E-NEWSLETTERS

University of Maryland colleges produce more than 200 e-newsletters, providing crucial information and community-building links to our constituents. A consistent element to these e-newsletters will improve overall brand awareness.

All UMD-produced e-newsletters must use the two new templates offered by the Office of Marketing and Communications. It includes the UMD header at the top, for consistency and can be used in red, white, gold and black.

The templates themselves have a clean look, are easy to use and manage and allow for data tracking. They are available for the two most popular e-newsletter services used by units on campus.

• **iModules*** users may select from two approved templates from its Email Marketing section:
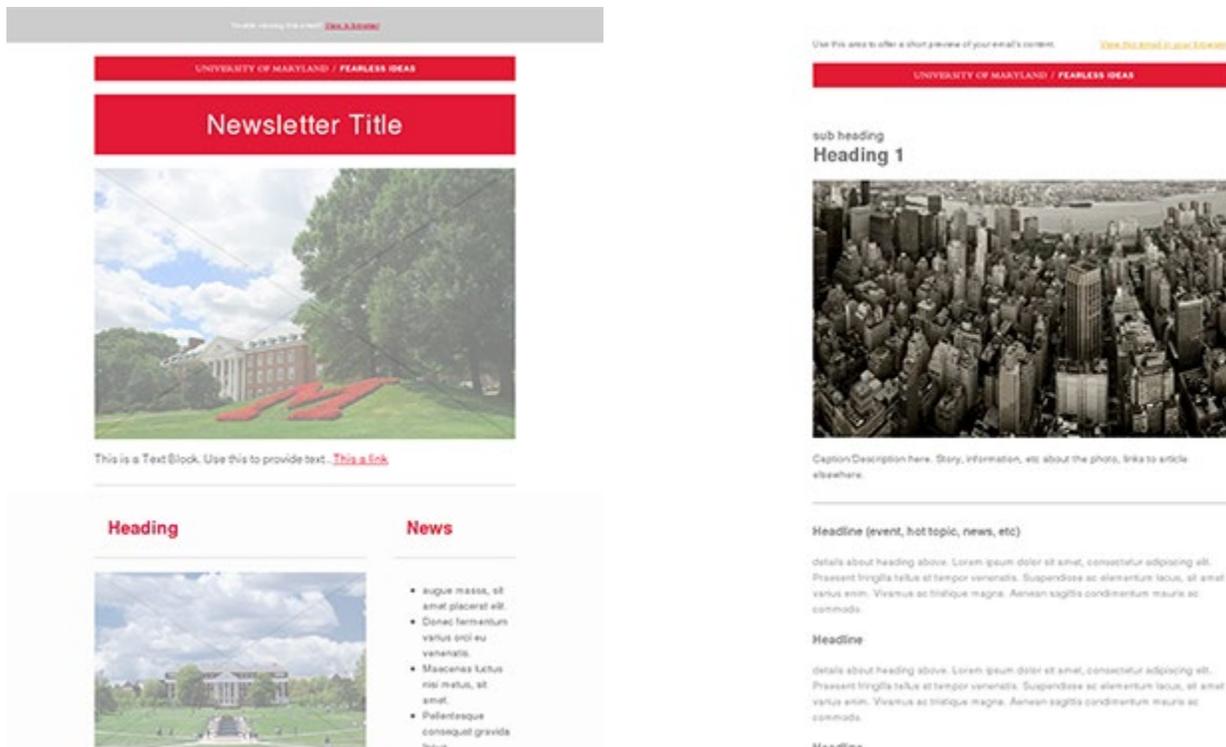
• **MailChimp** account holders may download either of the two templates below:

• E-newsletter 1
• E-newsletter 2

• Those who don't use iModules or MailChimp may download the HTML files on the downloads page.

*For iModules training, send an email to electricpub@umd.edu.

Strategy

As you consider creating or revamping your unit's newsletter, the first question to ask yourself is: What are you trying to achieve, and will an e-newsletter help you do that?

If you want to establish or maintain a connection between your unit and your alumni, an e-newsletter might be a great idea. If you want to connect people regionally, an event might be a more appropriate tactic.

Be sure to determine how will you evaluate your online newsletter's success and how will you use that information to inform and improve future communications.

The following tips will help you create an online newsletter that is strategic, informative and engaging:

• *Begin with the end in mind.* Before writing one word, determine what you're trying to achieve with your newsletter. Are you intending to increase attendance at an event? Provide emotional engagement and connection? Raise awareness?
• *Identify your audience.* Who is your audience and what do you know about them? Consider demographics, interests and what motivates them to act. Incorporate interactive elements such as polls and videos to learn more about your audience's preferences.
• *Diversify.* In addition to newsletters, consider incorporating other tactics into your marketing mix such as events, social media and media relations to achieve your program goals.
• *Keep it clean.* Make sure your email list is in good shape. If your data is bad, you are doomed before you start. Don't spam. Honor opt-out requests. People are more likely to ignore your email than unsubscribe, especially if it's difficult.
• *Make it easy.* Send your online newsletter consistently. Avoid emailing on Monday morning or Friday afternoon, times when audiences may be overwhelmed or distracted. Optimal times are midday Tuesday through Thursday. Post your content online, too, for those who may not have seen your newsletter.

Content

Readers spend an average of 50 seconds reading an e-newsletter. Don't let your e-newsletter become that statistic. Think about how you can share news about your unit that will capture—and keep—your readers' attention. The following tips can help:

• *Balance what your unit wants to say with what your audience wants to read.* Nobody wants to read boring institutional messages. The central questions to ask when considering story ideas are: Why should readers care? And why should they care now? Your readers' time is valuable (see above). You must entertain as well as inform.
• *Decide how to tell each "story."* Don't just fall back on narrative writing. Maybe all you need is a quote. Or a list. Or a lively video. Or a photo and caption. Consider combining a few of these ideas. Mix it up.
• *Be conversational.* Think of yourself as a translator, converting "academese" into plain English. Write like you talk as much as possible. Read your copy aloud to ensure it sounds natural.
• *Show, don't tell.* Rather than open a story by telling readers that a student had a life-changing opportunity, show it—what did that experience look like? Or instead of front-loading a research story with the technicalities, show how it would make a difference in people's lives. Put the readers there.
• *Keep it short*. You're producing a newsletter, not a magazine. Avoid long-form writing, unless in rare cases you have a truly outstanding example that you're confident will hold readers' attention.
• *Sell your stories.* Write a snappy headline, and maybe a subhead, too. (Aim for clever, but not by sacrificing accuracy or clarity.) Studies have shown that readers first read the headline, then look at the photo and caption or other art. Then they start reading. With every paragraph, your chances of losing them increase.
• *Plan your art from the start.* Photos, illustrations and graphics don't just compliment a story. They can help draw readers in and offer new insights. Leave time to schedule photo shoots or, if resources permit, to create a graphic or illustration.

Design

Before viewers read your newsletter, they notice the design. This first impression is crucial in readers' decision that the newsletter is worth their time. Ugly newsletters don't get read. Follow these tips to present your content in an engaging way:

• *Simplify.* Remove clutter by limiting the number of typefaces and use of special effects. Organize the space by grouping content such as ads or stories. And question everything. Try something, then step back to look at it from readers' perspective. Does it help the story or add information? If not, get rid of it.
• *Clarify.* Establish a hierarchy of importance. In other words, determine the best element in your newsletter, then make that apparent to readers. Then decide which stories or content should be seen next. This helps the user navigate the newsletter.

Your headline copy should be noticeably different than body copy, and your caption type should look different than body copy. Use size, weight and color—but keep it simple. Different levels of information and text can help draw readers into your newsletter.

Headlines and pull quotes intrigue readers. Subheads and intro paragraphs pull them in and (hopefully) hook them to read the entire story. Captions add secondary information and are less important than other text in the story.

• *Unify.* Develop standards and use them. Use the same headline fonts for all headlines, unless you have a great reason to change. The same is true for body copy, captions and other elements. Color and graphics used consistently also help readers become comfortable with the newsletter by establishing a familiar "face."

Use compelling imagery, too. Find images that relate to, add information to, or are more interesting than the story. Images are typically the first thing people notice in a newsletter. Images with colorful background or foreground objects brighten a drab text-only newsletter. Just make sure the subject is clear.