

CLUB NEWSLETTER

THE IMPORTANCE OF A NEWSLETTER

After a camera club has passed through the organizational stage and its one hundred and one small details have been pulled together and fashioned into a neat, smooth-running package, there's still one more thing needed . . . the string with which the package is held together to prevent the loose ends from flapping in the breeze.

And that "string" is the camera club's monthly publication. It binds all the important activities of the club into an easily consulted reminder for all the members. It brings together within the framework of a few electronic or printed pages the necessary information on programs, competitions, field trips, and all the other activities that go to make up the life of a well-managed organization.

Every club, large and small, needs such a periodical. Even if available volunteer time allows for only a single page, it's still important. Important because it can be kept, important because it can be used as an informal club history over the years, and important, too, because it can serve as a publicity medium and a source of information to prospective members.

CHOOSING THE EDITOR

The responsibility of starting a publication and establishing its general policies rests with different sources; it all depends on how the club operates. The source may be an especially appointed publication committee, a club's executive committee or even a single individual, probably an officer.

Regardless of who has the responsibility, the first step is to choose an editor. This should be done first so that the new editor can be included in conferences that set publication policy. Most likely many of his or her ideas may serve as a basis for future procedure.

Much serious thought should be given to selecting an editor. This person should have a natural liking for people and be endowed with more than the usual quota of common sense. While the editor need not be a Ph.D., he or she needs to possess a more or less natural flair for handling language in a clear, concise manner.

The foregoing may sound like a sizable order. Actually, it's not. In any group of average camera clubbers, there's certain to be at least one who's a natural for the job.

To help the editor collect material for the newsletter an assistant or two might be appointed. With the editor, these people will be the "staff" responsible for turning out the publication on time and in good shape.

PUBLICATION FREQUENCY

Most clubs prepare a monthly newsletter. Some omit issues during the summer; however, there is a growing tendency in favor of the every month plan.

Nowadays, the availability to volunteers with computers and ink jet or laser printers is great. Most members with a computer can produce clean, uniform, copy, often with justified columns (even at both right and left sides of the column). Attractive headings separating items, adequate "white space," small line drawings, and clip art or computer graphics add much to the appearance and readability of the publication. Most are able to insert members' digital images and "scan" members' prints, and the resultant high quality pictures in the club newsletter add great interest to its pages.

Keep in mind that it's important to produce on schedule the most readable, attractive, informative bulletin possible, even if it consists of only a single page.

NEWSLETTER NAME AND FORMAT

Before publication, a name for the new periodical should be chosen. Don't call it simply "The Newsletter." Dream up a distinctive title that ties in with photography if possible. Get suggestions from club members . . . someone may come up with a brilliant idea.

Next, design the front-page masthead or nameplate with the title/name worked into it. The design need not be elaborate but it ought to be neat, attractive, easy to read and indicative of the club's special interest or location. A club logo is often used. Membership in PSA, a Council, or a Community Group is frequently included in the design.

The best page format is conceded to be two columns of type rather than running the text across the entire page. Lines that run from the left side of the page all the way across to the right without a break (except on narrow pages) are somewhat tedious to the eyes of the reader and also seem to reduce the attractiveness of the page. Break up individual items with headlines (in a larger type, if possible) and don't be afraid to allow plenty of white space (margins) to show.

EDITORIAL CONTENT

After an editor has been appointed, a name chosen and a method to circulate the newsletter to the membership has been approved, it's time to begin publishing. At this point, the editor and staff begin to gather material for the first issue.

In the order of its importance, material that can be included in a club newsletter might be listed as follows:

- * Coming events, programs, and competitions.
- * Competition scores and cumulative standings of members.
- * Reports on the club's standing in PSA and local council activities.
- * News and activities of the members.
- * Photo tips and brief technical articles.
- * Miscellaneous material.

You will note that the above gives most importance to the announcement of coming event. This is as it should be . . . the newsletter should always be used as a medium to let the membership know all about things to come. And this should not be done merely by a simple matter-of-fact announcement. The events-to-come must be described with enough enthusiasm to make the readers feel that they simply cannot afford to miss them.

Scores and cumulative standings are always of interest. They should be complete and up-to-date, with every entrant listed. Don't omit the low-scoring members . . . remember, they pay dues, too.

If the club competes in a PSA Interclub competition, or engages in council contests, let members know how they're doing as a team. If a member makes a high score, wins a ribbon, medal, or other award, give that member an editorial "pat on the back."

Try to reserve some space for general chit-chat about members and what they are doing currently. Use as many names as possible. All members enjoy seeing their name in print (provided they're name is spelled correctly).

Some members seem to make more news than others. Consequently, their names tend to appear more frequently. To prevent their being mentioned too often, several items can be "saved up" and used all at once in the same issue.

Don't overlook welcoming new members. Say a few words about each one to acquaint the club with who they are and what they do.

Above all, when writing about members, the Editor should strive to be chatty and informal, but never flippant. Gossip, or the use of material that may offend in any way, is definitely not appropriate.

The PSA Representative for the group should be an excellent source of material for the newsletter. The club's PSA Rep can look through the *PSA Journal* and pass along usable items to the editorial staff.

An active, progressive camera club should never have any trouble keeping its publication filled and interesting. When space permits, use feature articles by members, summaries of lectures given at the club, and excerpts from other club publications and photographic magazines. (Watch out! Use a "credit line.") Permission to reprint copyrighted material should always be obtained in advance.

MOST IMPORTANT DATA

Be sure that your club publication always carries complete information about meeting dates, meeting place, and club contact email address. It's surprising how many editors overlook the inclusion of these data. Without it, the publication becomes valueless as a source of information to an interested prospective member. It also loses its value as a publicity medium.

The best way to make sure that this information is always in the newsletter is to have a permanent "box" called the "masthead" which appears on the same page in each issue. Some clubs include the names and email addresses of officers, as well as important chairs, such as those for programs, membership, and publicity. Some mastheads present copyright, deadline and dues information and also indicate membership in PSA or a council.

PSA NEWSLETTER CONTEST

For further aid in preparing a club newsletter, use the services of the PSA Club Services web site Consultant on this (Club Newsletter) webpage. Each year, PSA holds an International Newsletter Contest composed of three categories: Small Clubs (4 to 40 members), Large Clubs (41 or more members), and Councils and Chapters. Each entry receives a detailed analysis by qualified judges. Top awards and ribbons are given to the Editors for exemplary work. All entries are on display at annual PSA Conferences. To enter, contact the Consultant on the PSA Club Services web site, Club Recognition webpage.