

11. Magazines and Newsletters

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Introduction

Magazines and newsletters have often been the focal rallying call for social change movements. They are of vital importance for spreading the movement, mobilising supporters around key actions and developing understanding of both the movement's key issues and the work of the individual organisation.

Magazines and newsletters are the organisation's 'shop windows' to the world (together with the Web Site). This means that they need to appear professional and interesting, to involve and attract to your cause.

Writing a society magazine or newsletter is no simple task. These publications have to talk to different audiences and put across different messages. An accessible standard style is needed, despite a variety of contributors, with widely different agendas and approaches. This requires careful planning, strong style guidance and firm editorial management.

At a practical level, a magazine or newsletter also has to be cost effective, and be used as a fundraising and supporter development tool.

Audiences

You need to know your audiences when you write your magazine, to make sure you are reaching and 'speaking to' these. Usually, supporters and potential supporters are the main audience. However, you will also be using the magazine for other audiences, such as: -

- Politicians
- Potential funders
- Companies
- Media
- Other animal protection societies
- Opponents

This means that as well as highlighting the issues and the work of your organisation, the magazine should be accurate and authoritative.

Use of Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a good way to find out which aspects of your magazine are most popular with subscribers. Over time, the format and content of your magazine can be amended to make it more popular to your majority audience(s).

Many of these questionnaires bring out interesting and unexpected facts, such as that many readers want to know what they can do, and how they can help (so opportunities to donate, or protest (e.g. special 'action points' for supporters) or how to buy 'cruelty-free' products are very popular).

Magazines, Newsletters or Leaflets

In general, a magazine is a more substantial publication, whereas a newsletter is a less formal (and less substantial) method of updating about the organisation's work or progress (including about individual issues or campaigns). A magazine is usually published periodically, whereas newsletters can be published more frequently, whenever there is an amount of news to be told. However, some smaller organisations, with less funding, tend to use newsletters instead of magazines, and these can meet many of the same purposes (at lower cost). Leaflets are usually subject specific campaign tools, and fall into a different category.

Whether an organisation uses magazines, newsletters or both will depend on a number of factors, including available finances. Similarly, the frequency of magazines and newsletters will depend on money and time available. Larger organisations tend to have regular magazines (e.g. quarterly or six-monthly, plus newsletters (e.g. campaign updates or supporter newsletters)).

Organisation

Organising the society's magazine is a big job, and should not be underestimated. The routine administration is sometimes delegated, but an experienced Editor or editorial panel usually organises the overall plan and edits articles carefully. The below are just some of the factors that need to be considered.

Schedule

A schedule has to be agreed with the printer, to ensure that the magazine can be sent out at the planned time. This will need some built-in time in case of delays, as other work emergencies can often hamper the magazine schedule. For example: -

September 1st – draft plan and request for articles sent out
September 15th – final plan agreed by editor and articles commissioned
October 7th – draft articles deadline
October 15th – editor to finalise articles and commission photos
October 16th - meeting with printers
October 21st – editor to collect photos and design final version
November 1st – draft to printing
November 7th - proofs to editor for checking
November 9th - final sign off
November 10th – accompanying appeal drafted
November 12th – appeal final sign off
November 14th – printing finished
November 15th appeal insert and magazine posted
(Just in time for pre-Christmas donations and merchandise orders)

As can be seen, this is a lengthy process, but also one in which there are tight deadlines and little scope for delays.

General Template/Content

A template for contents is a good way to keep control over length and format. It is easier to manage a magazine that has a coherent plan, and it usually results in a better quality publication. See Annex 1 for an example.

Style

It is also preferable to have style rules for a magazine, to ensure a coherent and recognisable style.

Balance

The balance of each edition has to be carefully considered, both in terms of content and visually. 'Heavy' articles need to be balanced by articles of general interest ('lighter' articles), and by appropriate use of images. Beware of sections with too much text, packed with facts etc. Use of boxed inserts (e.g. specific case studies to bring theories alive) can be a good way to break intensive text.

Images

Choosing the right images for articles is an important part of the magazine preparation. Often images can have a greater impact than words. However, many supporters will complain of there are too many gruesome and horrifying images in one edition. Action pictures, that show the organisation's work, are very important. Supporters can feel manipulated, if only gruesome images are shown. Whereas if they can see that 'their' organisation is actively tackling the problems, they feel secure and appreciate that their support is worthwhile.

Collecting regular information

An important part of the preparation for the magazine is collecting and recording information on an ongoing basis. It is easy to keep a 'magazine box', in which to put copies of all interesting information or developments. This will save an enormous amount of time when the magazine is due, and help to ensure a rich content.

Cost v Benefit

It is always difficult to judge how much money an organisation should spend on its magazine. This cannot be measured solely by the size of donations that come in from an accompanying appeal. As was said earlier, the magazine is the main 'shop window' to the organisation, and it regularly builds supporter loyalty and understanding. Some of this value will be in less tangible forms, such as changing attitudes and lifestyles, whereas some will be tangible longer-term forms, such as in future legacies.

Advertising

Many organisations decide to include paid advertising in order to make their magazines less costly. This can certainly help financially, but it should not be undertaken lightly.

Firstly, advertising should always be ethical (if possible connected to the organisation's remit e.g. 'cruelty-free goods or ethical investments) – even some pet food companies test on animals. Secondly, the balance of the magazine has to be maintained. It is first and foremost the society's magazine, its own 'shop window' and including issues relevant to its mission. It is completely counter-productive to allow it to be overtaken by advertising, becoming more like a marketing catalogue!

Tip!

Obtain copies of the magazines of leading animal welfare societies and compare them. Take and use the best ideas - on layout, format, content, length etc.!

Annex 1

Magazine Templates

This is just one example of a magazine layout. There are many different options. But it is very useful to have a template like this for planning purposes. It helps keep a consistent style and layout.

Page 1 Front cover

Edition and date
Nice Cover Picture
Mention of
key/interesting contents

Page 2 left

Welcome
(Chief Executive)
Plus organisational info
and contacts

Page 3 right

Contents

Page 4 left

Major Campaign
Articles
Updates
Action photos

Page 5 right

Major Campaign
Articles
Updates
Action photos

Page 6 left

Major Campaign
Articles
Updates
Action photos

Page 7 right

Second Priority Campaign
Articles
Updates
Action photos

Page 8 left

Second Priority Campaign
Articles
Updates
Action photos

Page 9 right

Second Priority Campaign
Articles
Updates
Action photos

Page 10 left

Third Priority Campaign
Articles
Updates
Action photos

Page 11 right

Third Priority Campaign
Articles
Updates
Action photos

Page 12 left

Issue

New issue researched

Page 13 right

Issue

New issue researched

Page 14 left

Political
Document political actions and political disgraces!

Page 15 right

The Industry
Recent news from animal protection opponents 'Dirty Tricks'

Page 16 left

Investigation/Exposé

Document recent animal protection investigation

Page 17 right

Investigation/Exposé

Document recent animal protection investigation

Page 18 left

Coverage of One Department

e.g. Investigations Unit at Work

Page 19 right

Coverage of One Department

e.g. Investigations Unit at Work

Page 20 left

World News

International news about your issue

Page 21 right

Media Update

Details of the media coverage the organisation has had
Video clips and copy articles etc.

Page 22 left

Ethical Shopping

Information of how to shop ethically
Sources and news
Good and bad!

Page 23 right

Merchandising Page

Book reviews

Page 24 left

Fundraising Page

Fundraising department
Fundraising ideas and actions
Acknowledgements

Page 25 right

Letters Page

Samples of supporters' letters and replies

Page 26 left

Special Interview

Interview with celebrity on your issue
Or leading activists/author

Page 27 right

Get Active!

Action points to mobilise supporters
Various methods and subjects (linked to articles)

Page 28 Back Cover

