

STARTING A ROMANCE NEWSLETTER

by Stephanie Bond

Romance customers like the feeling of belonging to a "community" of readers. One way to foster this sense of community is to publish an in-store newsletter. If you have a computer, a printer, and a little initiative, you can put together a fun and informative newsletter for your romance readers. Here are a few tips for getting started:

Evaluate your goal for the newsletter. Do you want to raise the profile of your store? Reward regular customers? Draw new customers? Build romance sales? Increase your visibility within the company?

Start building a mailing list. Place an address book next to the register and ask customers to sign up

Generate interest in your project. Run a contest among employees and customers for a catchy newsletter title.

Keep it simple. Start with a simple design on your word processor, one or two pages is plenty in the beginning. Play around with the 'columns' feature to mimic the look of a newspaper. Another trick is to right justify the type so it 'adjusts' to fit the line. Learn how to 'drop in' a picture file; clip art is available at computer stores at very reasonable prices.

Let me entertain you. You must entertain your readers. Think fun, think light! You might want to relay some of the most humorous encounters with customers. Tell a good joke. List upcoming store events. Share employee/customer reviews on new titles. Start a Q&A segment for readers. Print a recommended reading list. Draw a cartoon. Feature a favorite recipe. Encourage literacy volunteerism.

Whitespace is a good thing. "Whitespace" is the area of a page where there is no printing: margins around the edge, spaces between paragraphs and columns, et cetera. Whitespace makes the page look balanced and inviting. Use it to your advantage.

Imitation is flattery. Study other newsletters for great ideas you can utilize. Remember, your newsletter doesn't have to be splashy to be effective. If you can't afford to print in color, use colored paper or creative borders or shading to create visual interest.

(continued)

STARTING A ROMANCE NEWSLETTER (page 2)

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Invite others to contribute. Contact the RWA home office to find the nearest local chapter, and ask members to contribute articles of interest to readers. For instance, ask a local author to write a small piece on the life of a writer. And invite customers to submit tidbits about why they love to read or which books made an impact on their life.

Deliver a regular dose of news. Your budget and time constraints will probably dictate how often you publish your newsletter, but a good rule of thumb is at least once a quarter. You might find it's better, however, to print a shorter newsletter more often, say once a month.

Document your progress. Keep one copy of every issue in a notebook so you can watch the newsletter grow and change. You might discover that you enjoy writing about romance almost as much as reading it! ~**S**Bond