

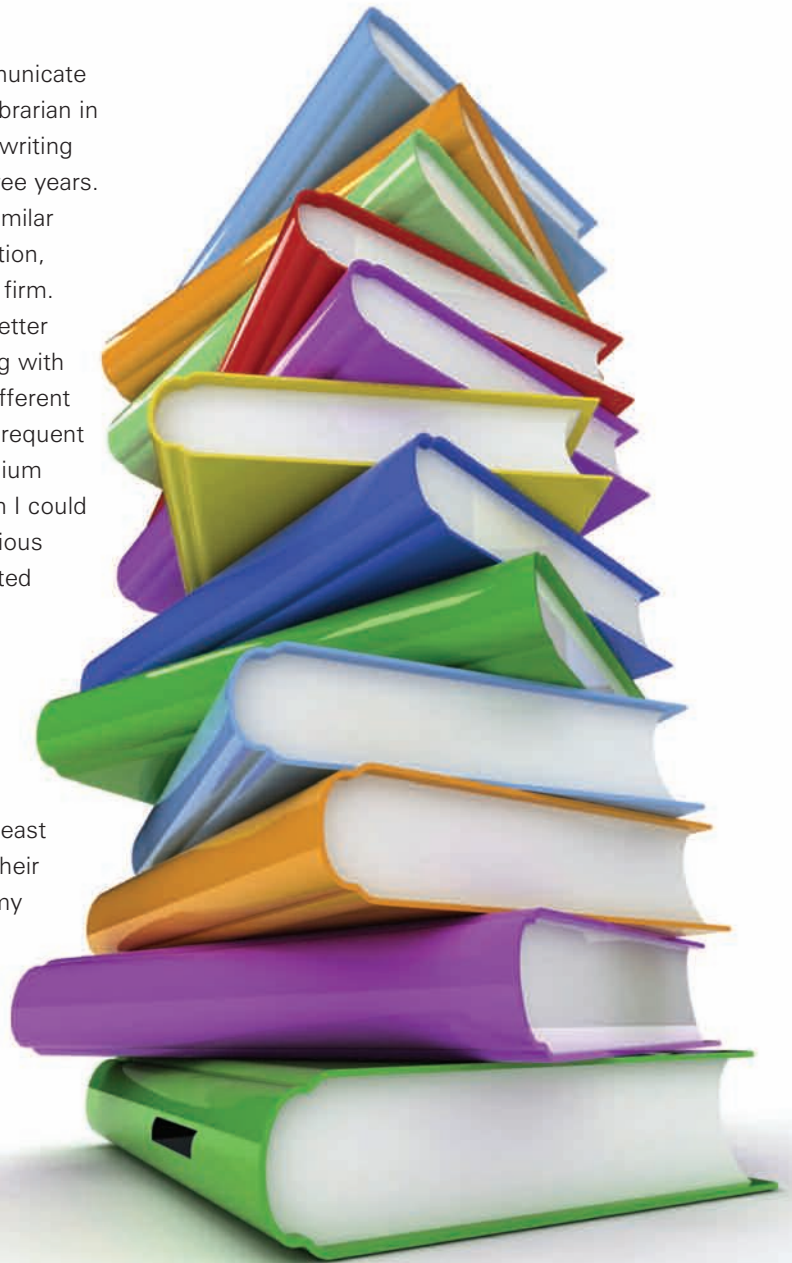
# Getting Connected

**A law firm newsletter represents an outstanding way to communicate news to colleagues and to market your organization internally.**

An electronic newsletter is an excellent way to communicate news and to internally market your law firm. As the librarian in a midsize intellectual property boutique, I have been writing and distributing a library newsletter for more than three years. Law firm administrators could benefit from using a similar publication, tailored to achieve whatever communication, marketing, and public relations goals they set for the firm.

The genesis of the Senniger Powers library newsletter came when, after spending two years communicating with attorneys and staff primarily via e-mail, I decided a different and more interesting approach was needed. I had a frequent need to disseminate information, and the e-mail medium forced me to severely limit the amount of information I could convey. I believed that long e-mails with the inauspicious subject line "Library News" would end up being deleted without being read. A newsletter seemed to be the perfect solution.

Careful planning of a newsletter is crucial to its success. The first step is to determine its goals. In my case, I wanted the newsletter to be a useful and current awareness tool for the entire staff, attorneys and non-attorneys alike. I wanted all staff to learn at least one thing from each issue that would help them do their jobs more easily or efficiently. I also wanted to give my patrons tools to help them become more savvy researchers and library users. If you are writing a newsletter as a law firm administrator, your contents may likely be more geared to employee profiles, personnel news, and workplace issues.



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The next step is to decide on the newsletter's format. I use a Microsoft Word template. The newsletter is divided into two columns: The left column contains a list of the current issue's contents, and the right column holds the newsletter's main body. The newsletter includes the most important and relevant items culled from print and online subscriptions, blogs, journals, newspapers, word of mouth, and other reliable and authoritative sources. Items cover important information about intellectual property law and other legal news, library services, new titles in the collection, how to use our electronic subscriptions, notable Web sites, and search engine tips.

The basic layout is consistent, but the color scheme and clip art are changed each issue to reflect the seasons and current events. This keeps the newsletter's appearance fresh and interesting. Regular features are always in the same location. I use Verdana font for its clear and pleasing appearance, with clear delineation of the newsletter's various sections. The font, column width, headings, and style can be altered to suit your taste. Keep the length reasonable, two to six pages. That's long enough to allow for feature-length articles, but not so long that your intended audience will resist reading it.

Make your newsletter entertaining as well as informative. Each of my newsletters contains a short feature called "In IP History" that discusses an interesting invention, patent, trademark, or copyright, with links to additional information. This has become a popular feature and allows for some occasional lighthearted but educational content.

I strive for each issue of the newsletter to contain at least one item that will be useful to everyone in the firm. This broadens the newsletter's appeal and eliminates any impression that it is designed only for attorneys. My rule of thumb is that anything that helps employees do their jobs better or helps them feel better both mentally and physically is worth considering.

To that end, I include not only information that pertains to the practice of intellectual property, but information about staying healthy, time management, workspace organization, and other relevant topics. When sections of a major highway in St. Louis recently shut down for two years as part of an extensive reconstruction project, readers knew that the library newsletter would provide links to sites giving traffic updates. Again, my guiding principle is, "Will this information help someone do their job better?" Getting to work on time and as stress free as possible certainly applies.

The newsletter is published every two to three weeks. The number of articles listed varies, but is usually between 10 and 15. Regardless of the amount of content, the newsletter should be composed in a professional tone. Avoid exclamation points and annoying lines of all capital letters. The newsletter's purpose is to inform; save editorializing or opining for a blog or personal correspondence. Archived issues of the newsletter can easily be searched via the firm's internal Worldox search feature. Users can instantly retrieve any of the newsletter items directly from their desktops, either onsite or remotely. Users may also link to the newsletters via desktop icons. Print copies of each issue are kept in an easily accessible binder.

Using a regularly delivered law firm or library newsletter has many advantages. It furnishes information in an expected, standard format that patrons will anticipate reading. It consolidates firm news into one location. It reduces the number of e-mail messages. Its formal design lends credibility and professionalism to internal communications. Most significantly, a newsletter serves as a wonderful internal marketing tool for your organization. ✱

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