

# My Excellent Adventure

Across

the C's of

Newsletter

Design and

Editing

My excellent adventure across the C's of newsletter design and editing began in late July. Fired up with dazzling marketing ideas gleaned from the AALL Excellence in Marketing Award newsletter winners, I took a look at my own library's newsletter. (The Excellence in Marketing Award winners are displayed in the AALL Public Relations Committee Exhibit in the Exhibit Hall Activities Area at Annual Meetings. See details and the 2001 entry form at [http://www.aallnet.org/about/award\\_eim.asp](http://www.aallnet.org/about/award_eim.asp).)

Its occasional irregularity and tired format put me in a stupor. My eyes glazed over with disinterest at the same typeface, single column style, and the same content of long lists of new acquisitions; product descriptions of LEXIS and WESTLAW files lifted from the vendors' documentation; a URL for an interesting Web site or two; and the graphic, placed issue after issue in the same spot. How could I update the look and the content to make the library newsletter an effective marketing tool?

Like high school students Bill and Ted (of excellent adventure movie fame), when faced with a do-or-fail term paper, I took myself to the library. I started researching newsletter design. I posted a query to the law-lib listserv. And so I began my adventure. While I did not bring President Abraham Lincoln back for show and tell, I learned a great deal during my journey across the C's of newsletter design and editing.

## Consistency, Conservation, Contrast, and Content

**Consistency.** Creating an appealing and constant graphic design style for your library newsletter adds to its marketing value. Can the style of your organization's other publications be adapted to the library's letter? Can a play on your organization's name make a catchy library newsletter title?

A clean professional look creates a positive visual first impression with 21st century readers used to graphical interfaces and representations. Choice of layout, paper, background color, and the ratio of text and graphics, all send a message to the reader about the value of the newsletter's content.

A regular graphics style sorts out the different elements of the newsletter—headlines, text, and clip art—without distracting the reader from the content. Newsletter and desktop publishing experts use graphical surprises to keep the format from becoming boring, but only a few restrained surprises.

**Conservation.** Get to know your organization's word processing program's macros or templates for newsletter formats or your organization's desktop publishing program's features. Read the user group periodicals for tips.

But do not become enamored of all the program's bells and whistles. Littering the newsletter with too many typefaces and graphics detracts from the content. AALL member Carol Bredemeyer observes in her 1997 AALL *Spectrum* article on this topic: "There are four elements to every piece of design: text, graphics, typeface, and layout. The first rule for any of these elements seems to be 'don't over do it.'"

**Contrast.** Sometimes less is more in newsletter design. Fonts and artwork should lead the reader through the publication, illustrating the content. Using bold capital letters (double the point size of the text) to distinguish the headline from the text is a basic example. Calling attention to separate sections of the document with larger initial capital letters at the start of a section in a long article provides a visual break.

Reverse type and background colors; try white type on a black background for a sidebar comment. Use wide or offset margins to contrast text in long lists.

**Content.** My excellent adventure continued as I read replies to my law-lib query "What do you put in your Newsletter?" I found that law firm, corporate, school, association, independent, and court and government law librarians all agreed on the basic content of a law library newsletter. I also heard innovative ideas for content that would make a newsletter a better marketing tool.



by Lucy Curci-Gonzalez

There is a clear consensus on the basic contents and distribution of a law library newsletter. The newsletter should contain: new book and periodical acquisitions lists; new library services and procedures notices; and LEXIS, WESTLAW and other database, Internet, or CD-ROM product announcements highlighting interesting libraries or sites. Pathfinders and subject bibliographies, annotated or not, are frequent library newsletter contents as are database, CD-ROM, and Internet training schedules, staff contact information, and annual distribution of the patron library users' manual. Vendors often give copyright permission to reprint or to make extensive excerpts from their documentation. E-mail and intranet distribution are gaining popularity over paper copy distribution.

Innovative contents strengthen the newsletter's use as a marketing tool. Feature articles on staff, interesting research projects, helpful research tips, or staff professional or continuing education activity highlight the library's role in the core business of the parent organization. This emphasizes the services, capabilities, and accomplishments of the library staff. Profiles or short interviews with technical service and reference staff members demonstrate their skills and their role in the management of the library—something the patron may not be aware of. One firm library names an "outstanding patron" each quarter, awarding the patron with mention in the newsletter and a bookstore gift certificate. Several libraries describe interesting, difficult, or funny research projects.

Not every library produces a newsletter. A solo librarian writes a column in the firm's internal newsletter rather than publish a separate library newsletter. A bar association librarian writes a column on legal research for the association's newsletter.

My journey ended with plans to completely revise my library's newsletter. Perhaps I will submit it to the AALL Excellence in Marketing Award Committee. If you'd like to read more about three of these C's, see the Newsletter Design Clinic's "3 C's: Consistency, Conservation, Contrast Improve Any Publication" (<http://desktoppub.about.com/compute/desktoppub/library/weekly/aa980402.htm?rnk+r1&terms=newsletter+design+clinic>).

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