

# Communicating with Your Membership Through Newsletters & Websites

Whether you use a newsletter, website, or both, communicating with your membership to keep them informed on your PTA's activities is vital to the success of your PTA.

## Best Way to Communicate

There are pros and cons to both newsletters and websites. Websites are relatively inexpensive and are the most immediate way to communicate with your membership; however, your members must proactively visit your site to get the information.

Newsletters, on the other hand, are delivered home automatically. Your members don't have to do anything special to receive them; however, there is a necessary lead time for getting information out in a newsletter and there are possibly printing and mailing costs involved. Additionally, because newsletters come home passively, your newsletter must grab the attention of your members to get them to open it up and read it.

A combination of both communication mediums is the best solution.

## Create a Professional Image

Even though we are all volunteers, keep in mind that all of your communications with your membership, whether via newsletter or website, reflect on your PTA as well as your school. Having a good design and timely, pertinent information will give your PTA a professional image.

## The Design

Your design can make or break your newsletter or website. Information must be noticed before communication can take place. The following

design concepts can be applied to both websites and newsletters:

### ◆Keep it Simple

Your design does not need to be overly complicated to be effective. Create a simple design you like and stick with it!

### ◆Be Consistent

Consistent formatting throughout your newsletter or website can help to create a professional image, as well as assist your readers in finding the information they want. Consistency is key!

### ◆Fonts

**Limit your font choices to 2 or 3, easy-to-read fonts.** Use a larger, bolder font for titles. Avoid scripts fonts or fonts that are difficult to read ... if your readers have to struggle to read your information, they won't read it! Avoid ALL CAPS or underlining words as they are harder to read. Use **Initial Caps**, **Bold** and *Italics*.

### ◆Colors

Avoid using light colored fonts on light backgrounds and dark colored fonts on dark backgrounds. Limit your color choices and use them consistently.

## Graphical Elements

Graphical elements include clipart, photos, borders, etc. The purpose of any graphical element is to catch your reader's eye to get them to actually read your information.

### ◆Clipart

Use clipart or images – **but use them sparingly!** Too much clipart can look “busy” and will take

away from your information. Use clipart to draw your readers into the articles. When placing photos or clipart on a page, embedding them in an article and allowing the text to wrap around them is far more effective than simply having the clipart at the beginning or end of the article.

Remember, the whole idea is to get them to READ your information. Clipart needs a purpose ... don't just use it to fill in space!

### ◆Borders

Borders can be another great way to grab a reader's attention, but don't put a border around every article on a page—that defeats the purpose of getting your reader's attention.

### ◆Photos

Photos can be a great way to add interest to your newsletter or website. Try putting a group of photos together in a collage. Placing captions with photos is a great way to convey information without your reader even realizing it. (Be sure to check with your school district on their policy for posting student photos on the Internet.)

### ◆White Space

White space is defined as any area on a page that is not covered up with a graphical element or text. White space in and of itself is a design element and should not be overlooked. Having pages that are too crowded or cluttered are harder to read and readers tend to have a more difficult time finding the information they really want.



link on every page so visitors can get back to the beginning should they become lost along the way.

Keep your navigation simple. Make sure visitors to your site can easily find links for the information they seek.

When linking to files (like PDFs) or other websites, set the link to open in another window; this leaves your site open for them in the background.

## For Newsletters Only

When designing a newsletter, there are some formatting decisions you need to make. You can print on regular 8.5 x 11 paper or you can print on 11 x 17 and fold in booklet form. You must decide if you will print in color or on colored paper. Whatever you decide, you should remain consistent for the entire school year.

Use columns when laying out a newsletter. Columns instantly add a professional look to your newsletter, they are easier to read, and believe it or not, you can actually fit more on a page.

You also must decide if you want to justify the right margin or leave it jagged. (See samples.) This is a personal decision; there is no right or wrong; however, you want to ensure that all articles are done the same for consistency.

The same is true for indenting paragraphs. You can double space between paragraphs and keep the left margin flush or you can tab or indent the first line. It

is totally up to you, but again, all articles should be formatted the same for consistency.

If you don't already have one, create a bold nameplate that your readers will use to quickly identify your publication. Remember, you want

**Justified Sample**

It is important to keep your pages in balance by keeping the headlines closer to the text they go with and keeping larger spaces between articles. Keep the spacing between your columns the same.

You can change font size of an individual article to make it stand out, but don't change the font family. You also don't want every article on the page in a different size. Consistency, consistency, consistency is the key to a good newsletter.

**Non-Justified Sample**

It is important to keep your pages in balance by keeping the headlines closer to the text they go with and keeping larger spaces between articles. Keep the spacing between your columns the same.

You can change font size of an individual article to make it stand out, but don't change the font family. You also don't want every article on the page in a different size. Consistency, consistency, consistency is the key to a good newsletter.

Break up long bodies of text with a pull quote or graphic. Don't use this simply as filler - they need to have a purpose and draw your readers in.

## For Websites Only

When designing your website, make sure your site is easy to navigate. Always have a "home" button or

your newsletter to be noticed when it comes home in the mail or via backpack express!

## The Information

While your design should be geared toward making your information easy to notice and read, it is your information that will keep your readers coming back.

**So what type of information should you include?** A good place to start is to think about what you, as a parent, want to know.

## On the Web

Your website should house standard information like who your board members are, how to contact the PTA, how to join your PTA, the annual calendar of events, and other information that stays the same all year. It should also include any “late breaking news” and should be the place your parents can turn to get the most up-to-date information on events or other issues.

Update the site frequently and always have the date last updated on the main page (regardless of what page(s) you updated) so visitors know at a glance the information is current.

It is also great if you can post forms that must be filled out (like your membership form); if parents can print them from your website then they don’t have to tear them out of your newsletters.

## In your Newsletter

Your newsletter should include a letter from your PTA president, a calendar of upcoming events, as well as membership, fund-raising, legislative, and volunteer information as needed. Be certain to include all of the required elements if you will be applying for the Thomas Newsletter Grant. (See Quick Tips on page 4.)

## Promote Communication

If you are using both a newsletter and website, use them to promote the other. Put an article in every

newsletter advertising your website and the fact that the most up-to-date information can be found there. Likewise, you can post electronic copies of your newsletters on your website so that your members can access any issue they like, whenever they like.

## Keep it Professional!

Make sure your information is accurate and timely. Whether posting on the web or in a newsletter, **proofread, proofread, proofread!** Remember, you are responsible for what gets printed and not just how it looks.

**Use proper punctuation and spelling.** This is paramount if you want to have a professional image.

**Use spell check**, but don’t rely on it alone! **You must proofread!** Spell check won’t tell you if you have a wrong word (its or it’s; their, there, or they’re). Double check the spelling of any names.

**Check links** on your website to make sure they actually go where you intend.

**Get approvals** from the principal and PTA president (or their designee) before printing a newsletter or posting something on the web.

**Safety first.** Check with your district and/or school for their policies on publishing photos and/or names of students. A good rule of thumb, erring on the side of safety, is never post a photo of a single student or identify students by name in any photo on the web.

**Use of PTA Name.** The use of the PTA or PTSA name and logos are governed by the guidelines established by National PTA. There are never any periods in PTA or PTSA. To make them plural, simply add an s to the end (PTAs, PTSAs). Do not add an apostrophe when making them plural; only use the apostrophe when making them possessive. Example: I belong to three PTAs. (*plural*) I need to borrow the PTA’s cooler. (*possessive*)

## Quick Tips

### Websites

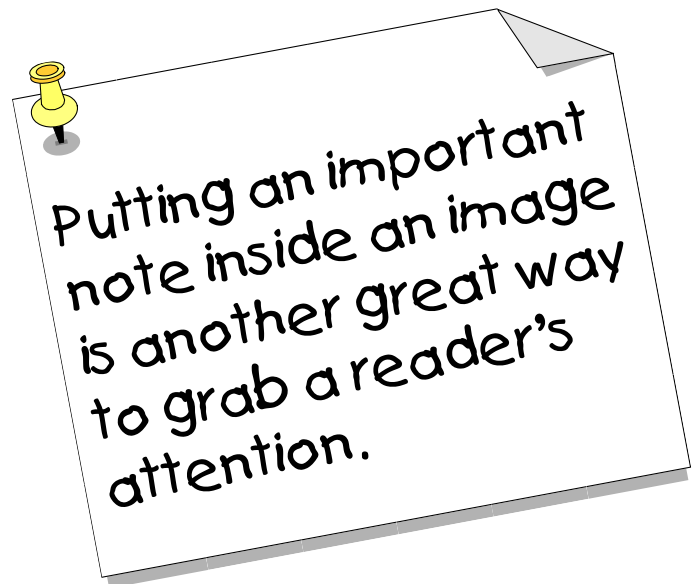
- ✓ Be sure your site is easy to read and easy to navigate. Have a way to return “home” from every page.
- ✓ Make sure all links go where you intend.
- ✓ Update the site often and include a last updated date on the main page, regardless of the actual page(s) you may have changed.
- ✓ Include downloadable and/or printable forms that parents can fill out, as well as copies of your newsletters.
- ✓ Be sure to have membership and volunteer information, as well as a listing of your board members, and how to contact the PTA. A picture of your board is a nice touch as it lets parents put faces with names.
- ✓ Include links to Florida PTA, National PTA, and your County Council.

### Newsletters

- ✓ Keep your newsletters consistent in formatting and overall “look and feel.”
- ✓ Use graphical elements sparingly and with the purpose of catching your reader’s eye.
- ✓ Be certain to include a letter from your PTA president, as well as relevant membership, volunteer, or legislative information.
- ✓ To qualify for the Thomas Newsletter Grant be sure you have a masthead with all of the following: PTA name; address; phone; name of principal, president, and editor; number of issues published each year; the date and volume/issue number; and how and when articles should be submitted.
- ✓ Use your newsletter to encourage parents to visit your website for the most current information (then be sure to keep your website up-to date!)

## Ways to Grab Attention

- ◆ Use bulleted lists (like this)
- ◆ Add clipart or photos
- ◆ Reverse your type (white type on a black background)
- ◆ Place boxes or shaded areas around key information
- ◆ Rotate an image or block of text
- ◆ Put a large amount of white space around a particularly important piece of information



### Where Can I Get More Information?

Go to [www.ezpos.com/pta.html](http://www.ezpos.com/pta.html) or e-mail [joneuman@verizon.net](mailto:joneuman@verizon.net) for a copy of the PowerPoint, as well as more detailed handouts.