

Writing a Toastmasters Award-Winning Newsletter

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Writing a Toastmasters Award-Winning Newsletter

In 2000, the newsletter I wrote for my Toastmasters club was voted as one of the top 10 newsletters of its kind in the world.

People ask me what I did to win the award, and this article shares with you the process I used.

Background

I was a member of the Toastmasters International organisation for several years. For three years I was the Public Relations Officer for our club. During that time I wrote a regular newsletter for our club members.

Each year Toastmasters International runs a competition to find the top 10 newsletters from around the world. The year I won there were 1500 entries. At the time I was taking a freelance writing qualification, and found the newsletter an excellent project to work on.

Explanation

Please remember that the process I went through was specific for this particular newsletter, though the principles can be applied to others.

THE PROCESS

1. Determining the purpose of the newsletter

This, I feel, was the crucial step. It is said that if you get the first 15% of anything right, the rest will effortlessly follow.

Before I put pen to paper (or finger to keyboard) I spent a good amount of time working out what the purpose for this particular newsletter was.

I was pretty new to Toastmasters and did not realise that newsletter-writing was a well established practise within the organisation and that there were well-documented guidelines.

So I reinvented the wheel and started from scratch!

I decided that there were three main reasons for having this particular newsletter:

- **Reason 1** – by far the most important, I felt, was to create a sense of belonging within the club. This would help retain members and reduce attrition. I reckoned that if people felt a sense of belonging and therefore felt of value to the club, they would be both keen to develop their own speaking skills and be supportive of the club as a whole.
- **Reason 2** – to provide education through interesting and useful articles.
- **Reason 3** – to give news. Although it is called a newsletter, I felt there were other more appropriate ways to share news within the club – e.g., by giving announcements during meetings.

2. Writing the newsletter

Because I wanted to create a quality newsletter that fulfilled the three purposes, I was happy to commit a decent amount of time to researching and writing it. Good quality seems to take time!

I obtained copy in three ways:

- By obtaining information myself – e.g., interviewing people, writing reports of meetings, events, success stories of members.
- By asking for contributions from members. This I felt would enhance people's sense of belonging and give them more ownership of the newsletter. About 75% of the members contributed articles some of them willingly!
- By occasionally asking permission to reprint articles written by Toastmasters from other clubs.

I ensured that in every newsletter I mentioned as many members as I could, as many times as I could, and included photos of them whenever I could.

People like to see their name in print.

After I had produced the first newsletter, one of the members rushed up to me, thrust the newsletter in front of my face and said, beaming, "My name is in here three times!"

To make it more readable, I also included light hearted articles –
e.g., a humour section
a quiz
a crossword
members' notices section

3. Formatting it

I was keen to make it look good so that people would be more likely to read my precious masterpiece!

It took a few hours to format it, ensuring I had colour, variety, and lots of visuals – clip art/graphics and photos.

I hope this has been of help, and that you can relate some of the ideas to your own newsletter.

My main two messages would be:

1. Determine the purpose of your newsletter.
What do you want it to achieve?
2. Be prepared to devote enough time to it to make it good quality.

Go well!

Best wishes

Kim Chamberlain