

# “What Works for Me”

## Suggestions for writing excellent EAA Newsletters from the Newsletter Editor Forum at AirVenture 2008

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1. **Experience** - You don't need to be an experienced writer to be a good newsletter editor. But you do need good organizational skills, and it helps if you own an airplane, are a builder/restorer and you visit as many regional/local events as possible. Obviously the editor should keep up with EAA print publications, and sign up for the eHotline as well as other news sources such as AVWeb. Note that only EAA information can be sent on to members without permission from authors. Copyright law is serious.
2. **Title** – the real title of your job is "Director of Communications" for your chapter. This is the most important job of an EAA chapter. EAA chapters rise and fall in success with the regularity and quality of their newsletters. For instance, I have watched EAA1114 grow from 20 members to 170, and IAC grow from 10 to 50 during the time that I was their newsletter editors.
3. **Scope** – One can make a strong argument that the newsletter editor should also be the webmaster and owner of the chapter database. There are few today who are not web-centric, so it makes sense to combine these tasks to reduce duplication of effort to keep things in synch.
4. **Basics** – there are a few basic things a newsletter editor should keep in mind:
  - a. **Regularity** – any news is better than no news. Even a few sentences in an email to chapter members on a regular basis, preferably a few days before your monthly meeting, is far better than nothing.
  - b. **KISS** – applies also to newsletters. A one page black & white newsletter can be more useful than a 10-pager full of large images and fluff.
  - c. **PDF** – the simplest and most reliable means to distribute your newsletter. If your layout/document software can not export these, try the converter found on [PDF995.com](http://PDF995.com). It installs as a printer on your computer and will generally keep file sizes around 1MB for an 8-page newsletter with a few pictures of 300 pixel width per page.
  - d. **Distribution** – easiest is to post/archive your newsletters on your web site, then send out a brief email to your members to announce its availability. Most web groups (Google, Yahoo) also allow you to post small files and send messages to all group participants.

5. **Essential Contents** – A good source for ideas of what to include in an excellent newsletter may be found in the leading newsletters, for instance winners of the annual. Most are online. A list may be found here: [http://www.airventure.org/awards/chapter\\_awards.html](http://www.airventure.org/awards/chapter_awards.html) Here's what I consider the four essential elements of any EAA newsletter
  - a. What/Where is the next meeting?
  - b. What happened at the last meeting?
  - c. Chapter calendar including local aviation events
  - d. Contact information for chapter officers
6. **More Content** – there is no limit to what else you can include in your newsletter, for instance:
  - a. Officer columns – your chapter officers ought to be obligated to send you regular updates on their activities. At a minimum the president should send a column.
  - b. Member news – this is your chance to recognize member achievements, illnesses, efforts by volunteers, visitors, new ratings, new/restored airplanes, flying trips, etc.
  - c. Member contributions – often members are eager to share a story but don't know how to write. Ask them for the basics and a few images and (voila!) you have a story. Watch you listserver/forum/web group for snippets and turn these into stories or bullets in your member news section.
  - d. Local aviation events – attend as many as possible or ask friends to do this for you. Members who can not attend will love hearing about these.
  - e. Borrow/Share – stay in touch with other chapters in your area and offer to swap stories. Be aware of copyright protection on stories and images.
  - f. Pictures – these are important, but will inflate the file size of your newsletter. Keep single-column (of a typical 3-column page) pictures to 300 pixel width and 2-column images to 500 pixels wide.
  - g. Special issues – run special version of the newsletter, for instance AirVenture/Sun'nFun review, Summary of builder/restorer projects. Gather short stories and images from members involved. These articles may span over several issues due to length. Organize informal gatherings of members attending aviation events in order to extend your reach, i.e. gather stories from others.
7. **Kent's No-Nos** - I never include the following in my newsletters:
  - a. Minutes of Officer/Board meetings – most members don't care to know all the details of meetings, which are often very repetitious.
  - b. Recipes – a pet peeve of mine. Chapters that do this seem more focused on eating than on flying, which is probably not why your younger members joined.

- c. Large PDF files - try keeping your newsletter PDF file to less than 2MB. An 8 page newsletter with no more than 2 images per page (see suggested image sizes above) will remain under 2MB when properly converted to a PDF.
  - d. Sensitive information – use the smell test on printing questionable information. Is the article or image something that a trial lawyer or our friends at the FAA might use in a case against a pilot or – even worse – your chapter? For instance, incidents/crashes, illegal aerobatics and similar stupid stuff. Also, while there is nothing at all wrong with the consumption of adult beverages after the flying is over for the day, it is probably best to avoid reporting on this in a newsletter. You never know who might be reading it.
8. **Mechanics** – I use the Microsoft Office suite, but it really doesn't matter what you use since the result will be a PDF file which can come from just about any source. Following are a few details on my “process” to create a newsletter, which takes me at most 4 hours per issue:
- a. Create a folder for each month and “throw” things into it as they cross your desk. For instance interesting news/emails from members, images, articles, etc. Keep a simple list of ideas/contents in a raw text file. Put other documents, for instance officer columns, in separate files within the current month's folder. When you sit down to hammer out the newsletter, just refer to the raw text file and the other stuff that you find in this folder.
  - b. Crop and resize images to 300 (1-column) or 500 (2-column) pixel width.
  - c. Layout the newsletter in MSPublisher, Word, PowerPoint, or whatever you're most comfortable with.
  - d. For ease of reading, keep font size no smaller than 10 points and choose a typical “serif” font (one with curly-cues). Study the style used in EAA magazines as these folks are the pros. You will also find many good guides for creating newsletters online, for instance <http://desktoppub.about.com/od/newsletterdesign>
  - e. When using contributions from chapter members, check for inappropriate language and misspelled words, but don't massage their writing style into your own. Others need to “see” the author's character in their work.
  - f. Convert your completed newsletter to a PDF file. I use the PDF995 “printer driver” found at [PDF995.com](http://PDF995.com)
  - g. Post your PDF file on your web site and announce its existence to your membership through a group/listserver email. If it is small enough (under 2MB), you can email it as an attachment. Don't forget to send copies to EAA Headquarters, other local chapters, all area FBOs and other friends of your chapter.
9. **Web Sites** – Since, as the newsletter editor, you are really the Communications Director for your chapter, you are probably involved in some way with your chapter's web site. I maintain the newsletter and the web site for IAC19, and have found the Image Café software from our web

hosting service, Network Solutions ([www.networksolutions.com](http://www.networksolutions.com)) to be quite adequate for our needs. Image Café resides on the server of Network Solutions, not my computer, which is really important unless you want to be your chapter's webmaster forever. All one needs is Internet access to update the web site using the simple tools that Image Café provides. There are many other similar tools out there; use the one that works best for you and your chapter's budget.

10. **Don't Forget** –the two most important rules of a newsletter: KISS and Regularity.

### **Forum comments from David Hipschman, EAA Director of Publications, and Brenda Anderson, EAA Chapter Administrator**

1. Make sure your newsletter includes the chapter number and chapter location in the header on page one. This is something that Paul Poberezny, who reads many of the newsletters, likes to see.
2. The EAA produces 6 print magazines, 5-6 electronic newsletters as well as the EAA.org web site. All material found here may be used in chapter newsletters without explicit permission, however please remember to give due credit to the authors and source of information.
3. A newsletter is the “family album” and the connection between individual members and the larger EAA “family”.
4. Tom Poberezny calls Sport Aviation “AirVenture twelve times a year”
5. “EAA is about food”, commented David Hipschman, who does like seeing recipes in newsletters.
6. Send your newsletters to members, but also local schools (science and shop teachers), your mayor and town council members, county commissioners, local newspaper, TV and radio stations, restaurants, airports, FBOs, airport authority members, chamber of commerce, etc.
7. If you miss a month, apologize to members.
8. Every chapter member has a story to tell. Get others to write about themselves, especially older members who are often more humble but who many times have had interesting aviation careers.
9. Requiring chapter officers to report on their contributions in the newsletter also forces them to do their jobs.
10. Be a story-teller; be aware of what is happening in your chapter and report on this to others.
11. If you ask for contributions to your chapter, it may be easier to obtain in-kind gifts rather than money.
12. Use BOLD font in your newsletter whenever a member's name is cited.