

DESIGN TIPS

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Tips for designing a dual-purpose newsletter, Part 1

A few of your church members still may not use e-mail, but the majority of them are probably “wired.” That’s a good reason to create an electronic version of your newsletter. Many people check their e-mail inbox far more frequently than they visit their traditional mailbox. Thus, e-mail increases the likelihood that your news is viewed by people who might lay aside a paper version and then never get to it.

Some churches have even replaced most of their printed newsletters with an e-news edition. We say “most” because they still accommodate members who aren’t online, but their main communication tool is the e-news. They create the electronic edition and then print a few copies to send by postal mail to members without e-mail.

E-newsletters can be presented in four formats: plain-text e-mail, attachment to an e-mail, HTML e-mail and Web page with e-mail notification. We’ll cover the first two in this issue and the other two next month.

The plain-text e-mail

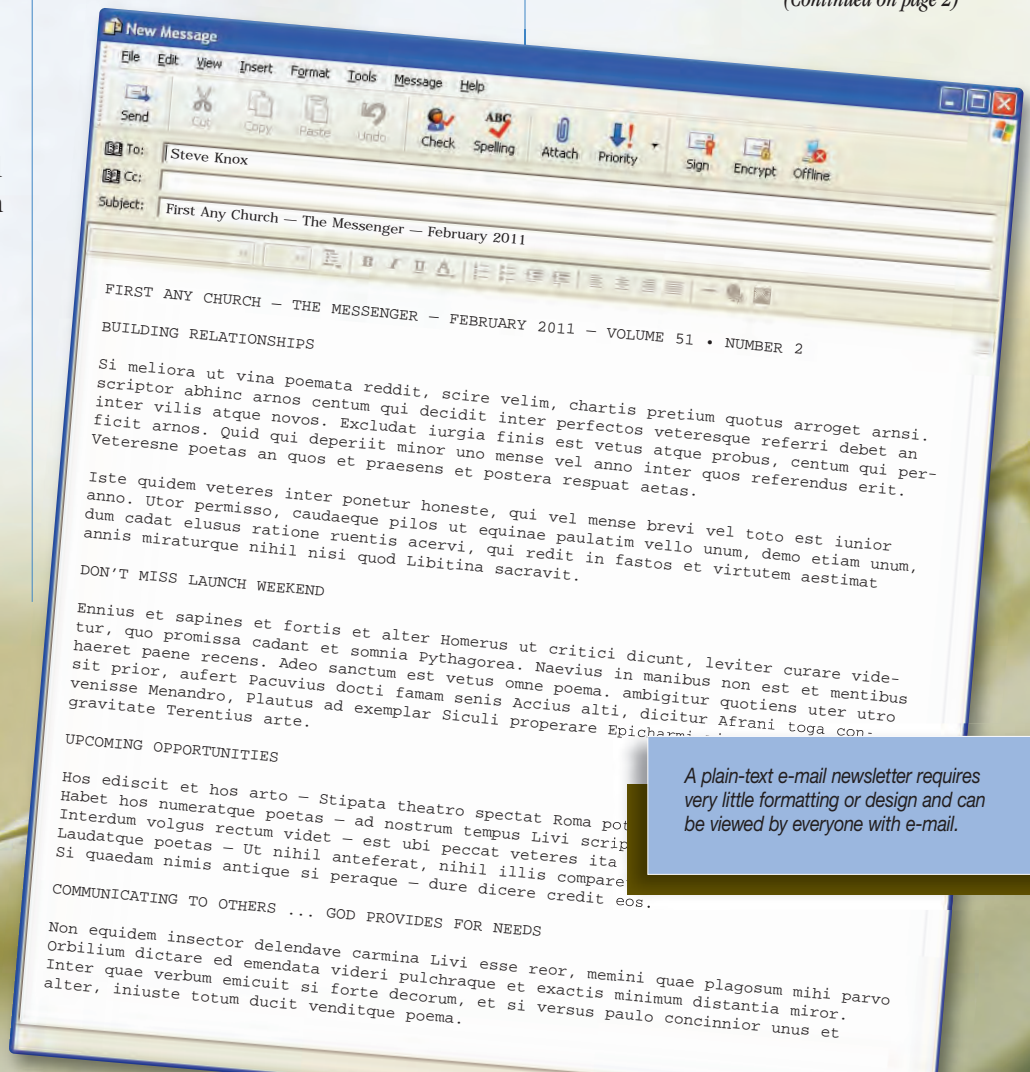
This is simply the written content of your newsletter typed into an e-mail message. Very little formatting and design work are required, and everyone with

e-mail — even those on old computers with primitive e-mail interfaces — can read it. But you can’t include photos or artwork and be confident they’ll be viewable by every recipient.

What’s more, your formatting options are limited. Bold and italic

may come through for some recipients, depending on their inbox settings, but some won’t see those at all. A better option is to set text you wish to emphasize, such as headlines, in all-caps, as that will be visible to everyone.

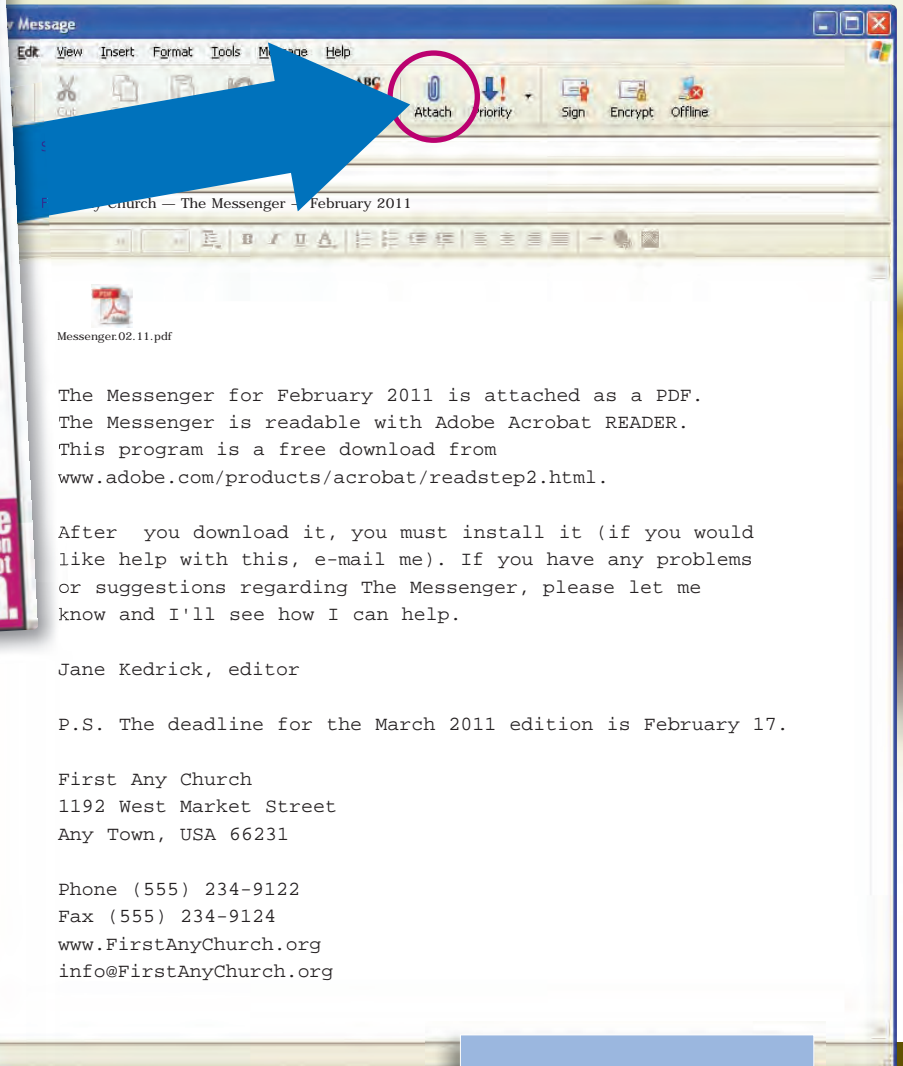
(Continued on page 2)



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Original PDF



(Continued from page 1)

Attachment to an e-mail

If you're starting with a newsletter designed for print, the simplest way to convert it for e-mailing and still maintain the entire look and content is to export it from your publishing program as a PDF (Portable Document Format) or convert it in a program that makes PDF files. A PDF is an exact copy of your original. You can attach it to your e-mail message, and recipients will receive a newsletter that looks exactly like the print version.


A PDF can be a massive-sized file, but most PDF programs have a command that allows you to reduce the file size without significantly

cantly changing the attachment's appearance. In Adobe Acrobat, the command is called "reduce file size." Check your program's Help menu.

The drawback to an attachment is that it requires the recipient to go through the additional step of clicking on the attachment link. Although that may not seem like much of an impediment, if the newsletter arrives on a busy day, the recipient may think, "I'll open it later" but then never get to it. You can overcome some of that by including in the actual message

Attach a PDF file of your newsletter to an e-mail. The file can be opened with Adobe Acrobat Reader.

a few teaser lines from the articles.

No matter which option you choose, include something in the subject line that tells recipients that the message is from a trusted source and contains valuable information. You could say something such as "The weekly news from Trinity Church." But it might be more effective to include something from the biggest news story, too, such as "Trinity News: 55 kids attend VBS." 

If you can't open a PDF, you can download Acrobat Reader for FREE at www.Adobe.com



Remake adds a lot of heart

From the Heart is a newsletter of Mission on the Move. It spreads news of mission work in “the Americas, Mexico, Africa and the USA.” It’s printed on two 11" x 17" sheets of glossy white paper folded in half to form eight 8.5" x 11" pages. The version we saw was printed with black ink only, but the office manager tells us they’re moving to full color.

One thing we really like about this newsletter is its number of “people photos.” They show missionaries at work in the field as well as the people and villages they’re helping. This issue contains 29 photos on six pages. We suggest maintaining that practice (though we recommend adding captions wherever possible).

And although our remake of the front page doesn’t include photos, one could be used in place of the fish-and-net art. We didn’t put a photo there, however, because we wanted to avoid the boxy look of the current front page, with its “Faith Promise” box and the rectangular photos. A face photo would work where we placed the postage stamp graphic, however.

The script font in the nameplate and hearts graphic screened back behind the text is a nice look, but the organization’s MOM logo feels stuck on and static, compared to the other elements.

The other design problem is that the publication lacks a distinctive grid. Throughout, it seems to use one wide column of text with photos placed randomly, but this sometimes results in narrow blocks of text in odd places.


So, for our remake, we started by first establishing a three-column

grid, allowing for the possibility of articles and photos sometimes spanning two columns. Once we made that decision, we turned our attention to the nameplate. It sounds to us as if Mission on the Move is an organization with a lot of heart, so we opted to use a big graphic of a heart. For something different, we placed this in a rectangle spanning two of our newly established columns.

The original has a “Prayer Needs” sidebar on page one that instantly puts a face on the organization’s work. We suggest keeping it, but we’ve moved it to the right-hand column, starting at the top of the page.

We also changed the fonts. On the original, the headlines and body text are all in a sans-serif font. The headlines are in all-caps, but there’s little size difference to further distinguish the headlines from the body copy. So we kept headlines in a bold sans-serif font but enlarged a bit. We also switched body text to a serif font to further differentiate the body copy from the headlines and to aid reading.

Finally, we used a mix of warm and cool colors to add additional eye-pleasing appeal to the page.

From the Heart is a publication of Mission on the Move, Springfield, Georgia. 

AFTER



BEFORE



How can I keep contributors from sending me “books” instead of articles?




Two words: word count. A word count helps you predict how much space an article will require or how much material you need to fill a space. A good way to arrive at a standard word count is to take a couple of past issues that appear visually balanced and count the words in articles of various types — main front-page article, second front-page article, sidebars, features, announcements, etc. Then create a list of word-count ranges for each of the different types, and make it available to your usual contributors or even to the whole church.

When you receive a submission that’s too long for the sort of article it is, you can return it to the writer, mention the standard word count and ask for a slimmed-down version. If you’ll be doing the rewrite yourself, you can ask the original contributor to give you

just the main bullet points. Emphasize that you’re looking mainly for the “who, what, where, when, why and how.” Because you’re working from a standard word count, the contributor isn’t likely to feel that you’re rejecting the article — just that you’re asking him or her to work with you.

When assigning articles, of course, you can provide a range of minimum and maximum word counts along with the assignment.

Of course, you need a certain amount of flexibility. At times, an unusual situation makes a longer-than-usual article necessary. Or if the pastor hands you an overly long article and doesn’t

want it cut, you should accommodate the request. Of course, there’s nothing wrong with asking the pastor to authorize any additional pages necessary to run it. 

WORD COUNT!

