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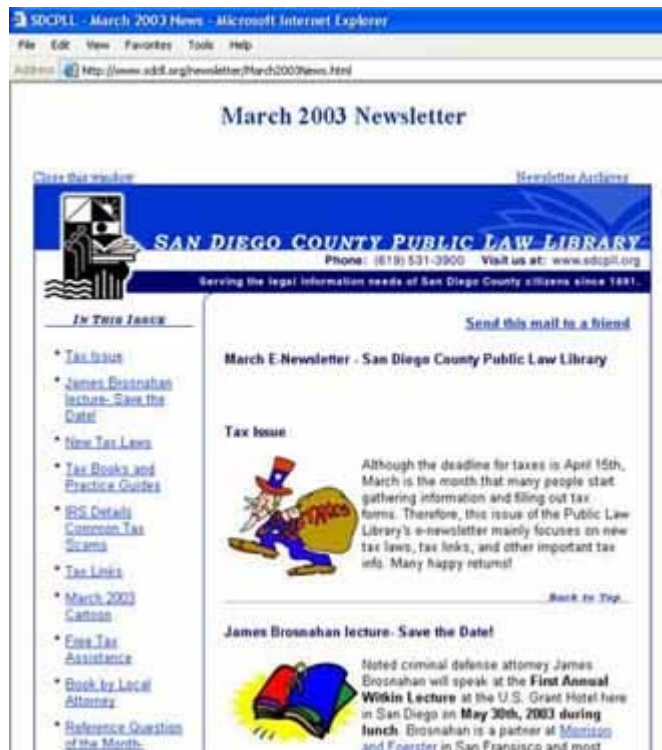
HEADNOTES

**E-NEWSLETTERS FOR PUBLIC LAW LIBRARIES ARE COST-EFFECTIVE
AND EASY**

by **Amy Hale-Janeke**

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Note: I will be presenting a program at the SWALL Annual Meeting about Electronic Newsletters and providing some examples and "how-tos."



To access current issues of the SDCLL Newsletter go to the archive at:<http://www.sdcll.org/newsletter/e-Newsletter.html#archives>

INTRODUCTION

When I took the job of reference librarian at the San Diego County Public Law Library, I didn't know that I'd also end up being the Media Coordinator. My bachelor's degree in business communications helped me identify several things the library could be doing better to promote itself and its services. One of the biggest changes I suggested was switching from a paper newsletter to an electronic newsletter. We converted in September and the response has been great! To see what it looks like, go to the Newsletter's archive: <http://www.sdcll.org/newsletter/e-Newsletter.html#archives>

WE CONVERTED [TO AN ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER] AND THE RESPONSE HAS BEEN GREAT

The content of the e-newsletter falls under the categories of General News, New Books, Legal Links, Cartoon of the Month, and Reference Question of the Month. The General News sections cover items like Civil Procedure changes, new laws and holiday hours for the law library. We also include information on grants we have received and different classes we are offering. The New Book section details new titles we have received, as well as a short description of the material. The Legal Links section provides Internet links to sites that are of use to practicing attorneys in a variety of fields. The Reference Question of the Month describes in general terms a reference question we have received in the past month and our response.

GOALS

The goal was to increase the number of members viewing the information about the law library through our newsletter. The law library was producing a quarterly print newsletter sent to about 1,700 people at the cost of about \$2,000 per issue. An informal survey showed that only roughly 10% of our targeted readership actually read any part of any newsletter in the past year. Further, the information had to be collected and held until the next issue of the newsletter was ready. This meant the information was often outdated by the time people read the newsletter, and any promotional impetus was lost after a three-month delay.

Additionally, many of our users were not getting the newsletter at all. For example, the current practice of distributing the printed newsletter meant that, due to cost constraints, we would send one newsletter to each law firm and hope that the firm would circulate the issue among the membership. You can imagine that by the time the last person in the firm received the newsletter (if they got it at all), the information was too dated to be useful. With an e-mail newsletter, on the other hand, we would be able to send the information directly to all registered holders of library cards at the same time. The odds of at least a few of them reading the information, versus only one, would be vastly improved. Additionally, an

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electronic newsletter would help burnish our image as a law library in tune with the electronic age.

Thus, after investigating the feasibility of an e-newsletter, we decided to start using one for three reasons: (1) better market penetration, (2) lower cost than print, and (3) timely delivery of information to our users.

We published our first e-newsletter in September. We got our original mailing list from our membership rolls and used the e-mail addresses therein to send out our first issue. In addition, we sent out the first issue to those who we thought might be interested in subscribing, like reporters for the two law-oriented newspapers here in San Diego. We also placed an icon on our Web site which invited people to subscribe to the e-newsletter. Patrons do not have to be members of the law library to receive the e-newsletter.

COSTS

When looking at switching to an electronic newsletter, one of our primary considerations was cost. The print newsletter cost about \$8,000 a year to produce. On the other hand, the yearly cost of an electronic newsletter (excluding an initial set-up fee of \$1,500) is \$3,000.

WE ARE SAVING ABOUT \$5,000 A YEAR BY SWITCHING FROM A TRADITIONAL PRINT NEWSLETTER TO AN ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER.

An electronic newsletter company charges us a \$250 monthly fee to use its templates and other programs. This fee also allows us to send out up to 10,000 e-mails a month. Our current mailing list includes all of our members with an e-mail address plus other non-members who have subscribed to the newsletter via our Web site -- a total of about 1,800 addresses. Thus, we can send an electronic newsletter to all of our current members and still have room to send the e-newsletter to those who are not members of the law library but who have

signed up via our Web site to receive the newsletter.

Other factors we looked at when deciding which company to use for the newsletter included the length of the contract with the electronic newsletter provider and whether we would be able to archive the newsletter on our Web site without additional charge. We chose to use a provider that offers a month-to-month contract and allows us to archive the newsletter free regardless of whether we terminate our contract.

Other newsletter-service providers I looked at required a long-term commitment. They also told us that we would have to pay a separate fee to archive the newsletters on our page when we terminated the contract. In effect we would be paying twice for the same product!

Thus, we are saving about \$5,000 a year by switching from a traditional print newsletter to an electronic newsletter.

BENEFITS

More people are reading the e-newsletter than were reading the print version. We know this through some statistics that are tracked by the company that we use to publish the e-newsletter, including how many of the e-newsletters are forwarded and how many of them are actually opened and viewed. This is called the "open rate." Although we started publishing our newsletter in September 2002, this statistical program was not available until December. By looking at the stats for Dec. and Jan, we see that the open rate is about 40%. Additionally, our newsletter holds the current record at the e-newsletter company for the most forwards of an electronic product (32 of them at last count)!

Additionally, it only takes about an eighth of the time to assemble an e-newsletter than it takes to put together a print version. That frees up valuable staff time.

One of the concerns in switching to an electronic format was that those who don't have an e-mail address would miss out on the information. We examined this problem and concluded that since our web page contains the archived materials, it is not necessary that someone have an e-mail address to read our newsletter. They can either access it via our web page or a reference librarian can print out a hard copy and hand it to the patron. We do post a hard copy of the newsletter in our lobby for the non-electronically-minded.

AUDIENCE RESPONSE

Our e-newsletter has been so successful at reaching people in the legal community that the cartoonist featured in our e-newsletter recently got a phone call from a reporter for the Los Angeles Daily Journal. The reporter had seen the cartoonist's work in our newsletter and wanted to write an article about him. It turned out to be a large article, placed above the fold, and even included the cartoonist's picture.

One of the best comments I have received was from a regular user of the law library who stopped by the reference desk and said he had a complaint about the newsletter. He complained that he was unable to delete the e-newsletter each month because it contains so much useful information. He said he had archived all of our newsletters to date. We have also received the following quotes from those who subscribe to the e-newsletter:

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THAT HE WAS
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EACH MONTH
BECAUSE IT
CONTAINS SO MUCH
USEFUL
INFORMATION**

"Outstanding and informative newsletter."

"I just read your newsletter online and wanted to let you know how impressed I was with it. It is brief, but quite informative."

"Thanks for sending the newsletter -- I love it. It's interesting and I'm sure very useful to recipients."

"Thank you very much for the e mail. I look forward to the next one!"

"Thank you very much for the heads up on the changes in the civil code."

CONCLUSION

We are very pleased with the response to our electronic newsletter and plan to continue publishing it once a month. It has helped us reach all of our goals: (1) It boosts our image as a source of legal information while promoting our books and services directly to our targeted audience; (2) we are saving money by using an electronic format instead of print; and (3) we are reducing the lag time in information dissemination while increasing our readership. We highly recommend this form of communication to other law libraries.

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