

The Step-by-Step System to Building Your Small Business

**Helping small business owners around the world build
successful, profitable and rewarding businesses**

Module 4 Create Your Marketing System

Lesson 4G Newsletter

**Solutions and
Direction for tomorrow's possibilities**

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Introduction

Hello,

Have you ever seen the bumper sticker, “The person who dies with the most toys, wins”? Well, in marketing, the person with the biggest database wins!

Building and maintaining your database is an important contributor to the success of your service-based business, and one of the best means to database development is an electronic newsletter, often called an ezine. While it may seem daunting at first, producing an ezine is probably not as difficult or time-consuming as you may think. Especially once you get in the flow of writing and sending your ezine on a regular basis.

In this lesson, you will learn:

- The secrets for an effective ezine.
- How to determine the best format and frequency for your ezine.
- How to manage and automate your mailing list.
- How to get started.
- How to determine your content.
- How to overcome writer’s block.
- How to have an effective ezine even if you hate writing.
- How to best promote your services in your ezine.
- How to use your ezine to increase your business.
- How to increase your subscriber base.

Your ezine is an important part of your long-term marketing system. I encourage you to take what you learn in this lesson and get started. Don’t worry about making your ezine perfect. It can and WILL improve over time. What’s important is getting it started!

All the best!

Definition

For the purposes of this lesson, a newsletter is a regular electronic communication that you send to your group of subscribers. The purpose of your newsletter is to share your knowledge, provide value and build a relationship with your readers. Having a newsletter is a highly effective way to build your database.

If done well, it will keep you in the minds of your readers so that when they or someone they know want or need to hire someone who performs your service, they will automatically think of you. Examples include a monthly electronic newsletter, a weekly tips sheet, a fun fact message. It can be plain text or html. It can be monthly, biweekly, weekly or even daily.

Newsletter/Direct Mail Marketing Statistics

- 10% or more of newsletters aren't received by subscribers because of spam filters.
- It takes between 3-7 marketing messages before someone is interested in purchasing your product or service.
- Your number of subscribers does not directly correlate with the number of people who read your newsletter. In general, people delete every other or every third issue. Use the guidelines provided here to increase your readership. And realize that people are busy and get overwhelmed with email. If a subscriber comes back from vacation to hundreds of email messages, there is a very high likelihood that your newsletter isn't going to get read that month.

Benefits of Having a Newsletter

Build Your Database

Your database is king!

Far too many business owners ignore this and miss out on a HUGE opportunity to keep in contact and build relationships with people they have met. In addition, your ezine subscriber base will grow steadily through word of mouth when you provide value to your readers.

While very few business owners can solely rely on the proliferation of their newsletters as their primary marketing vehicle, it is an effective way to allow other people to market for you while you sit back and watch the size of your database grow!

Credibility

Chances are, when people first subscribe to your newsletter, their knowledge of your professional capacity will be limited. Publishing a regular newsletter allows you to build credibility with your readers. When you provide value and share useful information with your readers, they will see you as a professional and as an expert.

Hiring or using a professional service provider like you requires a level of trust. People want to feel like they will be in good hands if they hire you. A newsletter is an excellent way to build trust and credibility.

Enables Relationship Building

Perhaps you've heard the term "relationship marketing." In essence, relationship marketing is the process of allowing people to get to know you and your services over time. Having a newsletter is an excellent way to build relationships with potential clients.

Let's face it, people are most comfortable (and willing) to hire professionals whom they already know. A newsletter is one of the most effective and efficient ways to build relationships with tens, hundreds, even thousands of people. There are no geographic limitations, and the costs are minimal.

Increase Your Knowledge

When you write articles for your newsletter, your own knowledge and confidence will increase. As you may have heard, the best way to learn something is to teach it! So when you publish a newsletter and invest the time and energy to research topics and write about them, your own skills, proficiency and knowledge increase.

How to Launch Your Ezine

Before you launch your ezine, you need to make four main decisions, which are outlined in the following steps:

1. Frequency
2. Content
3. Format
4. Delivery management

Step 1 Determine the Frequency

We start here because the frequency of your newsletter will impact what you write about. In the chart below are two common choices, with the pros and cons of each choice:

	PROS	CONS
WEEKLY	Consistent, regular contact. Your readers become accustomed to hearing from you weekly. You develop the habit of writing weekly.	The time and energy required to write and send weekly! Greater likelihood recipient will occasionally delete without reading.
MONTHLY	Even if you don't love to write, you can likely manage a once-a-month publication. Decreased likelihood of recipient deleting without reading.	Requires significantly more time to build the relationship.

Points to Consider

How much do you enjoy writing?

Ultimately, this is the key factor to consider when determining the frequency of your newsletter. Unless you love writing, choose monthly. End of discussion! While there are definite marketing benefits of weekly or bi-weekly newsletters, these benefits do not outweigh the cost of it becoming an energy drain, which could result in you not enjoying it, not doing it well and/or not doing it at all!

Is your newsletter going to be a significant part of your marketing strategy?

There are a few business owners who consider their newsletter one of their active marketing strategies, or Engine activities. This can be done, and if this appeals to you, go for it! Just remember that this strategy takes time to produce results. If you are using your newsletter as one of your main Engine activities vs. as a Caboose keep-in-touch strategy, in addition to your writing frequency preference, you need to consider your target market and niche and the lifecycle of your reader.

For example, let's say you coach women on rebuilding their lives after divorce, and you are thinking about starting a newsletter or blog called "Life On Your Terms." Your ideal subscribers are obviously recently divorced women. If you love to write and want to use your newsletter or blog as one of your primary marketing strategies, I would recommend you make it a weekly publication.

We make this recommendation because of the nature of this target market and niche: Women rebuilding their lives after divorce are not likely to be in that rebuilding stage for

an extended period of time. With a weekly newsletter or blog, you have a better opportunity of building the relationship quickly and offering your coaching when they need it most.

As another example, I know a coach who uses a monthly newsletter as his primary marketing strategy. He coaches people on using the Law of Attraction.

For him, monthly is perfect. First, and again most importantly, it is his preference. Second, people in his target market stay in his target market. He knows that when people are reading and learning about the Law of Attraction, it is something that gets integrated over time. He has a longer approach cycle. He realizes that over time, if he builds a relationship with his readers, when the right people are ready, they will hire him. He builds the relationship and has occasional calls to action that in essence say, “Are you ready yet?”

A Final Thought on Frequency

Ultimately, you must choose the frequency that works best for you! In general, unless you are using your newsletter as one of your active marketing strategies, monthly tends to work best. And if you are on the fence, you can always split the difference and do it bi-weekly!

Step 2 Determine Your Content

When thinking about what you want to write about in your blog, keep these guidelines in mind:

Relevancy to Your Target Market and Niche

One of the foundational principles of this business-building system is having a specific *Who* and *What*. Your blog should be written for your target market, and the content should be related to the solution your business provides. The more specific, the better!

Keep in mind the things I discussed with regard to determining your *Who* and *What*. The same applies to your ezine. Your blog will be most effective if it is highly relevant to your readers, if it really “speaks” to them. When your message is targeted and relevant, you need far fewer subscribers in order to start seeing results.

Topic Ideas

While you can write about anything that is relevant to your *Who* and *What*, a good place to start is with your *How*. Virtually every component of your *How*, or your unique service proposition, can be a topic for an issue of your blog.

Provide Value

Each issue of your newsletter should provide value. Focus on one topic or theme for each newsletter.

Be Concise

We live in a world where we are bombarded by information, and our time is extremely valuable. You not only need to write something interesting, valuable and relevant to your readers, you need to do it with as few words as possible! Your mantra should be shorter is better, especially for weekly or bi-weekly blogs.

Be Personal

Remember, you want to build a relationship with your readers. As a service provider, your clients are essentially buying you. Not only do you want your ezine to build credibility, you want it to build trust. People hire business owners they know, like and trust. Let your personality come through! If done well, your readers will enjoy getting to know you through your newsletter.

Look at the popularity of reality TV shows. People keep tuning in each week because they feel like they know Joe Millionaire, Trista the Bachelorette and contestants on Survivor or American Idol. Be a real person. Share a little about your life. This will increase your subscriber base and the percentage of people who read what you write!

Other Content Ideas

While the main content should be an article on a single topic, there are other things you can add to your newsletter to make it more interesting and valuable to your readers.

1. Begin with a summary or 60-second tip. Put this right up top, so people are compelled to read the entire ezine.
2. Include a reader question. This can be a separate section or the format for your main article. People love the Q&A format. And it's a great way to find out what is most relevant to your readers.
Hint: When introducing this feature, you might need to create a reader question or two to get started. Once your readers are used to seeing your Q&A, they will send some to you, assuming you ask them to. You might just need to prime the pump in the beginning!
3. Include a quote or book recommendation that is relevant to the topic of that month's article.
4. Include something fun, such as a movie review or a joke. This is especially effective in monthly publications.

And If Writing Isn't Your Thing

Most people who claim to hate writing have not given it a fair shot.

Writing is an important skill worth learning (or fine-tuning). Being a competent writer will greatly benefit you as you grow and maintain your business.

However, if it really isn't your thing, you can still utilize an ezine as part of your long-term marketing system.

Here are some ideas:

- Co-author your ezine with a complementary service provider. Your partner can do the writing, and you can be responsible for promotion.
- Hire someone to write it for you.
- Use existing content or an article bank. Content can often be reprinted as long as the proper attribution is included.
- Have your blog deliver a quote or a tip instead of full-fledged articles.

Writing Hints

Getting Started

If you are concerned that you don't know what to write about, do this exercise.

Sit down and challenge yourself to come up with 10 possible topics.

Think about the different components of your *How*. You will likely be able to identify at least 10 different topics related to your *How* alone!

You may not even use all the topics on this initial list, but doing this exercise will give you the confidence to know that you do have plenty of things to write about.

Have an Idea Folder

Keep a folder (paper or electronic) to store ideas.

Anytime you come across something that might be an idea for your ezine, put it in your idea folder. Also, whenever you have an idea for your newsletter or blog, type or write it out and put it in your idea folder.

Then, when it is time for you to write your ezine, pull out your idea folder for inspiration.

Article Structure

Virtually all well-written articles follow this format:

- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion

Writing Each Article

Some people write best by taking an idea and then just sitting down and writing whatever comes to mind. Others prefer to create an outline first. There is no right or wrong way. Whatever works for you is the right way!

Regardless of the method you choose, when you are ready to get to the writing, try to bang out your first draft as quickly as possible. Don't worry about grammar or writing the perfect sentence. It is much more effective to get all your ideas and thoughts down first and then go back and edit.

Hint: Take a day or two off between your first draft and the editing. Give your brain a chance to mull over the topic and let it do its creative magic. You'll be amazed at how much easier editing and finalizing the article are after you've taken some time off.

Your Voice

Your blog is a reflection of you. While your blog should be well written and professional, don't hide your personality. Let who you are shine through! If you're funny, include humor (real life stories about yourself work best). If you are philosophical, write from that perspective.

Speak to the Reader

Write as if you are having a conversation with someone in your target market. Use the word "you," and make it personal.

Use Stories

Use stories or examples whenever possible. People remember stories. The best and most relevant stories are about you or a client of yours.

Note: When using client stories, be sure to protect the identity and confidentiality of your client by changing their names. For example, you might write, "One of my clients, let's call him Don,..."

Final Thoughts

You will, of course, want to develop your own style and format, but there are a lot of examples out there. You may want to subscribe to a bunch of blogs to get ideas. See what resonates with you, and then go for it! Don't let your blog make you crazy! It is important and can be a very effective marketing tool; but don't stress about it, especially when you are first getting started. And please know that the more you write, the better you will get!

Step 3 Decide on HTML or Plain Text

Ah, the debate. Which is better, and which should you use: an HTML newsletter or a plain text newsletter? Maybe the following definitions and chart will help you decide:

- An HTML newsletter looks like a web page that you see in your email.
- Plain text newsletters are just that, plain text.

	PROS	CONS
HTML	<p>You can use graphics, different fonts, colors, pictures, control the layout.</p> <p>Studies show that a well-designed HTML newsletter, assuming it is opened and read in the format it was meant to be, is more effective than a plain text newsletter (i.e., higher click-through rate, more thorough reading).</p>	<p>AOL users with older versions may have challenges receiving HTML newsletters.</p> <p>Some HTML newsletters do not read well when you are offline. If your readers download their email and read them later, they may have problems reading your newsletter.</p> <p>While there are many great tools out there for creating HTML newsletters, creating an HTML ezine will require more time upfront to learn to create the template and how to use HTML tools.</p>
Plain Text	<p>In general, easier to write and create.</p> <p>By using white space and caps, you can have some formatting.</p> <p>People are used to receiving plain text email. If your newsletter is compelling, then plain text can definitely work.</p> <p>People can read it as intended without needing to be online.</p>	<p>Less room for creativity and formatting.</p> <p>Plain text newsletters just aren't as attractive as HTML newsletters.</p>

Go with what works for you. If you are in the beginning stages, you can start with a plain text and switch to an HTML newsletter in the future. This approach will support you in

getting started, producing and distributing your ezine and sharing your products, services and ideas with others, which is most important.

That said, keep in mind that as more and more people switch to high-speed Internet, the problems associated with needing to be connected to the Internet when reading the newsletter become less relevant.

Finally, consider your target market. You might even want to do an informal survey of people in your target market to determine whether they prefer the plain text or the HTML format. Be sure to include the question, WHY do you prefer this format?

Step 4 Determine Newsletter Delivery and List Management

Self-Run

When you first launch your ezine, you may opt to manage the mailing list and distribution on your own. This is fine when you are getting started. And I encourage you to consider using a paid service and setting up your newsletter system the way you want it to be from the outset.

Of course, it is far better to manage it yourself in the beginning than to not have an newsletter at all. However, if you are committed to using an newsletter as part of your long-term marketing system, why not start off with a manageable, long-term system in place?

If you decide to initially manage it yourself, then you will want to create a “group” in your email program of your subscribers. When you send out your newsletter, send it to yourself and put your subscriber group in the bcc (blind carbon copy) field. The reason for doing it this way is to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of your subscribers.

Using a Service

As mentioned above, I recommend using a “list serve” or mailing list service to manage your subscriber list and distribution of your ezine. Using a service automates the subscribe/unsubscribe process, which can become a headache if you do it on your own as your list grows. In addition, many ISPs (Internet service providers), in an effort to try to control spam, limit the number of people you can send a message to. This makes it harder to self-manage your ezine as your subscriber base increases.

There are free and fee services for managing your mailing list:

Free

In general, free mailing list services are not recommended. They often include advertisements or require that your readers visit a website to read your newsletters, which very few people will do.

Fee

For as little as \$10 or \$20 per month, you can use a professional mailing list and distribution service to manage your ezine. I strongly recommend this option if you are serious about building your business and using an ezine as part of your long-term marketing system. The investment is minimal compared to the benefits it provides. See the resource section for a list of companies you may want to consider.

Promoting Your Newsletter

Remember, your database is king. The size of your newsletter list will greatly impact the success of your business. Therefore, you want to actively promote your ezine to increase your subscriber base. Below are several ways to grow your mailing list.

Ask Readers to Forward Your Newsletter

In every issue of your ezine, include a request that your readers forward your ezine to others. You might include something like this:

SUPPORT YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS!

If you've enjoyed this article and learned a valuable lesson, please forward this newsletter to your friends and colleagues!

To subscribe, send a blank email message to: (enter your newsletter's subscribe email address here).

Have Sign-Ups at Speaking Engagements

As you know, speaking is one of the most effective marketing strategies for building and maintaining a thriving business. Whenever you speak, in addition to offering Complimentary Consultations, you should give people an opportunity to sign up for your ezine. In the back of the room, you can have a bowl for people to put their business cards in or a clipboard with a sign-up sheet. Or have everyone complete an evaluation form that has a box they can check and a line to enter their email address if they wish to sign up for your newsletter. I recommend testing these various methods to determine what works best for the types of talks you do and the types of audiences you typically address.

In addition, to increase sign-ups for your ezine at a talk, I recommend offering something for free if they subscribe. For example, give away a two-hour block of your service and indicate on your sign-up sheet that as a special bonus, everyone who signs up will also receive your free ezine.

Recommendation in Another Newsletter

Find someone who has an newsletter on a complementary topic that caters to your target market, and have them recommend your ezine in their publication.

Publish Articles

Have one of your articles published in someone else's ezine or on a website. Make sure you include subscription information for your ezine and your website address.

Promote Your Newsletter in Your Email Signature

Create an email signature that promotes your ezine. See the sample format below:

(Your Name)

(Your Title, Company Name)

(Website Address)

Telephone: (Your phone number)

Email: (Your email address)

Subscribe to the free monthly (Your Company Name) newsletter and receive powerful tips to (Your *What*)!

To subscribe, send a blank e-mail message to:

(Your newsletter subscribe email address)

Use Your Website

Assuming you have a website, you want to make it easy for people to sign up for your newsletter. In addition to making it easy (i.e., by putting a subscription box/form/link on

the home page), make sure you give them a compelling reason to subscribe! Let your potential subscribers know what they will get from your newsletter. Explain why your newsletter is of interest to them!

Another great tactic is to offer something for free (a free report, top ten list, article, etc.). With your “free” thing, they also get a complimentary subscription to your electronic newsletter. This works great! And as long as you include the appropriate language, it is fine to do this. For example, you might make an offer in a similar fashion to this:

Sign Up NOW!

You will receive the **FREE** 56-page (Name) Report. And as a special bonus, you will also receive the Free (Your Company Name) Monthly Newsletter!

Generating Business from Your Newsletter

So far, you have learned about the structure, format and content of an effective newsletter. You have discovered numerous ways to build your mailing list and know that the size of your database is king!

Now, the final piece of this marketing strategy is using your newsletter as a means to generate business. Below are some general guidelines to help you turn your newsletter into dollars!

Include a Description of Your Products/Services

In each issue, have a section that informs your subscribers of your products and services. If you have a wide array of products and services, choose a specific one to highlight in each issue.

If, however, you are primarily focused on attracting individual clients, remind your readers that you offer a Complimentary 45-minute Consultation. Be sure to tailor your offer to your specific *Who* and *What*!

Occasional “Call to Action”

In addition to the regular reminder about your products and services, you want to have an occasional “call to action.” This is something that compels your readers to take action immediately. The most common is a time-sensitive special offer.

One of the keys to successful “calls to action” is to not overuse them! Once every 2-4 months is typically appropriate, depending on the range of products and services you offer.

Assignment Plan Your Newsletter Strategy

Now you know the benefits of having a newsletter as the Caboose of your Marketing Train. Use the following pages to plan out your next steps, and then get to work!

My objectives or goals for creating a blog or newsletter:

10 ideas (at least) that I have for my blog articles:

The frequency of my blog will be:

My blog will be either plain text or HTML (select one):

What I will do regarding the management of my mailing list/blog distribution:

My next steps:

Concerns or challenges I have about launching my blog:

Strategies to overcome any concerns or challenges:

Summary

Blogs are a great way to share your knowledge, provide value and build a relationship with your readers. While a newsletter can be used as an active marketing strategy, most of the time they are used to keep-in-touch with past clients, potential clients and referral sources.

The benefits associated with newsletters make it a desirable strategy for most businesses. This practice enables you to build your database and knowledge, enhances your credibility and develops your relationships with your subscribers, and it can even lead to new business.

Writing is a skill that develops with practice, so rest assured that the more you write the better you will get and the more you will enjoy writing. It is also a skill that serves most business owners. When determining how often you want to send out your newsletter, the most important consideration is how much you enjoy the writing process. A monthly newsletter tends to be the best option for most businesses for a variety of reasons.

The content of the electronic newsletter should provide value, be concise and personal. You want your *Who* to look forward to your ezine and feel motivated to read it and gain insight into your *What*; therefore, your *How* is a great place to go for topic ideas.

Producing the monthly newsletter can feel overwhelming for those who have not yet published one; however, in practice, as with many endeavors, it is not the big job we created in our mind.

Just getting started will assist you in breaking through the resistance that keeps many from benefiting from this strategy. And a great way to start, if you haven't already done so, is to work through this lesson's assignment!

Additional Resources

In this lesson, you have the key blog basics, so you can get started right away. If you are looking for more detailed information on ezine strategies, you might consider Alexandria Brown's *Boost Business with Your Own Ezine*.

Newsletter Sending and List Management for-fee services

Webvalence

This service is used by many business owners, is very easy and has good customer service. The fee is \$25/month.

Listbuilder.com

\$199/year for up to 1,000 subscribers; \$299/year for up to 10,000 subscribers. A benefit is that you can see the percentage of people who open and read your ezine.

Constantcontact.com

\$17/month. Allows you to see the percentage of people who click on links in ezine. Also, it automatically stores the newsletter.

Your Shopping Cart

\$39-\$69/month. You can use the auto-respond feature for your mailing list if you have a shopping cart account, such as professionalcart solutions.com or 1shoppingcart.com.