

Creating Electronic Newsletters

Why and How

Professional Perspectives — Tools and Techniques of the Trade. The Professional Development Committee encourages members to continue to explore topics after presentations at the local, regional and national levels. We welcome your comments and article suggestions. Please contact Lori Hedstrom at 651/687-5891 or lori.hedstrom@westgroup.com.

Why Go Electronic?

While still getting acquainted with my new job at the Leon E. Block Law Library of the University of Missouri at Kansas City, I was assigned to create a library newsletter devoted to the research needs and interests of law faculty and students. First, I considered what I knew about library newsletters:

- The editor has a thankless job.
- Nobody . . . No BODY wants to contribute articles.
- The editor sends out notices to potential authors.
- The editor reminds those authors of the deadline.
- The editor states, apologetically, that the deadline was last week.
- The newsletter is formatted and printed on eye-catching paper stock.

- The newsletter is mailed.
- Colored pages fall into trash baskets around the library, the receiving end of the mailing list.

Because my job dealt with various forms of electronic communication, I thought about trying to devise a newsletter in a new format that overcame some of the drawbacks listed above and allowed me to have some fun passing on information about information. Development of an electronic library newsletter introduced UMKC subscribers to a creative approach of locating information pertinent to legal research.

The mission of the library has always been to collect, maintain and provide access to resources of information. Its mission remains the same, but the packaging is different. Electronic communication makes it possible to publish an electronic newsletter that gains immediacy while avoiding all those piles of unread colored paper that had to be collected and recycled.

First: the Audience, the Goals, a Name

The first steps in undertaking the electronic newsletter included defining its audience, assigning the publication a theme or mission, and naming it.

The target audience was initially the faculty at the UMKC School of Law. Naming it *Friday5* simultaneously summed up the goal of publishing it every Friday and its format of five sections in each issue. Its subhead, "a multimedia sampler of electronic resources and law library activity," further spelled out its purpose. For continuity, the *Friday5* contains these five standard headings each week: News from the Library, Database of the Week, Government Publications, Web sites of Interest and Technology Tip.

For several months, only faculty read the *Friday5*. Broadening the scope of readership allowed the library to improve communication with departments like Career Services, Admissions and Student Advising. Readership of the *Friday5* now includes all

UMKC law students, campus educators (by request) and legal professionals who are interested in the research reported in the electronic newsletter.

Next: Delivering the Product

The e-mail delivery of the first issue on Oct. 6, 2000, was riddled with problems for those not opening it on campus with Microsoft Outlook. Instead of having smart headlines like those of the *New York Times* electronic headlines, the newsletter appeared with Courier type; X's replaced the graphics — not at all impressive and certainly not what had been promised. After trying several creative methods of delivery, the law library technician and I gave the newsletter its own folder on the library's server and delivered it by way of a hyperlinked Uniform Resource Locator in a single e-mail message to the faculty listserv. This method would work no matter what kind of e-mail system its receivers use — as long as they had access to the World Wide Web. With a solution found, the second issue was available to all readers to view in its graphic richness.

Tips and Tricks

Gathering News. The main component of any newsletter — whether print or electronic — is NEWS. Web resources expand a library's resources and speed news gathering. Subscribing to e-mail news services helps editors keep abreast of the latest legal research news. I receive e-mail headlines from *The Christian Science Monitor* (www.csmonitor.com/free-mail.html), *The New York Times* (www.nytimes.com/mem/e-mail.html), Findlaw.com (newsletters.findlaw.com), LLRX.com and several other news sites. Refdesk.com (www.refdesk.com) is my personal favorite for "keeping in the know." A terrific resource for our newsletter readers, this site was selected for a recent *Friday5* under "Government Publications." For example, see the "Link of the Day" for Oct. 8, 2001: Defense Almanac, www.defenselink.mil/pubs/almanac, described by Refdesk as valuable for

AALL Professional Development Program Competencies of Law Librarianship

1. Core Competencies
- Specialized Competencies
2. Library Management
3. Reference, Research, and Client Services
4. Information Technology
5. Collection Care and Management
6. Teaching

This article addresses AALL Specialized Competency 3 on Reference, Research and Client Services and AALL Specialized Competency 4 on Information Technology. The complete AALL Statement of Competencies is online at <http://www.aallnet.org/prodev/competencies.asp>.

A Desktop Learning Opportunity

information and statistical material about the Department of Defense — its people, organization, equipment and funding.

When I visit most news sites, I look for “Subscribe to our newsletter” and select what I want to subscribe to and where I want it delivered. Some offer a choice of delivery format: text, HTML, rich text. To keep current on the design of electronic publications, the CNET subscription service, www.cnet.com, offers a choice of several newsletters dealing with current information technology: software, design, application and use.

Editing. We use Microsoft FrontPage to edit the newsletter. As part of the Office 2000 suite, it is compatible with Word, PowerPoint, Excel and Publisher. The toolbars and options are similar in look and function. Users cut and paste words and images from one software program to another, giving the editor a versatile toolbox for the electronic newsletter. On the left of the front page screen are folders within the *Friday5* directory on the Web. The right window shows the working document, the storyboard, of the issue in the design stage.

Many university libraries use Dreamweaver as an editor. For help in selecting an editing program, see the software reviews in CNET, *New York Times* Technology, ZDNet (www.zdnet.com/ reviews), or computer journals and Web sites. Selection of a particular “Top 10” software editor is less important than using the same program throughout the Web site.

Graphics. The Web is a graphics heaven, but limit the size and number of images per newsletter to ones that relate to the news in the issue. In *Friday5*, I use product names and images to enhance, identify and link to the information highlighted. The process of capturing an image from an Internet site is usually simple:

- “Right click” on the image.
- Select “copy” from the menu.
- Paste the graphic into a graphics program, such as Photoshop.
- Edit it to a minimum pixel size.
- Save the edited version into the newsletter’s image folder.

- Insert the image into the newsletter from the Web editor.

Size does matter! Reducing the size of an image makes the file smaller for faster loading and takes up less space on the server. To minimize the size, take the following steps while in the graphics editor:

- Copy the image into the graphics editor before inserting it into the HTML code.
- Crop the image to just the information needed.
- Change the image from RGB to Indexed Color with 120 or fewer colors, with the ideal image less than 50K.
- Export the graphic as a GIF image.

AltaVista, www.altavista.com, is a good source for images.

Obtaining permission to use. Getting permission to publish a graphic from another Web site is often easy and must not be avoided. I send an e-mail to the “comments” section on the Web site where the image was found. A gracious (and flattered) site manager usually responds quickly to the permission request. If there are no “comments” or “permission” e-mail options and the image is obviously someone else’s property, I write a letter requesting permission if a mailing address is provided. I always include the origin URL and the destination URL. I explain how we intend to use the image, including the educational purpose in constructing the Web page. I keep all requests and responses in a file in the *Friday5* folder. I do not, as a rule, ask for permission from government sites because government information, both images and text, are considered public domain.

While graphics are inherently copyrighted, also use care when posting others’ text. The key guidelines for text: Do not copy an entire article. Rewrite or paraphrase select excerpts. Always credit the original source.

A final step: View the finished product using all the Internet browsers you have available to you — Internet Explorer, Netscape, Mosaic, Lynx — to ensure that

the publication appears professional in all browsers.

Selected Comments from *Friday5* Readers

“What a great idea to let us know what has come in (New Books). Please do this regularly. In particular I want to grab the Bederman book, *International Law in Antiquity*.” — Faculty

“I think that the section on Career Services Job Listing is excellent. I really like the daffodil background too. Thanks so much for all of your help!” — Administration

“Just in case you overlooked *Friday5*, there is an article about Mary Tiera Farrow that you may want to review.” — Staff listserv

“In case I haven’t told you, I really appreciate all you’re doing with the *Friday5*. I’m learning so much!” — Library Staff

“Your newsletter is pretty neat. I like it as a way to give new information.” — Student

“Thanks for including me in the message. We are keeping a ‘history’ of this transformation at UMKC, so your newsletter will become part of the archives.” — Chancellor’s Office

Tracking Reader Response, Measuring Success at Meeting Goals

After about six months of publishing *Friday5*, I set my Outlook e-mail to record “read responses” for my outgoing messages. Then I created a directory called “*Friday5* Read Messages” and had Outlook automatically file the read *Friday5*s into this folder. I’ve asked for monthly statistics on site visits to the *Friday5* address to obtain another profile of user response. I also keep a folder, “*Friday5* Responses,” where I file all comments, suggestions and kudos I receive of e-mail responses to *Friday5*.

Listening to the readers’ comments and suggestions keeps the entire process of electronic publication flexible. The only complaint we’ve had was with the first issue: “There is a trace of the ransom note

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about all the fonts and styles.” This is a pretty strict comment, but we now have a solution: a text-only alternative with each graphic issue. The sidebar to this article provides a sampler of reader responses.

The School of Law is a community, and the *Friday5* from the law library has become a community weekly. Legal research and awareness is vitally important to our readers, so we send them information that is packaged in a concise, scholarly and sometimes entertaining format.

Expanding the Concept

Special Reports. Because of the weekly emphasis on electronic information, we began to add special reports to the current awareness offerings. These resources have been valuable spin-offs of the *Friday5*. Examples include:

- Research in Response 9-11-01, <http://l.staff.umkc.edu/lordl/9-11-01-library/security.htm>, now a link on Library Resources: Concerning the WTC/Pentagon Attacks
- Black History Month, <http://www1.law.umkc.edu/library/black-history/index.htm>
- Election 2000, <http://www1.law.umkc.edu/library/friday5/11-10-00.htm>
- News of Interest to Law Students, <http://www1.law.umkc.edu/library/News/index.htm>
- Ronnie White To Testify, <http://www1.law.umkc.edu/library/News/ashcroft.htm>

Information Kiosk. The Information Kiosk, at http://www1.law.umkc.edu/library/Kiosk/index_files/frame.htm, sits at the entrance to the library. A large monitor with a PowerPoint slide show automatically moves through information slides of interest to the law school viewer. Library hours, holiday notices, announcements of lectures, seminars, courtroom sessions and other information are shuffled throughout the slides. The response to this “idea waiting to happen” has been positive. We consider the Information Kiosk an extension of the electronic newsletter and an example of how information packaging is evolving into an electronic venue.

What Next? We want to support the experimental quality of the *Friday5* while presenting research-quality information and tips to readers. We want a fresh clean design with innovative points of access. In the coming year, we’re going to offer bits of streaming video, a search engine for the site and formats compatible with accessible computing. Other ideas include:

- a text-only version
- a PDF text
- ability to download to a Personal Digital Assistant
- a PowerPoint version
- translation into various languages
- ability to read with a screen reader
- an e-mail direct version

Archiving Past Issues

The *Friday5* index file at <http://www1.law.umkc.edu/library/Friday5> contains a

listing of all *Friday5* issues by hyperlinked date. The 5thFriday, at <http://www1.law.umkc.edu/library/Friday5/5thFriday.htm>, is a mega index. All sites selected for the weekly newsletter publication are listed in a broad subject arrangement at the 5thFriday. The database allows readers to reference a previously highlighted *Friday5* topic.

Just a Beginning ...

The concept of an electronic library newsletter has become a reality — *Friday5* is now a substantive publication, delivered on time. It is indexed and accessible anytime with pertinent content and brief, concise abstracts. The hyperlinked resources have become part of a growing information database accessible from the library’s Web site. The mailing list is growing by word of mouth and the interactive subscription option in every issue. The *Friday5* has been the subject of several presentations in the Kansas City area and at the Mid America Association of Law Libraries in October 2001. We plan to allow the process to continue and not to hamper progress with expectations.

To see the slideshow, “How to Publish an Electronic Newsletter,” go to [http://www1.law.umkc.edu/library/friday5/MAALL/Electronic Newsletters!.htm](http://www1.law.umkc.edu/library/friday5/MAALL/Electronic%20Newsletters!.htm).

To subscribe to the *Friday5*, for weekly e-mail delivery on Fridays, send a request to the address below.

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