

Chapter

8

UPDATE THE COMMUNITY

PURPOSE *To inform officials, community members and other supporters about library programs, upcoming events and needed resources.*

In this Chapter

CREATE A NEWSLETTER

SEND PERSONAL UPDATE LETTERS TO KEY CONTACTS

INCREASE YOUR VISIBILITY IN THE COMMUNITY

PURPOSE *To disseminate the library's message, publicize events and activities and communicate the library's resource needs to potential donors.*

Step 1 — Determine if a newsletter is feasible.

Creating a newsletter on a regular basis requires a commitment of time and money. Be sure you have the resources to do this on a regular basis before you print and distribute your first issue.

Step 2 — Determine frequency, length and means of printing.

A newsletter is typically published on a regular basis. Establish a production schedule for yours: Can you publish one monthly or quarterly?

It will help to know how long your newsletter will be before you start to write it. Generally, your newsletter does not have to be long. An 8.5" x 11" sheet of paper printed on both sides can suffice.

Decide in advance how you will print your newsletter. Depending on the number you are distributing, a copy machine in the library may do the job. If you want something of a higher quality, approach your local copy shop or printer for a possible donation.

Step 3 — Name your newsletter.

The newsletter should have a name that people will come to recognize and associate with your library. For example, Thomas Jefferson Public Library's newsletter could be the "Thomas Jefferson Library Leader" or the "Thomas Jefferson Library News." Under the name of the newsletter, include the volume number, the date and your Web site address. In addition, be sure to include the library's name, address, phone number, e-mail and Web site on the back page of the newsletter.

Step 4 — Develop a distribution list.

Consider who you want to receive your newsletter. Start with your "Key Contacts List" and add names.

You may want to consider sending your newsletter to the community at large. Mailing to this large distribution list could get expensive, so explore the possibilities of including your newsletter with other county or city mailings. For example, your mayor's office may be interested in having a "library page" in its newsletter.

You may also ask your local newspaper staff if they would consider including your newsletter as an insert to their newspaper, particularly as an insert to their neighborhood

supplement if they have one. If your community has a weekly newspaper, you might approach its editors about a library page.

Remember to have a stack of newsletters available on the check-out counter at your library.



HELPFUL HINT

Begin to collect e-mail addresses so you can send your newsletter electronically.

Step 5 — Make an outline of newsletter contents.

Unlike a press release or pitch letter, a newsletter is your very own communications vehicle designed to get the library's message to a large and/or targeted audience. The newsletter can contain a variety of information and news about your library. The first step is to list all of the newsletter topics and prioritize them according to reader interest.

Your newsletter could include some of the items listed below:

- **Lead story** — This is the most important element of the newsletter. It is the first thing people see logically, so it should be the most important topic in the issue. Possible stories could highlight the arrival of new computers or an upcoming event.
- **Schedule of speakers, classes and other events** — A newsletter is an excellent vehicle to publicize upcoming classes, events and guest speakers, and to publish articles about events after they happen.
- **Pictures and captions** — These will make your newsletter more eye-catching. Be sure to take pictures of your speakers and guests at events. Wherever possible, use pictures to tell your story. For example, try taking pictures of students working on computers or make computers the backdrop of a picture with a speaker.
- **Spotlight on donors** — It is imperative to thank current donors. They will appreciate the gesture, and potential donors will see that gifts to the library do not go unrecognized.
- **Fundraising requests or inserts** — Add a paragraph about the library's needs and how readers can help. Think about inserting an envelope with a fundraising request into the newsletter.
- **Community profile** — Write a profile about a prominent community member or a volunteer who has shown support for the library's computer programs.
- **Kids' corner** — Recruit one or two students to write a short article on how they are using computers to enrich their lives. Or let them express their thoughts in pictures and drawings.

- **Web site info** — List useful sites for students and adults. It could be titled, “What’s New on the Web.”
- **Historical retrospective** — Technology has advanced at a very rapid pace in the last 20 years. A look back at the way things used to be might bring about a greater appreciation for the ease with which information is available today and the ways technology continues to change our lives. Try using pictures to tell the story (e.g., In 1980, [Picture of card catalog] – in 2000, [Picture of row of computers]).
- **Localized trivia** — Test your reader’s knowledge of the local community or interesting facts about your library. Put questions on the front or inside the newsletter and the answers on the back.

Additional story ideas:

- Tie into the launch of other programs, such as your summer reading program or Black History Month celebration.
- Include stories about people who have used the computers successfully (e.g., maybe you know of someone who found a job using your computers).

Remember, since you will produce the newsletter periodically, save some topic ideas or features for future publications and consider which ideas you’d like to make regular features.

Step 6 — Develop a “production” schedule.

Make a timeline of when you can complete each component of the newsletter and who is responsible for each activity. Whether the newsletter is distributed monthly, quarterly or annually, it’s important to develop a production schedule with deadlines associated with each item.

Step 7 — Assign stories.

Writing a newsletter can be a daunting task for one person, so ask volunteers, students and local business leaders to provide some of the newsletter content. For example, ask a student to write an article about the importance of computers in the daily life of a local businessperson or ask a local businessperson to write an article about why his or her employees need to be computer literate.

Step 8 — Sell advertising space.

Selling advertising space could potentially pay for the cost of producing the newsletter. Try to solicit local businesses to buy advertising space. Offer free ad space to printers or graphic designers in exchange for their services.

Step 9 — Design your newsletter.

Your newsletter does not need a complicated design. There may be software on your computers that you can use to produce the newsletter, such as Microsoft Word or Publisher.

Step 10 — Proofread.

Your grammar and spelling must be perfect, and your facts and numbers must be accurate. Make sure someone not involved in the writing reviews the final product before it is printed.



HELPFUL HINT

Microsoft Publisher's newsletter template can help you easily create an attractive newsletter.



Sample Newsletter

ANYTOWN LIBRARY NEWS

MAY 2002

Spotlight on Jane Smith

Volunteer of the month is the star of the computer lab

This month, we at Anytown Library News would like to tell you a little about Jane Smith, the most popular computer teacher at our library.

Jane has been a regular visitor at our library since 1980, when she and her husband first moved to Anytown. She also has volunteered at many of our book fairs and bake sales.

One day last year, Jane asked if we could teach her how to send e-mail notes. Jane had never used a computer before. She registered for our free e-mail class and quickly learned how to send notes to her family and friends across the country. Jane became so excited about using the computer that she took more classes and soon became a computer expert.



Jane at the computer.

Before long, Jane was giving us computer tips.

Jane encouraged many of her friends to try the computers. She even helped arrange special classes for the neighborhood Senior Center. She is our computer lab's shining star.

Next time you are in Anytown Library and see Jane Smith, give her a big "thank you!"

SCHEDULE OF FREE COMPUTER CLASSES

Computer Basics 1
Monday, June 3, 2002
3:00 PM – 4:00 PM
An introduction to computers, including using a mouse.

Introduction to E-mail
Monday, June 10, 2002
7:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Learn how to use a free Web-based e-mail program to send messages to your friends and family anywhere in the world. You will be able to sign up and use your own e-mail account.

Students should have some experience using a computer keyboard and mouse.

Hands-on Class for Beginning Internet
Monday, June 17, 2002
7:00 PM – 8:00 PM
An introduction to using the Internet. Basic computer skills are required.

All classes are free, and everyone is welcome. Call 234-5678 to register.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

SPRING BOOK SALE

WE'RE GETTING READY FOR OUR ANNUAL BOOK SALE ON SATURDAY, JUNE 29. THE SALE RUNS FROM 9:00 A.M. – 5:00 P.M. IN THE C STREET PARKING LOT.

EACH YEAR, THE BOOK SALE GETS BIGGER AND BETTER. THIS YEAR WE WILL HAVE THOUSANDS OF NEW AND USED BOOKS, TAPES, AUDIO BOOKS, CDs AND PUZZLES.

THE FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY, A NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATION THAT RAISES MONEY FOR THE LIBRARY, IS THE SPONSOR OF THE ANNUAL BOOK SALE. ALL PROCEEDS FROM THE BOOK SALE HELP SUPPORT OUR LIBRARY. THIS YEAR, MONEY FROM THE BOOK SALE WILL HELP BUY:

- MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTIONS;
- EDUCATIONAL SOFTWARE FOR STUDENTS;
- HEADSETS FOR COMPUTER USERS; AND
- NEW TABLES FOR THE CHILDREN'S CORNER.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED! LET US KNOW IF YOU CAN HELP AT THE BOOK SALE. WE NEED PEOPLE TO HELP SORT BOOKS AND BE CASHIERS. CALL MARY AT 234-5678 FOR MORE INFORMATION.

SEND PERSONAL UPDATE LETTERS TO KEY CONTACTS

PURPOSE *To keep officials and influential community members informed of your library's accomplishments and challenges.*

Step 1 — Determine if update letters would work for you.

An update letter may be a good tool if you do not publish a newsletter on a regular basis or if your local officials and supporters need more detailed information about the library. Typically, officials may be more inclined to read a personal letter than a newsletter.

Step 2 — Finalize your mailing list.

Send updates to those who might influence budgetary and policy decisions, who have supported the library or who have expressed interest in future support. Add the media to your mailing list.

Step 3 — Set a timeline.

Decide in advance when you plan to send letters throughout the year. Keep a file for each of the planned letters and throw in ideas for the letters as you think of them. While you may not be able to send this type of letter every quarter, at the minimum try to send one at least once a year.

Step 4 — Write a concise letter.

Your letter should be relatively short; one page is enough. A typical letter might include the following elements. (See next page for a specific example.)

- An explanation of why you are writing.
- A description of successes of the previous quarter. Perhaps you've received a grant, reached a programmatic milestone or held an event.
- An explanation of upcoming events or ongoing concerns.
- A conclusion that thanks readers for their support and interest and encourages them to visit the library.

8 hrs.

TIME INVOLVED:



Sample update letter

(Put on library letterhead.)

[DATE]

[NAME]

[ORGANIZATION]

[ADDRESS]

[CITY], [STATE] [ZIP]

Dear [NAME]:

Thank you for your support of [INSERT NAME OF LIBRARY]. I'd like to take this opportunity to give you a brief update on what has been happening in our library.

As you know, we have been able to provide our community with free access to computers and the Internet over the past [INSERT NUMBER MONTHS/YEARS]. I thought that you would enjoy the following snapshot of how successful this program has been in the last year:

- More than [INSERT NUMBER] patrons have used our computers to conduct research, write résumés and e-mail far-away relatives and friends.
- More than [INSERT NUMBER] citizens have taken advantage of our computer training classes.
- More than [INSERT NUMBER] volunteers have donated their time and expertise to support free public access to technology.

For some of our patrons, we offer their only access to information technology. We are proud to provide this service; however, it does require staff time and other resources. To help support this service, we are planning a [INSERT FUNDRAISING EVENT, DATE AND TIME]. We hope that you will join us.

If you have any questions about our public access computing program or our upcoming event, please do not hesitate to call us at [INSERT MAIN LIBRARY NUMBER]. Of course, we hope to see you in the library soon!

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

[TITLE]

[PHONE NUMBER]

[E-MAIL]

PURPOSE *To promote your library and its services at community meetings and functions.*

Step 1 — Determine two or three points you want to make about the library.

On a regular basis, develop two to three points that you want others to know about the library. These points do not have to be complex; in fact, they are probably already part of your daily vocabulary.

Sample points could be:

- The types of computer classes available.
- A summary of how many people are using the computers and for what purposes.
- The biggest challenge to sustaining the computing programs and how the library hopes to overcome it.

In general, try to keep your points as positive as possible but don't be shy about having one or two issues-related points.

Step 2 — Get visible.

You, your board members, staff and volunteers are the best salespeople for your services. Look for opportunities where each of you can make an announcement about the library. For example, a volunteer could promote the free access to computers during the announcement session of a church service. Or a staff member could remind other parents at a PTA meeting that the computers are available for children to use after school. These types of announcements can also be informal; tell your neighbor at the supermarket or at the theater.

These informal announcements are also an effective way to reach your officials. Consider attending your monthly city and county council meetings to give updates on the library services.