

Make newsletters work harder for you

These marketing tools should promote your landscape company through information, education.

By MARLENE EICHHOLZ

Newsletters are popular in the green industry, but if used incorrectly, they can become a waste of time and resources. If your company is thinking about starting a newsletter, or if you currently mail a newsletter, make sure that yours is actually helping your company and your readers.

There are three purposes for a newsletter:

- 1) **Promotional**, for marketing or public relations.
- 2) **Informational**, for updating employees, customers, vendors and friends.
- 3) **Educational**, subscription newsletters.

They can take the form of a paid subscription or free for customers or contacts. Most companies' newsletters are free promotional items. Make the most of your promotional newsletter by ensuring that it is also informational and educational. Even if it's free, it might not be appreciated by your customers unless they feel like they're being taught as opposed to being sought after. This will make your newsletter a more effective marketing tool.

Another important way to add to the effectiveness of your newsletter is to make sure your newsletter is consistent with your company's philosophies; people won't find your organization as credible if you are inconsistent.

How many of us have been turned off by environmental protection groups send-

ing hundreds of "trees worth" of solicitation material to our homes.

Once you've decided to produce a newsletter, you need to examine the costs. Newsletters can be very expensive but if you plan ahead there are many ways to produce a professional yet inexpensive newsletter:

- ▶ produce it in-house.
- ▶ keep it short and simple; a shorter newsletter costs less, takes less time, paper and postage.
- ▶ shop around for a quality, less-expensive printing company.
- ▶ ask your printer if there are alternatives which are most cost effective (i.e. preprinting color, using a standard color, avoiding bleeds, choosing a different type paper).
- ▶ don't go crazy on colors. Color increases printing costs dramatically. Try to stick to one color; you can always give the perception of different colors by changing the screen tints.
- ▶ do self mailers; lowers cost on envelopes.
- ▶ don't waste; avoid overprinting. Put a lot of thought into how many newsletters you will need.
- ▶ if you have a web page, save postage; put your newsletter on-line.

Make the most of your people resources. Get your staff involved. This is a good way to improve morale, and learn about hidden talents of your staff. Get your clients involved. Ask them what they would like to read about. You can even include a survey with your newsletter mailing, asking for feedback and ideas. This will help you out and ensure that they'll be more interested in actually reading your newsletter. This is also a great means for expanding your mailing list; ask your

clients to supply you with addresses of people who might like to receive your newsletter.

Remember that feedback should always be encouraged. If you remain flexible, you will be able to learn from your mistakes and have more fun with your newsletter. And stay on top of your competition by doing market research. It's important to know what others in your market are up to. Call up your competition to see if they have newsletters. If they've been sending newsletters out for two years and you're just starting, they have the advantage. Have a friend call and ask for a copy to be sent (preferably to the friend's address) so you can learn from their experience and, hopefully, from their mistakes.

Other tips:

- ▶ frequency is vital; you should send it out at least quarterly. This extra visibility ensures that your company's name comes to your customers' minds ahead of the competition.
- ▶ be on time. Make the newsletter production a consistent scheduled time. Customers are impressed by promptness.
- ▶ make the most of your newsletter. Keep it handy for whenever anyone asks for company information.
- ▶ And finally, make sure it gets read.

When you speak to your clients, ask them if they've read your newsletter. Make them aware of how important it is to you and (if you include coupons and seasonal specials) how worthwhile it is to them.

People today are on so many mailing lists that their mailboxes are being clogged with junk mail. If your newsletter doesn't stand out, it's going in the garbage even before it's read. If it's unread, it's worthless. As a "keeper," it's a valuable, cost-effective advertisement for your company. □