SPREADING YOUR MESSAGE THROUGH THE WRITTEN WORD

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ABSTRACT

Newsletters can take your message out of the garden to a far greater audience than you would otherwise be able to reach through tours or education programmes.

This workshop presupposed that delegates knew why, what and to whom they wanted to communicate. It concentrated on the two basic ingredients needed to produce a good newsletter: writing and design as both need to be considered if a newsletter is to be effective.

Delegates examined and commented on different writing styles and looked at the basic design skills required to create a newsletter. Guidelines were provided on production, printing and distribution.

RESUMEN

Las revistas informativas pueden llevar tu mensaje a una audiencia mucho mayor que la que de otra manera conseguirías mediante visitas o programas de educación. Este taller presuponía que los delegados conocían lo que querían comunicar, a quién iba dirigido y por qué. El taller se centra sobre los dos ingredientes básicos necesarios para producir una buena revista informativa: deben considerarse tanto la escritura como el diseño si la revista ha de ser efectiva.

Los delegados examinaron y comentaron diferentes tipos de escritura y de diseño que se requieren para crear una revista informativa. Se proporcionaron las líneas maestras sobre la producción, impresión y distribución.

INTRODUCTION

Botanic garden newsletters and magazines exist to keep readers informed of what is going on in the garden. The better informed readers are about the work of the garden the more likely they are to support the garden.

Publications vary considerably from simply-produced, two sided, newsletters giving up-to-date news without elaborate design, to magazines with more pages, 'in-depth' articles and perhaps a specially designed cover. A newsletter is quicker and simpler to produce and cheaper to print. It is easier to start modestly and become more ambitious when the newsletter is successfully established.

GETTING STARTED

It helps if the garden is able to find someone willing to be the newsletter editor. Successful publication of a regular newsletter depends on someone having overall responsibility for it and this is helped by continuity. In many gardens, however, editing the newsletter will be undertaken by the pubic relations person; if so, it is likely to be one of the most important parts of her or his job.

Decisions to make first

Frequency

Regular publication is essential in order to be topical and keep a high profile. It is better to publish a simple newsletter frequently and regularly. Once this is working successfully the newsletter can be developed.

Quantity

This will depend on who the audience is and the budget available. The larger the number of copies produced the cheaper it is per unit cost.

Production

Printers will often handle all the production work - typesetting, design and paste-up - as well as the printing. After supplying the copy, all that will need to be done will be the proof-reading and checking the layout. However, if the garden could do some or all of the production work then it would be cheaper and would give the garden more control over how the newsletter looks.

Distribution

There is nothing worse than working hard to produce a good newsletter only to find copies languishing in the garden weeks later! Efficient distribution is essential for all publicity materials.

Budget

Produce a draft annual budget.

The newsletter itself

What will you call it?

Choose a short title so that the title panel (masthead) can be displayed big and bold.

Contents

The editor will develop her or his own ideas, but a useful checklist includes:

♦ new initiatives in the garden;
♦ decisions that affect the public;
♦ people - new staff, events that staff have been involved in (eg. charity work);
♦ education courses;
♦ short articles;
♦ opening/closing times of the garden and contact numbers for the public;
♦ 'fun' material eg. quizzes, competitions or crosswords.

EDITING AND WRITING

The responsibilities of the editor cover four main areas: editing, design, production and distribution. It is always helpful if other colleagues can be persuaded to take on specific jobs, such as design or distribution, but overall responsibility for the publication will remain with the editor.

Collecting the material

Newsletters do not write themselves, and the editor has to make sure that there is enough 'copy' to fill each issue. Some copy, such as information about events, may arrive without asking, but most of it will be written by the editor or will be commissioned for others to write.

Commissioning articles

When someone else agrees to write for the newsletter it is important to agree with them:

♦ a deadline - a specific time within which to deliver their article. It is important not to underestimate how long it can take for people with other commitments to write: agree a deadline which allows a day or two for late delivery and leaves time to edit the piece;

♦ the length of the article;

♦ format - whether copy will be typed or sent in on a computer diskette;

♦ photographs and illustrations including captions and logos.

In-depth articles

In-depth features, providing information which isn't date-tied, can be commissioned in advance. Such features have a longer 'shelf life' than news articles: if more articles arrive than can be used immediately, they can be kept on file to use in future issues.

News

The editor will be the person who is likely to write most news stories - people making the news do not often have time to write it as well! It is important to develop a good system of communication with members of staff and other sources. As deadline for the issue approaches, phone them to ask for any news. Organising questions into 'who?' 'what?' 'where?' 'when?' and "why?" will provide all the facts needed to write a good news story.

Writing

The aim of an editor is to produce a newsletter or magazine which is easy to read, lively and informative. Copy will need to be sub-edited to achieve this aim. The following advice will be useful to take into account.

Grabbing attention

Aim to catch the readers' attention right from the start with a good headline and a short, clear introduction. The main facts - the 'who?' 'what?' 'where?' 'when?' and 'why?' found out when fact-gathering - should all be given as near the start of the article as possible. The less important information and background material should appear towards the end.

'News is people'

Try to link news items with how they affect people and liven up the copy with 'quotes' from individuals. Talk to staff and (with their permission) use what they say. 'How have the staff found using biological control in the green houses?'. Using their own words, articles will come to life.

Be clear

Never assume prior knowledge of an issue; every newsletter may have new readers. If the progress of a new building is being reported on, for example, include details of the 'why' it is being built. Cut out jargon and always use the full word rather than the initials or abreviations. Avoid unnecessary words and phrases and never use a long word where a short one will do.

Be concise

Keep sentences and paragraphs short and simple: copy will be more lively and its appearance when printed easier to read. Use active language wherever possible: not only does it read better, but it will generally be more concise.

Be controversial...

Do not shy away from debate: a newsletter is not just there to transmit garden decisions but to stimulate discussion and community involvement. But beware of mixing facts and opinions. A news article should report the facts, with individual views attributed directly in quotation marks. If an editorial is written, in which events are commented on, or action urged, it should

be labelled 'editorial'. As an extra safe-guard, a standard disclaimer could be included in every issue - 'the opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the editor'.

...but not offensive

Do not write or publish any material which is sexist, racist or offensive to groups of people.

SUB-EDITING

Planning

An overall plan needs to be made of how the newsletter will look and where the different kinds of articles might go. One plan is to have the most important news on the front pages, in-depth articles inside, with noticeboards, events and quizzes etc. at the back. Consistency can help: you will save time when planning each issue and readers will know where to find what interests them. Work out how many words on each page, taking headlines and illustrations into account; word counts will help when planning a page.

Page plans

When working within an overall plan, each issue will need more detailed planning to decide what goes on each page. A rough page plan will give an idea of the length each article will need to be.

Sometimes, after all the copy and illustrations have been received, it is necessary to revise the plan. An illustration may not have turned up, an important news story needs more space, or someone hasn't delivered their copy - be prepared to alter the plan to accommodate these changes.

Sub-editing

No matter how well contributors keep to the guidelines, editors will need to 'sub' the copy they get - that is make it more readable, and make it fit. Sub-editing ones own copy can be harder; ask a colleague to read it and make suggestions.

Sub-editing for sense

If the author has not made the meaning clear the editor will need to rewrite the copy. Be careful not to change what the author intended to say (except where it is offensive).

Sub-editing to fit

Copy may need to be cut, either because it will not fit the allotted space or because the the copy is vague and wordy. Again, be sensitive about keeping the author's intended meaning but do not be afraid to précis points in order to make the copy fit.

Copy may need to be divided into more paragraphs. If the article needs to be continued on a different page, keep the continuation as close as possible to the first part. When it is laid out, the

article will need a note telling the reader on which page it is continued.

House style

You may want to decide on a 'house style' covering such things as spelling (where alternatives exist) and punctuation (what to capitalise, whether to use single or double quotation marks). Make sure everything is sub-edited into house style.

Introductions

Articles benefit from a short introductory paragraph (generally set in bold type if possible). If the author has not started with such a paragraph, the most important point from the article can be selected and written by the editer. The aim is to catch the reader's interest, so make it concise and attention-grabbing.

Headlines

A headline has two main functions: it should convey the essential point of the article and should make the reader want to read the story below. Headlines should be short, preferably taking up no more than two lines above the article and should use short words.

Straplines

A strapline is a subsidiary headline usually used to provide additional information.

Crosshead

The line above this paragraph is a crosshead - a short, preferably one line, headline used to break up the text. It can make long articles much easier to read. A crosshead should pick a key word of phrase from the following section of text.

Proofreading

If the garden produces its own typesetting (on a typewriter or word processor) the editor will need to correct the copy as he or she goes along. Read through everything and check it. Typing mistakes can be picked up easily by working through the copy backwards.

MODEL HOUSE STYLE

'House style' is an agreed set of basic rules for the production and presentation of a publication. It relates mainly to the use of language -spelling, punctuation and grammar- but may also include design disciplines such as typography and spacing. Its purpose is to achieve consistency of tone and appearance.

Establishing a simple house style is useful, even when a publication is produced mainly by one person. However, it is essential when a number of people are involved and needs to be available as a ready reference.

TYPOGRAPHY

Text type

Typefaces

The typefaces used will depend on the ones available. Text typed on carbon ribbon electric typewriter can be made to look attractive with the addition of display headlines. If desk top publishing is used, there will be a variety of typefaces available plus the ability to use them in *italic* and **bold**. An even wider range may be available at an outside typesetter.

Choose one or two typefaces to use throughout and use them consistently. Except with typing, variety can be achieved by using different size letters and by using italic and bold fonts. For instance bold type can be used for introductions to articles and italic or bold (or ***bold italic***) for captions to pictures. However, be sparing with their use for emphasis in the main text. Emphasis in typed text can be achieved by underlining (but not too often) or using CAPITALS (even less often!).

Type size

Type size must relate to column width: type that is too small or too large for its column width is hard to read. Avoid wide columns as they are hard to read, and never use the full width of an A4 page. They eye needs to read every word unlike columns where it can scan the page.

It is often tempting to try and squeeze too much text onto the page, but this will be self-defeating as generally people are not prepared to struggle through dense pages of text unless it is very interesting. Having decided on the typeface and size at design stage, be ruthless in sticking to that and always sub-edit the copy to fit the design rather than reduce the type size to get more copy in.

Type is measure in points. Anything smaller than 10 points is likely to be too small.

Headlines

Headlines can either be all in capital letters (this works best with a short, large headline) or 'upper and lower case' (capitalising only the first letter of the first word and any proper names). Depending on the format, the leading headline could be about 60 points size with 48 or 36 points more common, and 24, 18 and 14 points reserved for small articles and snippets. Headlines can be 'ranged left' (starting flush with the left of the column) or centred.

Straplines

Straplines above a single article will generally be set smaller and even in medium, rather than bold, type.

Crossheads

Crossheads should be set in bold type, like headlines, but are smaller (12, 11 or even 10 points) and generally in

'upper and lower case' not capitals. Like headlines, they can be 'ranged left' (as they are on these handouts) or, if they are single words centred. They should be placed close to the text which follows, with more space between them and the text above.

Reverse outs

If desk top publishing is being used or an outside typesetter, try reversing out display type so that white type appears on a black background. This can add variety and impact.

GRAPHICS

Photographs, cartoons and other graphics to illustrate articles can liven up the appearance of the newsletter.

Photographs

Nothing illustrates news better than a good photograph. Generally such photographs are likely to be taken by the editor or other staff members.

Taking your own

If possible, work in black and white - not colour which reproduces badly. Interesting pictures show people doing things (working, talking to each other, approaching members of the public). Take pictures of staff - the director and others who are likely to be 'in the news' in the garden - but avoid portrait shots.

Marking up photos

It is unlikely that the photographs received for the newsletter will be the right size to fit the space available. Also only part of a photograph may be wanted.

If the whole photograph is to be used, this is how to 'size' it:

1 hold the print up to the light and look at it from the reverse

2 lightly mark with a pencil the actual area of the picture (assuming a margin has been left on the print).

3 with a ruler, measure the width avaiable in the artwork (for example over two columns) and, working from the bottom left corner of the print, mark this distance on the bottom line.

4 with a ruler, draw a diagonal line across the area of the actual picture.

5 next, with a ruler, draw a line at right angles from the first measurement to the diagonal line and measure this perpendicular line.

6 This will give the measurement for the depth of the picture. Use this measurement to allow space in the artwork and to give the printer instructions.

If only part of the picture is to be used, the process is similar. Mark the area to be used on the back of the picture and mark it up, as described above.

Before giving the photograph to the printer, do not forget to put the subject on the back, plus the measurement it needs to be. For future reference it helps to add the date, the photographer and further information about the subject. **Never** cut up an actual print just because part of it needs to be used now!

Tips

♦ Glossy prints screen better than matt prints.

♦ Photos of people in profile should always be placed so that they look into the page.

♦ Make sure your photos avoid discrimination.

♦ Always put a caption under each photo describing what it is about and who is in it.

♦ Always print a credit for the photographer (this can be run vertically beside the photo).

Cartoons

Unlike photographs, cartoons do not have to be screened. The can also be enlarged or reduced on a photocopier to fit the column size and then simply pasted direct onto the artwork. If no photocopier is available which can do this, mark them up for the printer as if they were photographs.

FORMAT AND LAYOUT

Format

Always use standard paper sizes. A4 is most common.

Careful consideration needs to be given to the basic format of the newsletter. It should look lively, interesting and be easy to read and follow. This means using a two or three column format. Two column is simpler and better for larger type. However, three column format can be more versatile especially if the text is typeset.

The Grid

Below are examples of two and three column layout grids within which the layout is assembled.

How to use gridsheets

Paste text and illustrations onto them to form 'finished artwork'. Gridsheets can also be used to measure text and headlines and mark out 'roughs' either for the printers to follow if they are doing the final artwork or for ideas to be tried out before doing the paste up.

WAYS TO BRIGHTEN THE PAGE

Using simple techniques can add variety and make the newsletter look more attractive. For example:

Turning a photograph into a graphic

Photocopy a photograph and try different levels of contrast until a bleached out effect is achieved.

Cut round the image

For a different effect, try cutting round the image of the photocopy or screened bromide.

Reversing out

Headlines can look very effective if they are reversed out.

Using tones

Using tone as a background can be effective, either for reversing out headlines or to give emphasis to a particular article on a page. Tones are described in percentages and can be specified to the printer.

10%

20%

30%

40%

Big quote marks

❜

Take a quote out of a story and make a graphic out of it ❜

PRODUCTION

This note applies if a garden is doing its own paste up for artwork which is to be printed or photocopied.

Paste up: what you need

- **Gridsheets**

- **Dry transfer lettering**

- **Letraset.** The most widely available brand, can be obtained from most artists' materials shops in a wide range of typefaces, plus extra symbols and rules. A catalogue will contain useful information about how to use Letraset, as well as the range of styles and sizes. It is best to decide on a limited number of typefaces to give the newsletter a recognisable style.

- **Steel ruler.** This is less likely to break than a plastic one and is essential for use with a scalpel.

- **Scalpel.** A scalpel is the quickest method of cutting up typesetting - and fingers, so keep them well clear.

- **Spray fixers**

- **Roller.** To make sure artwork is stuck down firmly.

- **Blue pencil.** Use this to write on gridsheets or artwork: it will not show up when work is photocopied or a plate is made for printing.

Paste up: what to do

Find a clean room with a large table to spread everything out on. Paste up can be fiddly and demands lots of patience, so taking breaks for rest and refreshment helps!

Rough artwork

It may helps to have a stage between the page plan and final past up. Photocopy the typesetting and do a rough layout to see whether it all fits or whether a rethink of the layout is needed. Remember to leave precisely measured spaces for graphics and headlines.

Measuring headlines

Write out the words to be used, then measure a letter 'A' on the Letraset sheet and multiply that measurement by the number of letters to be used. Add half the 'A' measurement for each break between words. This will provide a rough idea of whether the headline will fit; if it will not, either reduce the size of the typeface or rewrite the text.

Using Letraset

On each Letraset sheet there are guidelines printed 3mm below the letters. Draw a blue line 3mm below the required base for the headline. Then, after removing the protective tissue from the back of the sheet, position the letter by placing the Letraset guideline over the line. Using a smooth rounded object, such as the end of a ballpoint pen, rub lightly but thoroughly over the letter to transfer it to the paper. Carefully peel away the sheet, making sure the transfer has been completed. If part of an adjacent letter is accidentally transferred, scrape this off with a scalpel.

When the work is complete, put the backing paper over it and rub firmly with a roller to ensure firm adhesion.

Pasting up

Lay the headlines and text in position on the gridsheet, inside the inner blue lines. Line up the edge of the text with the lines, not the edge of the paper the setting is on. Use the ruler to make sure the edges are straight and line up the lines of setting at the top and bottom of adjoining columns. Then stick each piece down in order.

Black lines

Black lines - called 'rules' - can be used effectively to put boxes round articles, divide columns or 'frame' graphics. They look better if they are not too thick. Letraline looks good but is fiddly to use; it has to go straight onto the grid and is hard to change if a mistake is made. Black felt tip is easy to use but gives a fuzzier line.

A final check

Before the artwork goes for printing check everything again:

♦ reread the text to make sure there

are no mistakes and the pieces of setting are pasted up consecutively:

♦ check that everything is pasted up straight and well stuck down

♦ check that all the pages are numbered in order:

♦ make sure the instructions given to the printer are clear, including instructions for graphics to be processed and headlines to be set and a list of where they are all to be positioned.

The artwork is now ready for printing.

PRINTING

Choosing a method

The choice of method will depend on the resources available, how quickly the newsletter needs to be printed and to what standard you are working.

Duplicating

For print runs of between 750 and 2,500 copies, duplicating could be the cheapest option.

Photocopying

Depending on the cost, photocopying may be as cheap as duplicating, certainly for the first few hundred copies. It is quicker, cleaner and simpler to do. Modern copiers will reproduce graphics well but photographs less so.

Most will reduce or enlarge, allowing a better fit on the page. Like duplicating, photocopying looks more attractive if it is used on a coloured, pre-printed masthead (make sure the paper is suitable for photocopying).

Printing

For a professional job use a printer. Also, for a longer print run printing will be more economical.

Correcting Proofs

Before the newsletter goes to print final proofs will need to be checked to make sure that everything is correct. Correcting proofs must be done as neatly and clearly as possible. It is worth learning the symbols for correcting proofs, as this reduces the amount of explanation needed. As far as possible, all corrections should be made in the margin, the only marks made in the text being those needed to show the place to which the correction refers. If a mark may not be understood, put an explanatory note in the margin.

Other options

If desk top publishing is available, a diskette can be given to the printer or a bureau specialising in setting can be used to print the newsletter. In both cases it is important to check whether their equipment is compatible with the gardens.

Working with printers

Before selecting a printer get quotes from two or three. Prices can vary considerably. Also find out whether they can undertake the quality of work required and how fast they can deliver.

Getting a quote

Be as specific as possible, to ensure that the printer can meet the requirements and that no extra costs will appear when the bill arrives.

The following information needs to be specified:

♦ whether finished artwork or typed copy will be supplied;

♦ the number of copies. Printers often work in 500s or 1000s. If unsure, ask for a price for a minimum quantity and the cost of run-ons. A small run will have a higher cost per unit;

♦ the colours (black counts as a colour);

♦ the sort of paper required (see below);

♦ whether the workd is to be folded, collated and stapled;

♦ how many photographs are to be processed;

♦ the schedule for production;

♦ if the publication is to be regular, how frequent it will be;

♦ the size and number of pages;

♦ whether or not the finished copies are to be delivered.

It can be very helpful to show examples of the type of work required.

Paper

Paper sizes are standardised: A3 folded in half to A4, makes a good newsletter. Paper comes in different weights which are measured in 'grammes per square metre' (gsm). Recycled paper is often more expensive.

Instructions

It is vital to confirm an agreement in writing with the printer so there is no risk of misunderstanding. The following points need to be confirmed:

♦ all the details in the checklist above;

♦ a detailed schedule (for delivery of copy or artwork, receipt and return of any proofs, and delivery of completed job);

♦ the price.

DISTRIBUTION

However good the newsletter is, it will not be effective unless it reaches the audience it is aimed at, and arrives on time. The way the newsletter is distributed will depend on the garden's circumstances but it is a good idea to set up a system. This will involve:

♦ choosing the most suitable method of distribution;

- working out who will need to be involved and discussing plans with them;

- deciding on the frequency;

- working out the cost;

- keeping the mailing list up to date;

- ensuring that there is an efficient address system. Mechanical or computerised devices for addressing can save a lot of time and, in the long run, money.

CONCLUSIONS

A newsletter is a powerful vehicle for carrying a garden's message beyond its boundaries. Its production requires great committment and energy on the part of the editor, but it is worth the effort - particularly as it can play an important part in developing good relations between the garden and its local community.