

# New Perspectives

# Let's Talk 21<sup>st</sup> Century Style

by Michelle Mathews

Customers are like friends. If you communicate well, not only will they listen, they will respond. If customers don't hear from you once a month, they aren't going to be your customers for long. In a perfect world, a sales representative would be able to take the time to chat with every one of her customers on a regular basis. We all know that isn't practical. So how can a sales representative just pop over to chat? In today's connected world, e-newsletters can give representatives the opportunity to not only maintain a relationship with their customers, but build and reinforce that relationship. So you see, with e-newsletters, you can create a perfect world for your representatives and their customers.

## **Yes friends, gather 'round!**

An e-newsletter is a powerful tool. It can draw your customers in, keep them engaged and keep them coming back. A well-executed e-newsletter allows your representatives to stay in front of their customers and prospects. E-newsletters can also help you assess and cater to their needs, emphasize your product and business opportunity, and sell new prospects at a time when they are ready to take advantage of what you have to offer. A thoughtful e-newsletter becomes a valuable resource for building brand

awareness, credibility and trust, and to forge and maintain ongoing relationships that build your business. So how do you make e-newsletters work for your company, your representatives and their customers? And, how do you avoid the mistakes that can do more harm than good?

## **Your e-newsletter isn't spam; don't make it taste like spam.**

Respect your subscribers. Stick to a monthly publication schedule. Monthly e-newsletters allow you to create a single, tightly crafted message from your company's relevant news and information. If subscribers receive an e-mail newsletter once a month—at the same time every month—they will take the time to listen to what your team has spent good time and money to communicate. No one wants to open their e-mail to find 30 new messages a day from the same company. Also, by ensuring privacy law and CAN-SPAM compliance with an opt-out capability, subscribers will understand and appreciate the fact that your e-newsletter is special and that it is the legitimate and authoritative source of information about your products and brand. They will look forward to their monthly e-mail and open it with anticipation and pride.

### Mom always said, "If you're gonna do something..."

Do your e-newsletter right. There is too much competition for a subscriber's time to waste an opportunity to communicate with him or her by producing a less-than-effective e-newsletter. Nothing causes a subscriber's interest to wane more quickly than confusing text, unrelated graphics and an unclear message. Direct selling companies work hard to maintain a well-branded image. Don't allow well-intentioned individual consultants to determine their own content. By producing well-designed e-newsletters—with high production values—you will ensure control and consistency across all communication channels and strengthen your company's brand. We've all seen examples where each individual representative creates their own message. What's often lost in the translation is clarity of brand message—and, ultimately, sales!

### It's the personal touches that count.

Direct sales companies depend on their representatives' personal relationships with their customers to drive sales. An e-newsletter must be able to reflect and strengthen those one-to-one connections. So while the company produces the e-newsletter's template and content, it must be customizable enough to reflect the consultant's individual touch. A subscriber who recognizes their local representative's name and picture on the e-newsletter will be more likely to take the time to view the contents. Also, allowing an attachment of a personal message from the representative can further spur the subscriber to pay closer attention to the contents.

### High-powered content is key.

Content is the engine that drives an e-newsletter, so power-up. Effective content builds brand loyalty and drives sales, but avoids the "hard sell." What does that mean? It means mixing things up and exciting the reader. Supplement product highlights, company news, etc., with engaging relevant and thoughtful lifestyle content that captures the subscriber's attention. A food company can include seasonal recipes. A jewelry company might present an article on the fine points of accessorizing. A home and garden business could offer home décor tips and trends. Make content fun, interesting and on-trend. Keep readers coming back for more.

Be interactive and imaginative. What is direct selling about if not interacting with people? What are people buying if not an imaginative new idea? An e-newsletter should be a veritable cornucopia of interactive and imaginative possibilities, from links to products, articles and corporate and representative Web sites to reader surveys, opinion polls and forums about everything under the sun. You only have to look as far as the content of top magazines to get great creative ideas. Consider the use of podcasts to include customers in a new product launch. Explore the idea of creating an online poll, and then publishing the results the next month. And, why not embed streaming video to show how exciting the next conference will be. Customers will get to know not only their local representative, but the entire world of your company and brand.

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### Be a trailblazer.

With strategically crafted content, an e-newsletter becomes a map for the consumer's tour of a company's world. Once engaging lifestyle and interactive content has been created, an e-newsletter can be structured and "layered" to draw the subscriber into a rich environment that will subtly deliver your company's marketing messages. For instance, you can cascade your content with adjacent summaries and links that lead the reader from quality editorial pieces into more product-specific areas or offer-oriented areas (promotions, for example) where they'll find a progressively stronger call to action. In other words, once you've gained their attention and piqued their interest, make it easy for them to order products or take advantage of special offers.

### What works?

If content is so vital, how can direct selling companies find content that appeals to many individual readers? Some readers may be more interested in lifestyle articles. Some may love reading about products. Readership analytics is one of the most useful tools that e-newsletters can offer direct selling companies. Readership analytics provide the ability to analyze what readers are responding to and leverage that information to improve content over time. Analytics allow companies to see

what works and refine it, or see what doesn't work and eliminate it. Newsletter subscribers are more likely to stay engaged with a company that is responsive to their wants and needs. For instance, one of IMN's clients found—in their e-newsletter—that there was more reader interest in a lifestyle piece they ran than there was in a featured product. Readership analytics allowed them to discover this passion about a topic and put that passion into new content that would be even more meaningful to their customers. Without this ability to analyze content, and understand fully what is meaningful to the customer, we are just creating content for content's sake. Analytics makes communication a two-way street.

### What now?


So, now you've implemented an e-newsletter. You've personalized it for each of your sales representatives. You've created content that is engaging and interactive layered your content, and used readership analytics to hone your messages. Your e-newsletter is a rousing success. How does your company build on that success? Have your sales representatives pick up the phone. They can use the e-newsletter as a valid reason to initiate contact. This kind of personal communication is exactly what drives the direct selling industry. Make sure your newsletter provider has the capability to generate "Warm Call" reports that simplify call targeting by letting representatives know who to call and what to sell, based on the areas of the e-newsletter subscribers have visited. If a customer is repeatedly going to a particular product area, you know that's where her heart is, and your representatives can capitalize on that knowledge by offering her what she wants when she wants it. Your representatives' follow-up calls can be more personal when they know just what each of their customers read and found of interest.

### Build on the foundation.

In direct sales, where personal relationships are the touchstone, e-newsletters provide an excellent way to manage corporate communications and messages, and establish and strengthen brand awareness and loyalty at the same time. With careful content choice and construction, companies not only send thoughtful and useful e-newsletters, but connect with their subscribers, creating a meaningful dialogue. E-newsletters are 21st century communication tools grounded in the same principles that make direct selling such a powerful channel—people talking, people listening. One-on-one was never easier than it is today. 📞



Michelle Mathews is a top sales producer with more than 17 years' experience. Prior to joining IMN, she was an independent consultant for PartyLite®, where she was among the top five percent of the company's U.S. consultants. Earlier, Ms. Mathews held a variety of sales and customer service positions with PeopleSoft, Inc., Ross Systems, Inc. and Multibank Financial Corporation.



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