Start spreading the news!

Jane Shelling, librarian, The Canberra Hospital

Library newsletters have been around for a long time, but often have only limited popularity within libraries. In our constant quest to keep ourselves in the forefront of everyone's mind, lest they outsource or close us down, a library newsletter could be a valid way to demonstrate how indispensable your library is. So why not take another look at producing a library newsletter. Here are a few tips to help you.

Plan

The planning process is crucial in attaining a well-thought-out newsletter that will be read. First of all, formulate a goal or an aim — be clear about what you want your newsletter to achieve. Then decide who your target audience will be.

Decide on the tone of your newsletter. The tone will be set by the language you use, the items you include and how your newsletter is set out. Will your newsletter be chatty, casual and friendly, or more formal and factual.

Finding the write person

Find the best newsletter editor you can. Whilst library management and staff should be involved in the planning stage, one person must be in charge of the newsletter. The editor should prepare the newsletter and have it checked by the library director before copying and distribution. A newsletter requires time and thought, so the editor must have the time to research, write and produce the newsletter on a regular basis.

Decisions, decisions...

Regularity: take into consideration how much available time you have and the availability of material for inclusion.

Size: start small — one double-sided A4 sheet fortnightly. You can always expand later on or have a bumper edition every now and again.

The look: look at other similar types of newsletters. How are they set out, what strikes you about them (good or bad), what is your favourite thing about them?

Content: are you going to have regular features in your newsletter? A regular feature or two keeps you on track and helps to fill up those pages. Here are some suggestions of what else to include: free e-journals, new books/journals, new databases, changes in staff or hours of opening, departmental news, tips on using the library effectively, how to write a bibliography/cite an electronic resource, training news, book reviews, forthcoming events, good news, what's new?, community news, quizzes, staff profiles.

Costs: keep the costs down. Use standard-sized, recycled paper. Use the best standard photocopier available.

Software: there are many software packages available that can produce reasonable-looking newsletters. Be realistic about the software you have, and your ability to use it.

Style: try different styles to find an effective, striking banner and set-up. This can be your template for each new issue. Try changing the format each year to keep it looking fresh.

This book may help with the setting out and the 'look' of your newsletter: Peggy Nelson. *How to create powerful newsletters*. Bonus Books Inc: Chicago, 1993.

Distribution and copyright

Now that you have written your newsletter, how are you going to distribute it? I suggest that you produce a newsletter in three forms — paper, e-mail and web-based. The paper form could be sent to all department heads and put up on notice boards. The electronic version could be sent via e-mail to all staff. The web-based version can be loaded on to your library's home page.

Before production, go to the Australian Copyright Council home page (http://www.copyright.org.au) and check your responsibilities.

Future

Producing a newsletter can be a lot of fun and very satisfying. The first time you make a mistake and misspell or misnumber your newsletter, you will get dozens of e-mails pointing out your mistake. Now you know you have made it. People are actually reading your newsletter. Good luck! ∎