

# WF 5 Deadly Fears of e-Newsletter Publishing

(and how to overcome them)

By Michael Katz

**1 Fear of Having Nothing To Say**  
As a small business owner, you know a lot more than you may realize. And although running out of material is the number one reason cited by small business owners for not launching an e-Newsletter in the first place, I have never come across anyone who knew enough about a particular industry or topic to start a business in it, who didn't also have a nearly endless supply of content to choose from.

Remember, your clients and others who have an interest in your area of specialty, don't work in it every day the way you do. The things that are second nature to you, whether it's how to grow heirloom tomatoes on a balcony; how to plant up the perfect centerpiece for a housewarming gift; or how to troubleshoot grubs in your lawn; are all news to those of us on the outside of your industry.

The people who are going to read your newsletter have questions. You on the other hand, have answers, opinions, experience, and perspective. When it comes to your garden center/customers/community, you understand what matters and what doesn't, and how all the pieces fit together. These brief, useful nuggets are the things you write about.

**2 Fear of Technology**  
An e-Newsletter has a lot of moving parts. There are mailing lists to manage; links to set up; images to lay out; responses to track; and dozens of other small pieces to coordinate and fine tune, all in the course of writing and publishing a newsletter month after month (or week to week). Managing this process efficiently requires a fair amount of technology churning away in the background. That's the bad news.

The good news is that email marketing has finally evolved to the point where there are dozens of vendors out there who, for a very small fee, will take care of most of this for you (go to Google and search "email marketing vendors" for a look at what's out there). So while it's true that

you will have to go down a learning curve before you can switch your newsletter publishing into autopilot, you no longer need technical skill to get there.

Managing the logistics of a monthly newsletter can be tedious at times, no question. But if you've ever successfully assembled a gas grill, you're more than technically qualified to publish an e-Newsletter.

**3 Fear of Publishing on a Regular Basis**  
Although you may be sold on the value of a regularly published e-Newsletter, you may still be worried that once let out of its cage, this beast won't ever leave you alone. The truth is, you're right to be concerned. If I had to point to one factor that plays the most significant role in the failure of company e-Newsletters, it's that the people behind them stop publishing.

Like starting an exercise program, we all go great guns out of the gate: telling everybody we know; celebrating every issue. But (also like exercise), by month four or five the thrill is gone, and many people start to wonder how to quietly put the thing out of its misery.

I'm happy to say that I've discovered two solutions to this potential problem.

First, publish monthly. Although it may seem that dropping back to a less frequent schedule will reduce the burden, in practice the opposite is true. The less often you publish, the bigger a deal it is, and the more it seems to hang over your head. A monthly schedule however, means that the next issue is never more than 30 days away, and you will find yourself less concerned with achieving perfection each time.

Second, create a publishing schedule and stick to it. First Tuesday of the month, third Friday, whatever. The important thing is that you bake it into your monthly work schedule. An e-Newsletter will never be today's top priority, and unless you explicitly determine when it will come out, you're more likely than not to keep pushing it to the back burner.

**4 Fear of Writing**  
I hear it every day from the small business owners I work with: "I can't put out an e-Newsletter, I'm a lousy writer." Well, you'll be happy to learn that writing an e-Newsletter — like email in general — is a lot more like talking than writing.

People don't expect to read prose on screen, and they don't want something that reads like an article from a local business journal. They want a piece of you and your expertise. As a result, the most effective e-Newsletters are those that sound as if the company leader is just talking; filled with all the slang, run on sentences and joking around that comes out in person.

After all, e-Newsletters are simply glorified emails, and email is fundamentally a two-way conversation. The more you can write in an authentic, friendly, spoken manner, the more it will feel to readers like somebody (i.e. you) is really on the other end. So don't worry about something that your high school English teacher would be proud of. Focus on turning out something that breaks down the walls between your company and your customers. Something real.

**5 Fear of Competition**  
There's no doubt about it, thanks to the explosion of the Internet (and social media in particular) over the last few years, everyone is now a content publisher. That means your potential readers have a lot more to choose from and you have a lot more competition for whatever it is you write.

But, let's put that into perspective. A good e-Newsletter sent to your house list will still be opened by a third of the people it's sent to. That's 5?, 10?, 20? times better (you pick) than the percentage of people who read your newspaper ads; respond to your direct mail; or accept your unsolicited phone calls.

The fact is, an e-Newsletter represents the first time in history that a small business owner has ever been able to cost-effectively demonstrate her expertise, make a personal connection and



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stay top of mind with her entire customer and prospect base on an ongoing basis.

So sure, it's not as easy as it once was. But pound for pound, there is no better way to leverage your relationships (and build new ones) than with a monthly email newsletters.

**A Final Comment**

You may be waiting to launch your e-Newsletter until everything is "just right." Until your mailing list is large enough. Until you've stockpiled enough columns so you'll never run out. Until you've hired that new marketing person; etc., etc.

I've got news for you. No matter how much you plan and prepare, things are going to go wrong even then.

I've been midwife at the birth of dozens of e-Newsletters, and every time we launch one (every time), something goes wrong. It's never the same something, but it's always there. So don't worry about it, just get in the game.

Three reasons: First, because the cost of error online is exceedingly low. If you make a mistake — or simply change your mind! — you can fix it. Nothing about your newsletter need be permanent, from the name to the look to the content. Every issue is an opportunity to start fresh.

Second, because time is your enemy. Social Media Marketing (of which, you're-Newsletter is a tactic) is a long term approach. The sooner you get started reaching out to your circle of

contacts, the sooner you'll see the results. With an e-Newsletter in particular, you lose much more by waiting than you gain by perfecting.

Third, because experience is your friend. You can do all the research in the world, but until you've got a living, breathing newsletter of your own, it's just a theoretical exercise. There's only so much insight to be gained intellectually; the real "A-ha's" occur when you get behind the wheel and drive it yourself.

Bottom line: These five fears are common among burgeoning e-Newsletter publishers, but on closer examination, not all that daunting. To quote author Julia Cameron in her book, "The Artist's Way": "Leap, and the net will appear." **LGR**



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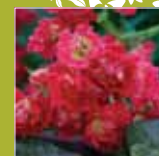
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