Tip Sheet: Digital Newsletter Options

Many non-profit organizations are transitioning their print newsletters to digital versions. E-newsletters offer many advantages, but some people are hesitant to jump on board because it requires some tech savvy. Making the switch takes a bit of effort but you won't regret the decision when you see the results. Read on for factors to consider when deciding to change to a digital format and some free/low cost options.

Advantages of digital newsletters

- **Visually appealing appearance:** People are very visual and a professional appearance creates a positive impression of your organization.
- **No design skills needed:** Templates are provided that already incorporate good design principles. You can tweak the designs by changing colours, fonts, etc. but the basic layouts are already set, so there is less chance of coming up with an unappealing or hard to read design.
- **Less chance of getting stopped by spam filters:** Some email programs like Outlook will label emails sent with a large number of email addresses in the To or BCC fields as spam, meaning that your email will get automatically moved to the junk folder of your addressees. You won't have this problem if you use a well-known company which provides email marketing services. These companies build their business on ensuring that emails sent through them are authenticated and will make it into email inboxes.
- **Help with CASL compliance:** All non-profit organizations must comply with the Canadian Anti-Spam Legislation (CASL) that says organizations must have consent to send electronic messages. With many digital newsletter platforms you are asked to confirm you have consent before adding someone to your contact list within the platform. If someone adds themselves to your contact list (subscribes to your newsletter) then it's considered an opt-in and appropriate for CASL. Many companies provide tools to help you with CASL compliance.
- **Easy subscribe and unsubscribe options:** Many digital e-newsletters provide a convenient subscribe or unsubscribe button that readers can click on. Instead of having to contact someone at your organization to say they wish to receive or not receive the newsletter they can do it themselves. If it's easy for your readers to subscribe and unsubscribe it also means it's easy for you to manage your contacts. You don't have to update databases, spreadsheets or lists with information you get from emails and phone calls.
- **Pre-scheduling options:** Some platforms offer the option of pre-scheduling distribution of the e-newsletter. This is helpful if the newsletter typically comes out on a specific day and the person responsible is away or busy with an important event at your organization.
- **Measurable results:** Digital platforms typically track results such as how many people opened the newsletter and which links (URLs) they clicked on. This information can help you provide relevant content and measure the results of your efforts.

What stops people from switching to digital newsletters?

Assumption you don't have the technical skills

As with anything new, it can take a little while to figure out how things work and get used to the system, but people learn new skills all the time. The interfaces are easy to understand and use terms and functions most people already know. For instance, you'll see the same font options like bold, changing the font size, and using bullets that you use in Microsoft Word.

Many use a drag and drop function where you select the type of content you want from a master menu and add it to your newsletter by dragging it over to the newsletter workspace. Some people think that using digital newsletter systems to format and put together a newsletter is easier than using Word!

Concern that readers won't like digital newsletters

It's understandable that many older seniors like print newsletters because that is what they're used to and they may not have computer access. Many boomers and seniors embrace technology though, so you might be surprised how open people are to new delivery methods.

Digital newsletters aren't as foreign a concept as some people think. If you can read an email you can read an e-newsletter that is delivered into your email inbox. Digital newsletters can also be printed just like an email.

Consider accommodating both types of readers for now. Create your newsletter in digital format and print it for the readers who want to receive print newsletters.

Explore your options

Janelle has used four digital newsletter systems and finds MailChimp and Constant Contact the easiest to use with the most options and functions. ESCC currently uses both companies to deliver our e-newsletters.

MailChimp is free if you send no more than 12,000 emails to 2,000 subscribers.

Constant Contact is very low cost and offers a non-profit rate based on how many subscribers you have per month.

Mailout (formerly Industry Mailout)

iContact

A September 2015 PCMag.com article The Best Email Marketing Services of 2015 offers a great side-by-side comparison of 10 companies.

If you're interested in exploring digital newsletter options, contact Janelle, ESCC Communications Coordinator at memberservices@seniorscouncil.net.