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**Engagement. Content.
Profit Sharing. Oh my!**

Interview with
Sophie Hanson

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Engagement. Content. Profit Sharing. Oh my!

As the world has gotten more connected, and smaller, the details that make your organization, board of directors and staff not just real, but unique, is a powerful call for engagement.

Today's technology makes it very easy to be impersonal, to the point where personal contact has become an anomaly. In a world where we text, email, blog, and send instant messages throughout the day, in 280 characters or less, anything personal makes a lasting impression because it is so rare.

What's wrong with being impersonal? It is boring, forgettable and, ultimately, ineffective – because we all want apologies in the form of crying emojis, right?

As humans, we relate to the world by constructing stories with beginnings, middles and endings. Our minds naturally construct and remember stories, so no other strategy is as powerful – or as relevant – as telling your story often, consistently, and in as many ways as possible to the right people.

And that's where our founder and owner, Sophie Hanson and our staff at The newsLINK Group come in. For the past 25 years – long before content

marketing was a thing – Sophie has been passionate about telling our clients' personal stories about why they do what they do. And along the way, she (and the rest of us) has met the most interesting people and helped hundreds of nonprofits and trade associations renew, recruit and retain their members.

Over the past several years, content marketing has had a meteoric rise to the forefront in marketing. It's the siren song for relevancy, and rightfully so. As the world has gotten more connected, and smaller, the details that make your organization, board of directors and staff not just real, but unique, is a powerful call for engagement. The truth is, people want to do business with those they like, know and trust. In a plugged-in world, authenticity and real, interestingly enough, matter.

Consequently, content surrounds our daily lives. Everyone has jumped on the bandwagon, Google rewards it, consumers crave it, and marketers are



A well-crafted story screams real and authentic. And when it's in print, it adds a tangibility to the experience that engages and grows membership like nothing else.

trying to find storylines right and left. For a story junkie like Sophie, it's a marvelous thing. Like Nora Ephron said, "everything is copy." However, for most, it's confusing. From a marketing perspective, to be effective, the trick is to strike the right balance and understand your audience.

The newsLINK Group uses print and digital media together to create impactful integrated marketing campaigns for their clients' membership bases. In an increasingly digital world, print remains a sustainable, tactile and trustworthy tool – essential to any good marketing campaign, or good story for that matter. Print, to Sophie's delight, is far from dead, and actually thriving. It seems that everyone – from Google to Airbnb – are telling their stories in a print magazine.

Today, in the marketing and communications field, we're all on a common quest for the elusive holy grail of engagement: Something new. Something original. Something different. And something that will engage our customers, or in The newsLINK Group's case, their clients' members. These days, member-based clients are a tough crowd. While many nonprofits and trade associations are thriving, an equal number are not.

Reaching and engaging those elusive members takes work, and it's not for the faint of heart. People are busy. A lot of the offerings made through nonprofits and trade associations can be found directly on the internet. So can many educational offerings. However, what can't be found outside of the membership base is the networking – the people part. Their stories. The lessons they have learned. The moments that can – and often did – change everything. Those are

the things that can be shared in one of two ways: in person or with a full color, glossy magazine, delivered right into the hands of the members.

A well-crafted story screams real and authentic. And when it's in print, it adds a tangibility to the experience that engages and grows membership like nothing else. And it's also why Sophie is still ridiculously excited to show up to work after 25 years in business. After all, a story junkie, is a story junkie, and when they can spend their day in a publishing company, it doesn't get any better.

Building on her excitement about what we do and how we do it, following is a discussion with Sophie about all the parts of magazine publishing: content building, engaging our clients' members, and how magazines can become profitable and generate revenue streams.

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There's a lot that goes into magazine publishing. What's the one thing that seems to rise to the top when people ask about out-sourcing their magazine?

Control and money. Most organizations don't want to lose control of their narrative – which I completely understand – and want to make sure we honor that concern. Then there's the question of, can their magazine make money and will they be able to share in those funds? Again, something that I completely understand and want to support in every way we can.

Trade associations do a lot with very little, especially the smaller ones, so everything that has focus needs to be meaningful and provide value.

What's the story behind implementing the profit-sharing program?

I don't necessarily know if there's a story, per se, other than it's a good idea.

We started profit-sharing several decades ago with a magazine for our very first client. We ended up selling more ads than we needed to, didn't need the extra money, and decided to split it with them. I was happy about how the whole scenario turned out; the product was great, the profitability of the project was good, and the client used the profit-sharing to fund their PAC efforts.

We still have a good relationship with that client, and we still publish for them. As you can imagine, profit-sharing is a very strong benefit of an association magazine.

Do you have a sense of how many associations would not publish a magazine if they didn't see profit-sharing?

No, because there are many ways a magazine can benefit an association. It's a mistake to think that "no cash" means "no value." I think of profit-sharing as frosting on an amazing cake. It's nice. It's appreciated but probably not necessary as it's the member dues and engagement that keep an association financially healthy.

Some companies supplement limited brick-and-mortar stores with a beautiful catalog, like Pottery Barn, Williams-Sonoma, J. Jill and Sundance. These companies might have a few outlets, too, but the catalog is a huge asset. People like to relax and browse through high-end catalogs when they have some time. There's no pressure and no rush. Some companies sell a lot of merchandise through their catalogs because clients buy more when they are relaxed.

It's no different with a good association magazine. Our magazines are beautiful, professional and interesting, the ads are relevant to the members, and the magazines themselves become great association ambassadors that generate goodwill. The products being sold are seminars and webinars instead of clothing and home furnishings, but really, the magazine functions the same way a good catalog does. As a result, we have plenty of clients – enough to keep us very busy – and many publishing awards for the quality of our work.

Tell us about the nuts and bolts of the profit-sharing program.

An average magazine is 32 pages long and has an audience of approximately 850 members. The general cost categories necessary to create a magazine are overhead, commissions, layout, printing and postage. We always sell ads to the best of our ability because we can't stay in business unless we cover our costs. Making money on a magazine is about the total annual volume, not just the volume for one issue, and the number and cost of the ads in each magazine are based on breaking even by the end of the year.





We need to have a general idea about how much money we need to make, so we go through our costs annually and deconstruct our expenses for the previous year to ensure our ad rates are reasonable. Doing that gives us our goals. It doesn't make sense to check more frequently because some magazine issues are more challenging than others. A client may come to us and say, "Hey, we need our magazine to be 42 pages for this issue, and we are handing it out at our annual convention to potential members, so we need 200 extra copies." If a client does ask for something extra like that, we'll say "yes." And, that same year, we might do another issue that costs less to publish.

Every client is eligible for profit-sharing. If we can sell extra ads, we deduct the commission and split the remainder with the client. Profit-sharing occurs at the end of the contract year because we don't know how big a check to write until then. We regularly write checks to associations for \$3,000 to \$15,000 per year.

Profit-sharing doesn't have to be money. It can take different forms, but the specifics depend on what the association wants. For example, some associations say "thank you" to their big sponsors by giving them space in the magazine or ads that would otherwise cost money to run. Another option is to take that money and add pages or issues to an existing magazine.

One or two of our clients like to give away ads, where each ad has a dollar amount attached to it. For example, they might give a quarter-page ad to every member in a particular membership category. An ad is probably worth at least \$300, so everyone takes an ad when the association offers it to them. Some clients will give an ad to members if those members become, say, a bronze sponsor. Then the association

makes money from the sponsorship. It's a way to create value without exchanging actual dollars.

We would go out of business if people didn't pay for their ads, but sometimes we can help out an association if we structure the agreement to make sense for them and us. Profit-sharing in the form of ads only makes sense if we've already covered the cost of making the magazine.

Is profit-sharing typical in the association magazine industry?

There were only three or four companies that did what we did when we started business, and we were all pretty small. One competitor wasn't sharing profits, but I don't know about the others. Profit-sharing has become very common since then. That makes sense because it's good business. However, even if a magazine doesn't have any profits, the magazine still adds to the association's bottom line because it's another way to bring the association to its members.

How many associations are eligible? And how many of the ones that are eligible take advantage of it?

About three-fourths of our clients enjoy some form of profit-sharing. The remaining fourth still benefits because their magazine helps them create a product marketplace and a strong sense of community.

Most clients want cash, but some associations want to give their members more of the magazine by increasing the number of pages or issues. They want members to see what their dues are buying them. We know our magazines make associations stronger and more vibrant even if we don't send them profit-sharing checks. The checks are just a bonus.

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Belonging to an association is intangible, but having a magazine is a way to make association benefits tangible. A good magazine reminds everyone what the association does, including the board members. It can increase a member's sense of belonging to a community, provide networking and educational opportunities, and let members know what is happening even if they cannot attend events. Magazines can also promote sponsors and sell products and services.

What are the advantages of increasing the number of published issues or page count instead?

It's a big compliment when a client tells us they would rather increase the magazine's scope than cash a profit-sharing check. For us, it means the client is looking toward using their magazine as the communication ambassador that we love to see any magazine become.

The reality is it's becoming harder and harder for any organization to engage with clients and associations aren't any different. Relevant communication is tough to manage, and I personally believe a magazine is a big help when it comes to member engagement. Magazines show up in offices and homes across the country and manage to capture the attention of some very busy people – these people would be very difficult to see face-to-face for association staff

unless they were engaged – and relay important association news, educational content and coverage of events. A magazine brings the association to its members, and in our busy and focus-challenged world, that's, in my mind, one of the most important jobs of a magazine. A magazine reminds members why they pay dues.

Do you have any stories about how the program has helped some of our associations?

We have really benefited some of the smaller associations. For example, there is an executive vice president in Montana. His association just finished its first year with us and is starting its second. He treats us like a partner, makes smart deals and brainstorms with us. Everyone got behind the magazine. The magazine was well-received and made money the very first year, which doesn't usually happen. Everyone is happy about the outcome, and the magazine received an award for distinction in publishing. He told me, "I should have said 'yes' to you guys a long time ago."

Those are the kind of outcomes that I love. And what makes the day-to-day so rewarding.

What can you tell us that we haven't already covered?

People join associations to meet other people. Magazines are valuable for many reasons, but they are a wonderful way to create a community and

help people within the association become friends. It takes time to put a good magazine together, and associations have to invest some effort into coming up with good content — but, we can and love to help with content creation. However, it's all worthwhile if you look at everything a good magazine accomplishes.

Magazines check off a lot of boxes. For example, we've talked about how a magazine can make money for the association. But the most important work a magazine does isn't about money; it's about relationships. Our magazines create stronger association communities.

One example of this is our many member interviews. Most people like recognition and want to have some say in their legacy. If they are working in an industry that has been good to them, they want to pay it forward and make a difference in other people's lives. They want their life to matter, and they usually appreciate a chance to talk about their journey.

We have interviewed some truly remarkable people. We love doing interviews because they give people a chance to share their values, insights and advice. Interviews are a way to mentor people outside their closest circles and increase their connection to the larger community.

Suppose a member goes to a meeting or convention for the first time and doesn't know anyone yet. If the new member has looked through the magazine, they will have some topics to discuss and may even find someone to start a conversation with, especially if a person we interviewed is there, too. The new member will know who the other member is and a little about their life because the interview has photos and personal stories or experiences.

Even when the pandemic prevented members from attending meetings or conventions, reading their association's magazine made them feel like they were still part of the community. They get to see what's going on and hear about their association peers.

As I said previously, association magazines are goodwill ambassadors. The potential to make money on top of that is a bonus. 🐟



A magazine brings the association to its members, and in our busy and focus-challenged world, that's, in my mind, one of the most important jobs of a magazine. A magazine reminds members why they pay dues.



Four Things You Need To Know About The Importance Of Original Content



The newsLINK Group has seen some marketing changes over the last few decades. Since most associations have websites, and many associations put their magazines online, some of those changes are thanks to internet searches.

We learned a long time ago that having original content makes a difference, no matter the organization. That's why our marketing niche is original content for association magazines. We can give you magazine articles you won't find anywhere else.

What, you thought we were going to talk about SEO?

Doing SEO the Right Way

SEO does matter to associations. But when many people talk about SEO, they think it means peppering the text with relevant words. That's not fun to read. The results are often unnatural, and then the strategy backfires.

Search engines are becoming increasingly sophisticated, and they are most interested in content with the following characteristics:

- Originality
- Credibility
- Readability
- Relevance

Let's talk more about them.

Originality

Originality is at the top because the internet is full of articles whose content is either the same or very similar to other articles. Your only hope for being noticed in a dense crowd is to be at the top of the list. That's why so many people focus on SEO.

According to EDGY Labs, there are more than 1.7 billion websites. On the Amazon website for Chip Heath's book *Making Numbers Count*, Heath points out that a million seconds – seconds, not websites – equals 12 days and a billion seconds equals 32 years. Nobody will spend more than 12 minutes, never mind 12 days or 32 years, looking for your association website.

One easy way to improve your visibility on the internet is to share original content on social channels such as Facebook and LinkedIn. People who see an interesting article click it, taking them to your association website (and even your magazine site), and that helps increase website traffic and improve SEO rankings. This also holds true when sharing articles from your association's magazine website, which all associations have. That's why people want their websites to be at the top of the list in an internet search and having original content will help.

Please note, the important word here is "original." If someone plagiarized an article, it used to be that it might not be obvious. That isn't true anymore. People don't look at all those websites, but search engines do. When a website article is plagiarized, search engines recognize that and rank the article lower than original articles. It doesn't matter if an article is well-written and relevant if the contents are also an obvious repeat that can be found all over the internet.

When writing original articles, the key is to take existing ideas and put a personal spin on them. We start by focusing on the main points of what has already been written. Considering then using multiple sources gives articles depth and synergy. Then we write a summary of the results in our own words. It's a technique that has worked well for many writers:

- Shakespeare wrote plays based on books he read, including Latin and Greek authors, and he paid attention to what might please the royal family. For example, James I was descended from Banquo and was interested in witches. When Shakespeare wrote Macbeth, characters included Banquo as a good guy and witches. Shakespeare also combined plots written by other people then added unique details.
- Niklaus Luhman was a sociologist and prolific writer. He originated the Kettelkasten method, which is a note-taking system. The notes are from anything a person reads that sparks interesting ideas, making it possible to use them later while writing.
- Malcolm Gladwell has a class on the MasterClass website. He recommends going to the library and looking at the books on the shelf around the books you might want to read. That way, you can look for unexpected connections to related subjects that will make your work richer and deeper.

When we do place articles in multiple magazines, we make sure we don't oversell them, and we keep an eye on whether your readers would be likely to see it in another magazine.

We also specialize in writing original interviews. If your association wants to highlight a member's life, for example, we come up with a list of questions, conduct an interview and write an article. The association and the person being interviewed both have a chance to edit it before it appears. The articles we write after interviewing someone are original, readable and relevant.

Credibility

Credibility matters because it helps you create a reputation as an industry expert. Good associations provide thought leadership to their readers. However, it's impossible to lead if your magazine always parrots other peoples' thoughts on important subjects.

People like to read articles that are informative, entertaining and reliable. Professionally written articles are helpful for any association magazine that wants to retain – and perhaps increase – the number of active members.

Readability

Readability means you can't just stuff a bunch of words into an article and expect to attract readers. Any keywords there have to occur naturally. Again, search engines have algorithms to help them determine whether something is written well or poorly. Poorly written articles get ranked lower than if they were well-written.

Relevance

Relevance is dependent on what interests your readers. An article about something important to them is more likely to be read than an article about anything they think is boring or irrelevant. But importance is highly subjective, and it changes over time, depending on a person's job, life and personal interests.

In Conclusion

Writing original content takes more time than a buy-once-use-many approach, but it's easier and faster to come up with original content than you might think. Also, magazines with original content are far more effective than magazines without it.

The newsLINK Group can help you create magazines readers will love, online and on paper. 🐟

As Our Language Evolves, So Does AP Style

All living languages change. There are many gray areas, and what was true yesterday may change tomorrow. World and local events often drive the language. When events such as wars, pandemics and shootings occur, people need a way to talk about what has happened, which often involves coming up with new words. The same is true of social changes. People need to know how to talk about gender and generational differences. The changes never end.

That's a challenging reality for anyone who works to update dictionaries, style guides, or both because it means they have to monitor language usage, written and online. They need to notice when changes occur, describe what happened, and then explain their conclusions to the rest of us.

The newsLINK Group follows AP Style because their guide is well-suited to magazines like the ones we put together. We aren't their only audience. Even though journalists are the intended audience, the AP Stylebook is well-respected and popular. Many people refer to it the same way we do.

Previous guidelines and handbooks produced by The Associated Press date back to June 1900, and The AP Stylebook's first edition was published in 1953. The AP Editors published the 56th edition June 1, 2022.

Paula Froke, AP Stylebook editor, described the process in an article on the company website. She is part of an extensive team whose goal is consistent with AP journalism. In addition to striving for accuracy, they also work to be clear, fair and concise.

The core team for the 2022 guide includes Paula and six other members: Anna Jo Bratton, Andale Gross, Jeff McMillan, Pia Sarkar, Jerry Schwarz and Raghuram Vadarevu. The standards editor, John Daniszewski, and AP senior news leaders are often involved. You probably haven't heard of them, but they shape what you read. All of them are experienced professionals at AP who provide a broad background of interests and skills.

The core team talks with AP reporters and editors, but they don't stop there. They also talk with people and organizations that are not part of the AP. That includes listening to what Twitter and Facebook



followers say and thinking about the questions submitted online through the *Ask the Editor* feature.

The core team meets by Zoom once or twice every week to discuss their work. They review drafts between meetings. Everything can't go in; the team has discussions that sometimes last months or longer and revisions are frequent. They work hard to decide which subjects have the most interest, the greatest importance and maximum usefulness.

When the core team is ready, they make updates public and wait for feedback. According to Paula, the reactions are sometimes intense. Although most feedback reflects the ideas that have already been discussed, sometimes people bring up new ideas that merit additional revisions.

Having a style guide like the *AP Stylebook* is indispensable for a company like ours. It is as invaluable as having a dictionary, and doing without

their work is unthinkable. You don't work at a company like ours without being passionate about language, so being able to consult the *AP Stylebook* makes our office a friendlier place. Using an impartial source, like the *AP Stylebook*, allows us to settle questions without scuttling amicable relationships.

We pride ourselves on our knowledge of the English language, but we can't match the depth and breadth of what the *AP Stylebook* provides. The AP editors are in an excellent position to see how language is changing everywhere, and we appreciate being able to access their expertise. It changes discussions so that decisions are made impartially, based on facts and expert consensus, instead of being made by seniority or an opinion poll that doesn't have enough people involved to mean much of anything.

We look forward every year to the latest update. We're delighted that it is finally here again. 🐟

You don't work at a company like ours without being passionate about language, so being able to consult the *AP Stylebook* makes our office a friendlier place.



Communicating With Skill And Conviction

What does everybody need in life? That's a good question with many possible answers, but let's pick three. The first answer is from Shala Nicely on the *Psychology Today* website. She said that everyone wants to be loved, valued and happy. Most people would agree.

The second answer is from the *On the Under 30 CEO* website. Matt Wilson stated that most people's basic needs are met in developed countries. As a result, people's happiness in those countries is not connected to accumulating more money or possessions than necessary. Instead, he claims true wealth consists of having choices and the freedom to do what you love. That reasoning somewhat explains why many people choose to prioritize experiences over possessions. It makes sense to avoid adding to your possessions when you already have more than you need. His reasoning is also supported by the fact that people need choices and freedom to feel they are in control of their lives; lack of control is threatening and can easily escalate into fear and major stress.

The third answer is from an Adam Grant TED Talk from September 2021, called *How To Stop Languishing and Start Finding Flow*. Although his thoughts are less about "what" and more about "how," he said (among other things) that people need mastery, mindfulness and mattering, where mattering is the feeling that "you make a difference to other people." For mattering to be most effective, it is based on a reciprocal relationship: you know them, they know you, and you are important to each other. As he points out, a one-sided relationship with the characters in a favorite movie or television series doesn't qualify because you may feel like you know them, but they don't know you.

What does all of that have to do with effective communication? People are social beings. Whatever you want to do, effective communication will help you achieve your goals (short term, long term and anything in between). More importantly, effective communication can help you and others find meaning.

Let's go back to the Adam Grant talk to see how effective communication can improve job performance. He gives the example of an alumni fundraising drive he was involved in where it was

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clear the people making the calls did not think their work mattered. In response, he arranged for some callers to meet one student whose scholarship was funded by their work on the fund drive.

What happened the week after the meeting? The callers nearly doubled the time spent calling and almost tripled their weekly revenue. They did better because they saw firsthand how their work benefited someone else.

When you know the name, face and story of someone you are helping, you automatically increase the value of your work. Your work matters more because you gain a deeper connection with other people. It's the difference between dropping cans of food into a donation bin during the Saturday grocery run and feeding someone you care about when they are hungry.

Even if work can't be connected directly to beneficial results, like knowing your work will help someone you've met and liked enroll at a university, you can elevate work by connecting it to something that does matter. For example, an organization can select a charitable cause and donate whenever a work-related goal is achieved. Many associations are already deeply involved in charitable community work; making a connection between work and important causes is a natural extension of what they already do.

Suppose you want to communicate more effectively and tie your communication to the truly important things in life. Where should you start?

The first step is simple: build relationships with the people who benefit from your work. If you know them and they know you, you will be better positioned to set goals. That's true for associations the same as it is for other organizations. Association magazines offer a great opportunity to introduce your entire membership to association leaders, members and even customers.

Some communication will be written; some will be verbal (whether live and in person or recorded). Our focus is on written communication. Although some principles translate more easily to paper than others, the following sections contain information about what to focus on.

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Listen Attentively

If you have a conversation with someone who knows how to listen actively, you know how it makes you feel: respected and understood. Associations can lay the groundwork for listening by having contact information in the magazine and online. Ensuring the website is current is very important. Monitor website communication, too. People should be able to get a response almost immediately.

Understand Your Audience

It's easier to minimize differences and misunderstandings when you listen to people. The goal is to keep interactions as positive as possible, but sometimes you will have to deal with emergencies or issues that generate strong feelings in people. Recognize the emotions you see so that you can respond appropriately. The more someone knows their thoughts and feelings are understood, the easier it is for you to have a constructive conversation with them. Talk to members to better understand what kinds of articles they would find helpful. If you present an article about a sensitive subject, think about what is said from the reader's perspective.

Build Community

Associations often have events that give members a chance to interact socially. Few things build community better or faster than bonding with other people at fun or relevant social occasions. Magazines and websites can both help you promote these events in advance.

Communicate

There are two kinds of communication: verbal and nonverbal. Nonverbal body language includes facial expressions, eye contact, posture, tone of voice and how someone moves. In a magazine, nonverbal communication occurs with the physical design of the magazine. It includes the choice of paper, fonts, layouts, photos and graphics and professionally edited text. Someone holding the magazine might not understand why a magazine looks and feels professional, but they can sense it.

People appreciate clarity, consistency and thoughtful communication. Clarity is obvious. Saying something correctly and well will always be better than the alternative. Consistency has to do with being reliable and dependable. If a magazine is supposed to appear in mailboxes regularly, it's important to keep to the schedule. Members should know that leaders watch out for them and communicate with them regularly.





The most effective communication of all will always be about things that matter. Decide what that is, or rededicate yourself if you already know, and you will communicate with skill and conviction.

Communication frequency will vary depending on what you are talking about. Find the sweet spot between communicating too much and too little by asking members about their preferences.



Finally, be thoughtful about the best way to communicate with members, whether by text, email, website, magazine, letter, at an event or in person. The more sensitive and urgent the topic, the more likely you should communicate face-to-face.

Remember Your Purpose

Everyone has times that feel emotionally and intellectually important. The opposite is also true. As an association leader or member, you have the chance to help members connect with the important part of life and elevate their experiences by reminding them (and yourself) about why your collective work matters. People may sell products or services, but there's more to what they do than that. Associations build communities. Whatever your association's official goal is, it makes people's lives better, and the members and leaders have many good, strong relationships that develop along the way.

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Powerful Headlines:

The Complete Beginner's Guide

Association magazines are a niche publishing market, but like the newspapers and magazines one might see in bookstores or grocery stores, they have a lot riding on pulling in engaged members, who are the lifeblood of the association world. While it is true that association members are more inclined to read their association's magazine than people outside the organization, association magazines still have the challenge of drawing members in and getting them to pick up a magazine and open it. Creative headlines can help.

Using headlines to get people's attention has two problems: first, there's a lot of competition for that attention. We live in a world where people have more reading options than time. Second, you want more of people's attention than the few seconds it takes to read the headline; you would like them to take a few additional minutes to read the article that goes with it, too. But if 10 people read an average headline, eight will ignore the story following it and move on to something else instead.

That leaves only two potential readers for your article. Those aren't good odds, but you can improve them by writing better headlines.

Select a Headline Type

There are five general headline types. Here are some examples:

- **Number:** Five Ways to Add Muscle-Building Exercises
- **Addressing the Reader:** You Can Begin Building Strength Today



- **How Statements:** How to Build Muscle Faster
- **Normal:** Building Muscles
- **What, Where, Who and Why Questions:** Why Build Muscles?

The list order of these types is not accidental. A study of headlines on buzzfeed.com found that number headlines were more effective than any others (36% versus addressing the reader, which was 21%). “How” headlines got 17%, normal headlines got 15%, and other questions came in at 11%. Gender changed the percentages but didn’t change the rankings: women liked numbers even more than men. Also, people preferred the headlines that were the clearest about what the article contained.

If you want to combine headline types, use a colon to separate them. For example, your headline might read, “Five Ways to Add Muscle-Building Exercises: You Can Begin Building Strength Today.”

It would get really old if every single headline had a number in it, but the stories you want to highlight

probably should. You may want to write the same headline five ways before deciding which form you believe is most effective.

How to Use Numbers

Depending on what you want to accomplish, it might be a good idea to use small numbers in headlines. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, the idea is to give readers a curated list, not a grab-bag of possibilities. If you have an article that talks about “101 Ways to Make Spaghetti,” the chances are good that nobody will try more than a few.

Second, big numbers overwhelm most people and become meaningless. Chip Heath and Karla Starr wrote about this problem in their excellent and useful book, *Making Numbers Count*. (According to them, anything bigger than five is a big number. Really big numbers, like a million, make people feel numb unless you can translate it into something they understand easily.) You can help people understand the significance of a number, but headlines are ideally short, so save big numbers – and ways to help readers relate to them – for the article itself.

Help Search Engines Find Your Headline

Taking the time to think about your headlines means more people will read the article that goes with it. Researchers have found that a good headline on a website like [Upworthy](http://Upworthy.com) can increase online traffic by 500%.

Some people will read only the first few words of a headline. Aim to write a concise headline that front-loads the most relevant information.

Current best practices include keeping the headline length under 70 characters and ensuring the headline uses one keyword that people searching for the article would be likely to use. Choose the most important one and place it as early in the headline as possible

It used to be good journalistic practice to shorten names as much as possible in news stories. For example, headlines didn’t use first and last names. That is no longer true. Use people’s first and last names because that will help search engines.

Although you want to help search engines find your story, remember that readers are more important than search engines. That is why you should write for the reader, not for SEO. A clear, well-written story should do fine when people use search engines to look for it; a story crammed with keywords will not.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

To better understand headline details, look at other publications to collect ideas and see what a good headline looks like. Analyzing other people's work always helps develop fresh ideas.

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Emphasize Value

People pay attention to information that promises to deliver value. Figuring out the value will vary depending on the audience, but the best ones are unique. How would you differentiate your association from a rival association if you talked to someone about them? The differences between associations may have to do with location, purpose and member identity. Keep that difference in mind when you write headlines.

If two magazines have the same audience, chances are their readers will read one magazine or the other but not both. An article for a dealership or a banker will need something that ties it to the reader's current interests and promises to solve a problem. For example, dealers who have a hard time getting parts for the service department are likely to read "Sidestep the Service Department Supply Chain." A community banker in Florida seeing too much customer turnover would probably read "Retaining New Bank Customers in Florida."

Get the Details Right

When writing headlines, it's hard to know where the line is between "clever" and "too clever." Some people might not understand what you are talking about. Even though the goal is to write lively, unique headlines, it's also important to write ones that people understand immediately. Save any jokes you may have for some other setting.

General suggestions include using the word "you" in headlines and thinking about your audience. Why should a reader care about your headline or your story? What is likely to be most relevant to their interests? Also, it's fine to write headlines in the form of questions, especially if you identify a problem

and have some solutions. Questions in a headline create a curiosity gap, and good questions encourage people to continue reading. Remember that the best question to ask may likely start with "How." Finally, keep verbs active. Avoid infinitives ("to be" verbs). Headlines shouldn't use any wasted words.

Headlines can be understated or use superlatives ("best," "smartest," "faster" and "perfect"). Should you use them? According to one survey, more than half of the survey respondents preferred an understated headline with either one superlative (29%) or no superlatives (22%). However, a fourth of the survey respondents preferred headlines with four different superlatives (25%). If you plan to use superlatives, avoid the middle ground. Either limit yourself to one or be flamboyant and use four.

To better understand headline details, look at other publications to collect ideas and see what a good headline looks like. Analyzing other people's work always helps develop fresh ideas.

Play Fair

If you've ever seen a clickbait article, you know how frustrating it is to click on one and realize you have many clicks and many ads to navigate before you get to whatever it was you wanted to see. Sometimes cliffhangers are an appropriate way to keep someone reading, but if you value your reader's time, you won't make anyone wait too long for your main points. If a headline asks a question, place the question's answer close to the top of the article.

Journalism teaches writers to put the most important information first because that way, readers will get what they need to know in the first few paragraphs. Marketing experts encourage writers to edit their stories and include only the points readers are likely to care about. Those are both good rules to follow. 🐟

Why Do We Think Awards Are So Important?

We love it when a client receives recognition for their communication efforts, but not because it tickles our professional vanity (although it certainly does that, too). **We are passionate about the quality of the work we do, and we want our clients to benefit from our best efforts on their behalf.** For us, having a client's marketing campaign, magazine, newsletter, website or other communication effort earn an award is about more than winning. **We want to know what works and what doesn't.** We want to make sure that the work we do on behalf of our clients is, in fact, **excellent.**

And the truth is, the best publishing companies, marketing agencies, public relations firms and ad agencies are fierce competitors. Not only do companies within the marketing and communications field from all over the world enter their best work on behalf of their clients, but there are also in-house departments and academia that encourage up-and-coming students to participate. As a result, having our work judged against top-flight superstars in our industry gives us great feedback because it compares our work against the best efforts of some world-class talent.

The Communicator Awards honors excellence in strategic, effective and meaningful communication across digital, video, podcasts, marketing, mobile, print and more. The Communicator Awards receives almost 5,000 entries from companies, agencies, studios, and boutique shops of all sizes, making it, globally, one of the largest award shows of its kind.

We are pleased to introduce you to our clients who won awards this year on the following two pages. 🐟



2022 Communicator Award Winners

Congratulations to our clients and their publications for earning The Communicator Award of Distinction for a printed association publication!

To see the list of winners on The Communicator Awards website, please scan QR Codes below.



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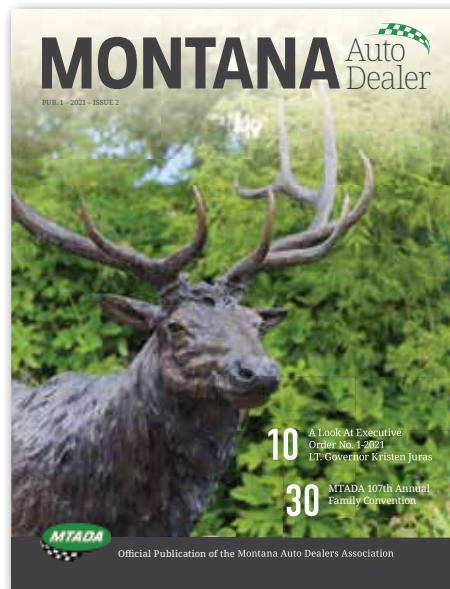


Kentucky Automobile Dealers Association



<https://kentucky-auto-dealer.thenewslinkgroup.org/pub-1-2021-issue-3/>

Montana Automobile Dealers Association



<https://montana-auto-dealer.thenewslinkgroup.org/pub-1-2021-issue-2/>

AIA Northern Nevada



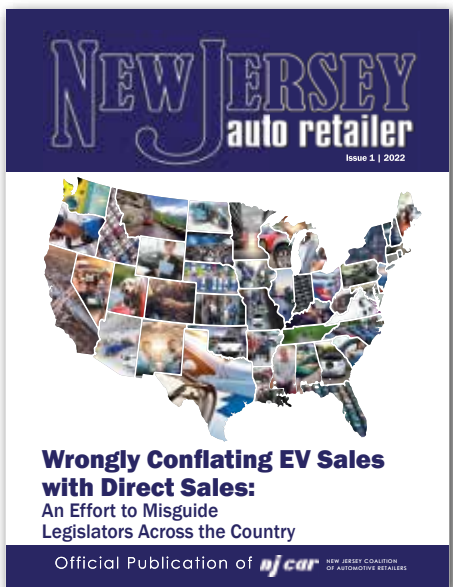
<https://northern-nevada-architecture.thenewslinkgroup.org/pub-4-2021-directory/>

AIA Wyoming



<https://wyoming-architecture.thenewslinkgroup.org/pub-2-2021-directory/>

New Jersey Coalition of Automobile Retailers



<https://new-jersey-auto-retailer.thenewslinkgroup.org/pub-21-2022-issue-1/>

Utah Asphalt Pavement Association



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