

Steps to Creating Successful Newsletters

Contributed by the Architects League of Northern New Jersey (a section of AIA New Jersey) and AIA Golden Empire

Excerpted and adapted from Component Excellence Awards entries

July 2005

The AIA collects and disseminates Best Practices as a service to AIA members without endorsement or recommendation. Appropriate use of the information provided is the responsibility of the reader.

SUMMARY

Newsletters are a leading communication tool for AIA components. Both AIA NJ and AIA Golden Empire found ways to create a cost-effective, informative, and graphic publication on tight budgets. They recruited member writers and teamed with allied organizations to trade services.

TRANSFORMING PUBLICATIONS TO REFLECT, AND MEET, MEMBERS' HIGH STANDARDS

Two unstaffed components—one small, one mid-size, and both with small communications budgets—faced a similar dilemma: How could they strengthen communication with members when their volunteer newsletter editors were already overtaxed and the costs of publishing a colorful, graphically sophisticated newsletter seemed prohibitive?

Following somewhat different strategies, the Architects League of New Jersey and AIA Golden Empire each found ways to set new, higher standards for their publications. By using the power of teamwork and tapping fresh support from advertisers and in-kind sponsors, both local components created self-supporting newsletters that

- Established a consistent level of communication
- Presented a wider range of professionally relevant topics and features
- Increased member involvement
- Awakened the community to architects' presence and contributions
- Represented an image of design excellence that befits the architecture profession

LEAGUELINE: QUALITY BY DESIGN

For years, a one-person newsletter committee produced an events-oriented bulletin for the Architects League of New Jersey (ALNJ), which in 2003 included 386 of AIA New Jersey's approximately 1,600 members. The unstaffed component, however, found that consistent, high-quality communication with members was difficult to

maintain. "Topics relevant to our occupation such as professional, social, and educational issues originating nationally and locally need a conduit to reach us all," said Anthony Iovino, AIA, 2003 ALNJ president and current cochair of its *Leagueline* committee.

The board approved a budget and team to make *Leagueline* a high-quality, professionally designed quarterly "that reflects the distinction of our vocation," Iovino explained. To do so, ALNJ took these steps:

Divide the labor. A team of four took responsibility for these tasks: (1) Iovino, as president, wrote a piece to introduce each quarterly theme and helped gather third-party articles and advertisers. (2) Brian Altman, AIA, became the editor, writing and gathering content as well as serving as contact person to the graphic designer. (3) Simone Tsigounis, AIA, became the advertising coordinator. (4) Anthony Pagnotta, PE, helped to gather allied professional articles.

Hire the right designer. A professional graphic designer was necessary to save volunteers' time and to achieve the desired level of quality, which in turn would help create demand for advertising and generate the revenue needed to outsource the design.

Sell advertising at reasonable, attractive rates. The component had accrued almost no ad revenue in previous years, but that all changed with the new *Leagueline*. Setting an advertising-to-editorial ratio of about 40:60, the committee looked at similar publications to set rates based on the size of ALNJ membership and the shelf life of the higher-quality publication.

Establish a schedule and stick to deadlines. The graphic designer, Bruce Zahor of Zahor Design Office, played a key role in organizing the process by establishing a regular schedule for team meetings and work sessions. Each deadline is taken seriously, and key layout meetings are held as closing dates neared. At the meetings, gathered articles are discussed, and advertising space is laid

out. The designer, who maintains direct contact with the printer, holds a final meeting to review the draft before it is published. After printing, the team gathers at one of their offices to stamp and label materials in preparation for mailing.

The results were worth the effort. Feedback on the new 12-page, two-color tabloid was “overwhelmingly positive” from both members and advertisers, Iovino said. The first three issues, in 2003, incurred \$13,000 in expenses and generated \$10,000 in ad revenue. In 2004, the expenses for four issues were \$18,000, and ad revenue reached \$16,000.

Better yet, since *Leagueline* was revamped, “members who rarely actively participate are showing up at the dinner meetings or are calling and e-mailing with questions and comments,” Iovino said. “If we can continue this effort, I believe we will have increased the value of our local services and will entice more involvement in the Institute.”

A SMALL COMPONENT TURNS ON ITS AXIS

Throughout 25 years as a chartered AIA chapter, AIA Golden Empire (AIAGE) has used its newsletter, the *Axis*, as a vital communications link to its members in Bakersfield, Calif., and surrounding Kern County. With fewer than 50 active members in 2002, the component lacked the budget for a full-color newsletter but managed to produce one anyway, along with a complete format change that dramatically improved the newsletter’s quality and content. With the redesign, AIAGE also made the newsletter available through its Web site as a .pdf file, ensuring that the widest possible audience has access to it.

Ken Svendsen, AIA, had shouldered most of the responsibility for the *Axis* through the January 2002 issue. An illness in the family, however, required him to delegate or relinquish some of his volunteer duties. A new volunteer newsletter committee began considering alternatives when new volunteer editor, Larry Aronat, AIA, stepped in and pushed to set a higher standard—especially, to publish the *Axis* in color.

A search for sponsors yielded in-kind contributions, including a local business center’s all-important offer to provide printing, in color, in lieu of a financial contribution. Many consultants and local businesses pitched in to help offset the costs of new publishing software, postage, and other expenses.

The redesigned *Axis* premiered in April 2002 and drew praise from all chapter members on its quality and content, enhanced by photography, much of which Aronat also provided. As AIAGE’s

quintessential communication device, it has become a powerful tool in rousting members, showcasing member architects’ work, and introducing AIAGE to all who read it.

Through its coverage of local arts and development programs, in which AIAGE participates, the *Axis* helped to set a new standard in community outreach as well. “Inclusion of local arts in the newsletter has created a rebirth of interest in local architecture as an art form,” wrote the executive director of the Arts Council of Kern. Coverage of area historic-preservation, smart-growth, and other development initiatives also has raised awareness in those areas while garnering praise.

The 16-page, four-color tabloid continues to evolve graphically, giving this small component an outside voice.

For More Information

Leagueline is the quarterly newsletter of the Architects League of Northern New Jersey. Contact Anthony J. Iovino, AIA, at leagueline@alnnj.org.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 07.01.12 Making the Most of Your Marketing Material
- 21.01.02 Redesigning a Component Publication
- 22.07.04 *The Daily Reporter*: Partnering with Your Local Business Newspaper

Feedback

The AIA welcomes member feedback on Best Practice articles. To provide feedback on this article, please contact bestpractices@aia.org.

Key Terms

- Leadership
- Associations
- Design associations
- Architecture associations
- The American Institute of Architects
- AIA components
- Marketing