable.
- Biographical sketches of new members.
- Official calls for meetings at which members will be asked to vote and the wording of proposed amendments and resolutions.
- News of community events of interest to the members or promoted by the club.
- Fun items – quips, jokes, humorous reports about incidents in members’ lives.
- Inspirational messages and motivational quotations (see Spiritual Aims SA #1 and “Quotes for Club Newsletters”).
- Contact information (name, phone number) for the club president, secretary, and newsletter editor.

With so many different types of content, it’s easy to overlook items. To keep things organized, you can copy the “Club Newsletter Worksheet” in this kit.

WHAT’S THE BEST FORMAT FOR A CLUB NEWSLETTER?

The “best” format is the one that does the job for your club. One club in Colorado won a district award with a weekly newsletter printed on one and a half sides of a postcard. The print was very small, but skillful editing packed in all the really vital information, and club members looked for and read each issue. At the other extreme, some clubs publish fairly elaborate monthly or bimonthly “magazines.”

We recommend a format between these extremes. For maximum effect, a newsletter should contain more information than can be squeezed onto a postcard. And a monthly or even less frequent schedule delays communication and may provide more content than the members really want to read.

Most club newsletters are printed on two sides of a standard or legal-length sheet of paper, which is enough space to include all the necessary information, yet brief enough so members can read it all in a very few minutes. Some newsletters use each side of the sheet as a vertical page; others turn the sheet sideways and fold it, producing a half-size, four-page publication. In choosing a format, consider convenience in assembling and addressing each copy.

Some newsletters arrange the text in two vertical columns; others use “letter style” like this page. A two-column design helps to break up the text into short, easier to read lines but requires more fitting and fiddling to make the columns equal in length.

A “cover sheet” often is used to convey permanent information, including officers, committees, membership directory, meeting times of neighboring clubs, etc. This page serves as an outer cover and helps to stiffen the newsletter, since a single sheet easily can become mangled in the mail. This cover sheet also provides a regular space for the address and postage, so these items don’t reduce the space available in the actual newsletter. The cover sheet and the newsletter can then be folded in half or thirds, stapled, and mailed without the added expense of an envelope.

For the sake of economy, cover sheets can be preprinted in quantity, enough to provide a three-month or six-month supply. But keep in mind that the more cover sheets you preprint, the longer it will be before you can make any changes in the directory to reflect new members, new addresses, or unexpected changes in officers or committees, etc.

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON DESIGN PROBLEMS IN CLUB NEWSLETTERS?

The amateur editor often perceives his job as *filling* space rather than *using* space. As a result, many club newsletters are simply too cluttered and, therefore, unsightly and difficult to read. The printed text runs right to the edge of the page; headings and blocks of text are crammed together, and if any slivers of space remain, they are filled with decorative lines or artwork. The result is a graphic jungle that impedes the reader’s progress.

The real secret of good graphic design is space, not print. Space sets items apart more effectively than lines or boxes. Space beckons the reader’s eyes. If an editor has too much text and too little space, it is better to edit and shorten the text than cram too much onto the page.

At least a half-inch margin should be maintained at the top, bottom, and sides of each page. Two lines of space above and one line below should set off headings. Paragraphs of text should be kept short, and it doesn’t hurt to separate each paragraph with a line of space, as used in the design on these pages. (To see how empty space can improve readability, just imagine this page without the blank lines between each paragraph.)

Spot artwork is another useful graphic ingredient, but don’t use too much of a good thing. Like seasoning in food, art should be used in moderation. If you have more than three items of spot art on a page, you probably are overdoing it.

The same advice applies to the use of second colors. A second color in the masthead or used to box an item can brighten up the newsletter. But don’t be tempted by the availability of a second color to use it for headlines, extra borders, and other graphic elements. Again, too much of a good thing can turn into a mess. Many clubs preprint paper with the newsletter masthead in quantity, thus providing a second color (often “Kiwanis blue”) to dress up each issue.

If the text of your newsletter is printed in any color except black, make it a very dark blue or very dark brown. Most other colors are too transparent for easy reading. If colored paper is used, make it a very light cream, yellow, pink, or similar transparent color. Dark blues, greens, and reds don't provide good contrast for the printed text.

PROSPECTIVE EDITORS IN OUR CLUB SAY THEY CAN'T WRITE.

The goal of newsletter writing isn't literature; it's information. Indeed, the newsletter editor should strive to keep his text simple and short (after all, it's called a club newsletter, not a club journal). You don't need to write essays, just the basic "who, what, where, when, why." At this level of simple reporting, most people who say they can't write mean they don't want to write.

In looking for a newsletter editor, don't look for "a writer;" look for a member who's enthusiastic about Kiwanis. This kind of club booster can become an effective newsletter editor even if his grammar and punctuation skills are modest, because he realizes that a good newsletter can make an important contribution to club spirit and organizational success.

HOW CAN I PREPARE GRAPHIC ELEMENTS ECONOMICALLY?

We already have noted the best way to prepare the newsletter's text—with a business-quality typewriter or computer printer. More and more Kiwanis newsletter editors are now using word-processing or desktop publishing software, and this makes it easy to select different type sizes and styles for headlines, form the text into columns, etc. But for many editors, graphic elements still must be prepared by the "scissors and paste" method.

A drafting board and T-square are a big help in positioning graphic elements on the page, but any straightedge—a steel ruler, for example—can be put to good use. You also can ink dark lines on graph paper and place this under your paste-up sheet as a "see-through" guide to help keep horizontal lines parallel and vertical columns squared up.

The masthead—the newsletter name, issue number, date, and other information that goes at the top of each issue's first page—is going to be used on every issue, so it ought to look sharp. A local printer or typesetter can set up a good design. It's not a big job and shouldn't cost much. The Kiwanis club newsletter editor's kit includes several professionally designed mastheads that can be used if you adopt the newsletter name included in the design you select.

You also can prepare your own masthead—at least the newsletter name in large, fancy type—by using "press type." The black letters come in many sizes and styles on clear plastic sheets. You place the plastic sheet over a piece of paper (again, graph paper is handy because the light blue grid lines help to keep everything straight). Position each letter just where you want it; rub the back of the plastic with a hard, smooth instrument, and the letter is transferred from the plastic to the paper. Press type is sold in graphics stores, office supply stores, and similar stores.

Rubber cement is a very convenient adhesive for pasting down graphic elements. When freshly applied, it allows bits of paper with artwork or text to be moved slightly for final positioning. Excess cement that may ooze out around the edges can be allowed to dry, then removed by light rubbing with a fingertip.

You will want to use some graphic elements again and again – the masthead, the various Kiwanis family logos, the current service-theme logo, etc. Coat the back of these items with rubber cement and let it dry. When you want to place an item on the current newsletter paste-up sheet, apply cement to the chosen spot and let it dry. Then press the art item to the treated spot. The two layers of dry cement will stick together, but not tightly. After the newsletter is duplicated, you can peel off the items you want to use again, without damage.

Spot artwork is where you find it – practically everywhere. Newspaper offices and printing shops may have whole books of “clip art” they rarely or never use and might donate. The Kiwanis family logos are available on computer disk from the Kiwanis International Supplies Department, and “on-line” Kiwanians might be able to pull down spot art from sources on the Internet. But every newspaper and magazine contains spot art you can clip for use in your club newsletter. Seasonal items – Easter rabbits, Valentine cupids, Thanksgiving turkeys, Santa Clauses – often are found in grocery ads. To reproduce well, artwork must be “line art” – pure black on white, no gray shading.

The modern generation of full-function photocopy machines is very useful for enlarging or reducing graphic elements to fit the space in your newsletter. The copy will be just as sharp as the original. Sometimes, it may even appear a little better because the ink may be blacker and the paper whiter.

Finally, there's one other item every editor should have in his or her “production department”: a small bottle of white “liquid paper” correction fluid. Inspect your finished paste-up or printout and apply the “white-out” fluid to remove stray marks, fingerprints, and all those other little mistakes and accidents that somehow creep in.

ASIDE FROM CLUB MEMBERS, WHO ELSE SHOULD RECEIVE OUR NEWSLETTER?

A good club newsletter also can serve some external public relations purposes. For example, you might want to send your newsletter to the presidents of the other service clubs in your community. Your circulation list ought to include your lieutenant governor. You also could include the presidents of the other Kiwanis clubs in your division, or better yet, establish an exchange of newsletters so you can see how they produce theirs. Your district governor and district public relations chairmen certainly would like to see your newsletter.

SHOULD WE ENTER THE DISTRICT'S CLUB NEWSLETTER CONTEST?

Why not? It doesn't cost anything, there's no penalty for not winning, and the judges might think more highly of your newsletter than you do. You will be competing against clubs of the same general size, not with clubs several times bigger than yours. And the judges pick the winners from among the newsletters actually submitted. If your newsletter isn't the best in the district, it might be the best one the judges see. Good luck!