

THE NEWSLETTER – A MORE OR LESS MASKED FORM OF ADVERTISING

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Abstract: The newsletter or bulletin is a form of periodical publication emailed to its subscribers and includes various new information from a particular area of interest. This paper aims to capture the hypostases that the newsletter takes as a form of communication. These hypostases may be from a company notice (about new products or services) to media products (news items) or articles published by bloggers on various topics. What do these hypostases have in common? More or less masked advertising messages, and this paper aims to analyze some examples across the spectrum.

Keywords: *newsletter, blog, advertising, communication, online press, information.*

Introduction

Originally appeared in print, the newsletter has been used by companies for a good period of time to send messages to a list of clients and partners. Over time, they have proven to be extremely costly, slow in terms of message dissemination and unidirectional from a communicative point of view.

Theoretical framework

With the advent of the Internet, the newsletter initially took over the system implemented by mailing lists when most users communicated via e-mail on various topics. In this way, users subscribing to a generic email address could send messages on a specific topic (following some instructions). In turn, they could receive the messages of the other participants in the discussion either in turn (in real time) or packed, at a well-established interval. The software that served these mailing lists could receive special instructions from users for changing the password, subscribing to or unsubscribing the email address, etc. just by simply sending a message to the email address of the mailing list.

In this highly technologically-dominated communication environment, things have begun to revolve around power centres that aggregate multimedia content: online giant platforms (Google, Facebook) that offer a variety of virtual services ranging from newsletters to entertainment,

software, suites of specialized software, and so on. Among them, a central place has occupied e-mail and instant messaging in their most varied forms from the very beginning and until their integration into multiple software solutions: social networks, e-mail, chat, etc. (Farcaș 2017, 264)

Just like e-mail, that has become very popular at the expense of classical correspondence, the newsletter has quickly become sought after by Internet users: information of interest was received in real-time, with immediate response. The newsletter has the role of transmitting information specifically designed to be read by the target audience. As the sites specialize, the way of navigating and posting messages has become easier, with discussion lists taking the form of forums, chats, or themed portals.

„An e-mail newsletter is a publication created by a person or a company and sent on request to others. (...) Participants will not be casual people browsing the Internet, but people who are interested in the topic and signed up to find out more about it.”(Vegheș, Ruff 2003, 134)

Thus, on the one hand, the newsletter has become an accessory for sites, and users may opt to benefit from this service only for marketing purposes and eventual stops for maintenance services. On the other hand, the newsletter helps a site actively maintain contact with the user by informing him of various information for which he has opted (or not) to be notified.

In other words, the newsletter is similar to a print publication distributed by mail, with the distinction that the internet has some advantages: no stamps or other costs are used to distribute them, a newsletter is distributed globally, the delivery of a newsletter is practically instantaneous and there are no costs related to the printing of the publication. „The Internet provides significant benefits in terms of the cost of delivering online messages compared to traditional messages.” (Neagu 2012, 93)

Discussion

At the heart of an email marketing campaign, the newsletter has a positive impact if it is intelligently designed. Its usefulness can be easily tracked to identify strengths and weaknesses in the promotion campaign. In addition, newsletter issuers can get important statistics on their audience, its areas of interest, and the conversion of newsletters into sales campaigns.

However, the modern newsletter is more than an effective tool for instilling loyalty to a company's customers. If from a marketing point of view the newsletter regularly presents information to groups of people with extremely low costs, in terms of their content and the form they take, the newsletter is facing certain challenges. The biggest thing is that the content should motivate the recipients to open, read and respond to that newsletter. The answer is not scriptural, but rather behavioral and actional in the view

of the recipients. Most recipients are busy, they receive daily in their inbox a multitude of emails that they select based on their importance.

That's why marketing and communication specialists have given the newsletter a new form that presents the latest news, products or services offered by various companies. But they did not stop here because the purpose of these newsletters, besides loyalty, is to sell. In order for the newsletter to generate a sale, it provides objective information that helps potential customers make a company-friendly decision. There are sites that require a registration that they later use to send the news that appeared on that site „to attract visitors interested in a certain domain and then to send an offer. (...) The message should be clear and concise, consistent with the purpose, polite, should provide information on how to obtain more data.” (Ries, Trout 2004)

The same opinion is held by the authors of the site butterflymediagroup.ro who claim that the title in a newsletter is very important, and the multimedia elements must be integrated into the text and if relevant to the text, links can be made to photos, profile on social networks or videos. „With the newsletter you need to establish trust between the brand and the subscribers, so it always delivers quality content (...) The tone used in the texts must be warm, but professional, to create a close relationship between the brand and the subscriber.” (Suciu 2013)

Sending newsletters to clients and partners is a successful online marketing strategy because they improve and maintain a positive image in society. These newsletters include news, contact information, notifications, events, and future actions related to the organization that issues them. „(...) Whether it is a material sent by a news site, promoting events or projects, it is important to pay close attention to the texts we choose for the newsletter and not to resubmit them in the next newsletter.” (Suciu 2013)

In recent years, the use of newsletter systems has become ubiquitous in all websites, and visitors are aware of all the news that the website they are subscribed to announces. This objective information, once it has become interesting for the recipients, will also contain advertisements with a lower or bigger impact on the customers.

These advertisements contain information that, according to the specialists, they want to be useful to potential customers: how to solve certain problems that customers can face, small articles about how to use the latest products, services or technologies (marketed by various companies), news and trends in the industry where a company operates, case studies related to the field in which the company operates.

Of course, any information in the newsletter must be created by a person (or persons) versed in communication science, an expert in words and images, a professional in the fields of advertising, public relations and marketing. E-mail advertising is a popular and well-targeted promotional

method (though, we often notice that the mailbox is full of advertising messages). That is why promotional specialists need to find the target audience interested in advertising. Olimpia Neagu gives us some guidelines: „First of all, sites that might be interested in the product will be chosen. Then, newsgroups will not be bypassed, they will be sent an email with data about their problems, or we will offer a solution. By responding to them, we gain their trust (...).” (Neagu 2012, 99)

There are several advantages of sending newsletters to increase sales and improve the image of a company by offering the opportunity to increase *brand awareness*. The term *brand awareness* comes from English and means „the degree of knowledge that a brand enjoys among consumers or potential consumers in the target audience, and it is also the right association that takes place in their minds between the product and the company.” (Albin 2012) The elements that it is based upon are the identification of target audiences, the existence of a name, a slogan and a logo, the transmission of a message, the publicity, the establishment and maintenance of positive post-sale relationships with customers, the existence of images that complement the verbal message transmitted.

This concept of promotion can actively help target audiences better understand the mission of the company and its products / services. In the absence of any other communication, other than advertising, target audiences may not know much about the brand. That is why a newsletter helps the audience to have a wider and more complete picture of the business and to contain links that encourage the reader to find out more information on the company's website or on the websites of its products. In practice, there is the so-called *Customer Relationship Management (CRM)* that helps the marketing department send targeted newsletters with information specific to each audience.

A newsletter can be a good tool for measuring the company's competence in a particular field. The content of a newsletter comes with important information to consumers and helps the company be seen as a specialist in the field and a market leader. Thus, a company has to deal in the newsletter with important topics in the field in which it operates and share research and expertise in the field. The frequency with which newsletters are sent (daily, weekly, monthly or semi-annually) is important because the company must be in constant contact with current and potential customers.

In most cases, the newsletter is used to promote products and services or launch new products on the market. This strategy is part of the advertising campaign, where advertisements run in parallel on media channels. In addition, many companies create special promotions for newsletter readers to create a kind of community and a sense of belonging to this community closely related to the company.

We focus our attention on newsletters from those who have received permission to send news. We are talking about the website www.Qbebe.ro, a site dedicated to raising and caring for children, who chooses to send information instead of an announcement about a contest run by one of its partners. The Newsletter title *Win allies for your health!* sends us to the website www.divahair.ro which, together with a pharmaceutical company, SunWavePharma organized a competition whose prizes consist of fertilizing products. (Fig. 1)

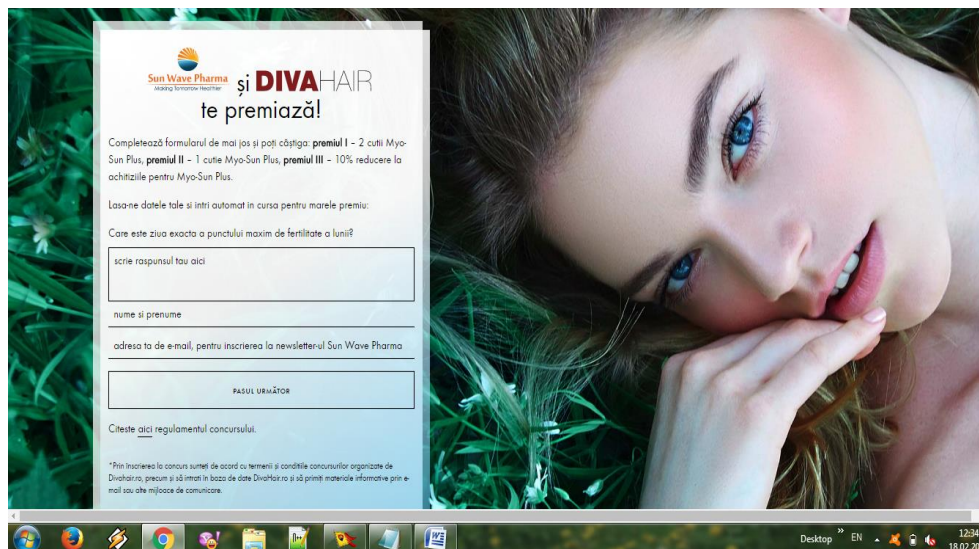


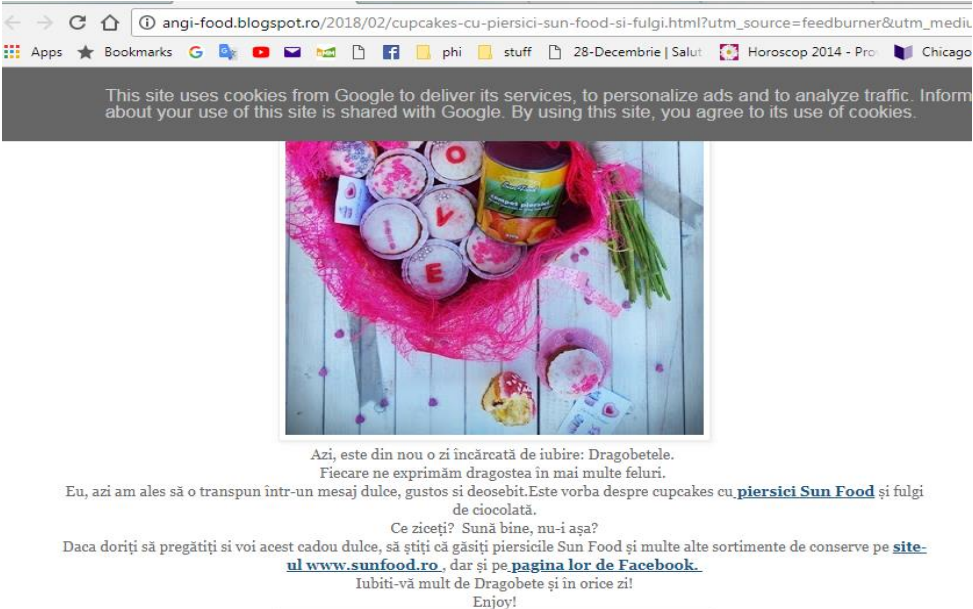
Fig. 1 The [divahair.ro](http://www.divahair.ro) site and the questionnaire for the contest <https://www.divahair.ro/concurs-sun-wave-pharma>

From the perspective of the companies, the (masked) advertising campaign has reached its goal because it reached the recipient, the only condition was the entry in the contest that the addressee can do or do not. From the recipient's perspective, this newsletter can be understood as a type of manipulation and influence of purchasing decisions. Moreover, the mailing address left on the Qbebe.ro site was for receiving information about raising children and not being used for other purposes by other companies. This is an example of the multitude of newsletters used for purposes other than information.

Another way companies use to reach their goals is to appeal to bloggers who have invaded the internet by informing them directly using their personal webpages, the blogs. Blogs are effective methods of free speech, conversation and dialogue, sharing experiences and having a great deal of traffic. They have emerged from the need of classical media journalists to have and maintain a closer relationship with their readers / viewers. This practice has been taken over by other advocates of free, non-conformist expressions to comment and disseminate information from the

press. The latter had a spectacular public outlet because „they did not seem to be subordinate to anyone, they had no patron, and they were not to worry about economic or political pressures. Writing passionately and juggling non-content with various content, not only publishing text, but also photos, videos or audio files.” (Brăduț Ulmanu 2011, 226) Blogs do not require any special training in web design and allow the creation of a professional interactive site without too much effort, which can be permanently updated.

In the New Rules of Marketing and PR, David Meerman Scot has classified blogs into individual, group and corporate blogs. The category of individual blogs belongs to individuals who want to send their own messages. Group blogs are made by multiple people and include multiple blogs. Corporate blogs belong to firms, companies and organizations, are made by their employees and express the point of view of companies. (Scot 2007, 46)



The image shows a screenshot of a web browser displaying a blog post. The browser's address bar shows the URL: angi-food.blogspot.ro/2018/02/cupcakes-cu-piersici-sun-food-si-fulgi.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed. Below the browser window, there is a dark grey banner with white text: "This site uses cookies from Google to deliver its services, to personalize ads and to analyze traffic. Information about your use of this site is shared with Google. By using this site, you agree to its use of cookies." The main content of the page features a photograph of a pink lace basket filled with various Sun Food products, including jars of jam and tins of preserves. Below the photo, the text reads: "Azi, este din nou o zi încărcată de iubire: Dragobetele. Fiecare ne exprimăm dragostea în mai multe feluri. Eu, azi am ales să o transpun într-un mesaj dulce, gustos și deosebit. Este vorba despre cupcakes cu **piersici Sun Food** și fulgi de ciocolată. Ce ziceți? Sună bine, nu-i așa? Dacă doriți să pregătiți și voi acest cadou dulce, să știți că găsiți piersicile Sun Food și multe alte sortimente de conserve pe [site-ul www.sunfood.ro](http://www.sunfood.ro), dar și pe [pagina lor de Facebook](#). Iubiți-vă mult de Dragobete și în orice zi! Enjoy!"

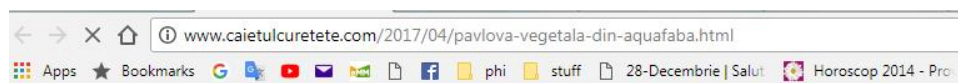
Fig.2 Featured product on the „Angi Food” culinary blog (photo credit: <https://angi-food.blogspot.com/2018/02/cupcakes-cu-piersici-sun-food-si-fulgi.html>)

From the perspective of the identity of the person to whom the blog belongs, we meet the personal blog and the professional blog. The personal blog presents the lifestyle, habits, author's personality, from a subjective perspective. The professional blog belongs to a leader in a specific field, presents ideas from a professional perspective and has the ability to change public opinion.

Here are some examples of gastronomy bloggers who have chosen to work with a particular food company. This collaboration involves a barter: the company offers products with which kitchen enthusiasts use them in the

preparation of food. Obviously, bloggers are free to post what they want on their personal pages. Just looking at things from the point of view of someone with interest, we can say that they are trying to manipulate the purchase of a product to the detriment of another. If the blogger I'm following uses only a specific product means that the product is the best and without it I cannot succeed in making my dish. On the other hand, if we are talking about a reader who does not get impressed slightly, then this kind of collaboration might leave him indifferent.

Here we have a blogger telling us that love can be shared through a „sweet, tasty and special message” (nothing out of place here). in the form of cupcakes (small and round cookies) where peaches of the „Sun Food” brand are used, obviously sending readers to the company's website for their purchase. Next to this invitation we find a picture of cupcakes and a box of „Sun Food” peaches. (Fig.2)



Aquafaba este practic zeama in care au fiert boabele de naut sau fasole, zeama care se comporta exact ca albusul de ou. Se preteaza foarte bine lichidul din conservele de naut sau fasole Sun Food, fiindca sunt preparate natural si nu contin sare.

Waiting for 2.bp.blogspot.com...

Fig. 3 Featured product on the „Recipe Notebook” culinary blog (photo credit: <http://www.caietulcuretete.com/2017/04/pavlova-vegetala-din-aquafaba.html>)

On another culinary blog, www.caietulcuretete.com („The Recipe Notebook”), we are invited to use an ingredient from the same company, Sun Food, for preparing a dessert, only this time a can of chickpeas is used. The picture is suggestive because we can also find the Sun Food chickpeas

alongside the finished culinary product. The blogger insists that the food is „very good” because it is natural and does not contain salt. Of course, if we are talking about preserving vegetables (chickpeas, beans, etc.), we inevitably talk about keeping them as safe as possible so they do not go bad, and this is primarily done with salt. (Fig. 3)

The Andreea's Chinesefood blog presents the product from Sun Food, a can of chopped tomatoes, along with other foods to be used for cooking: parmesan, minced meat, dried onions, eggs, and spices. We note that none of these have any producing company, except for the Sun Food chopped tomatoes. (Fig.4)

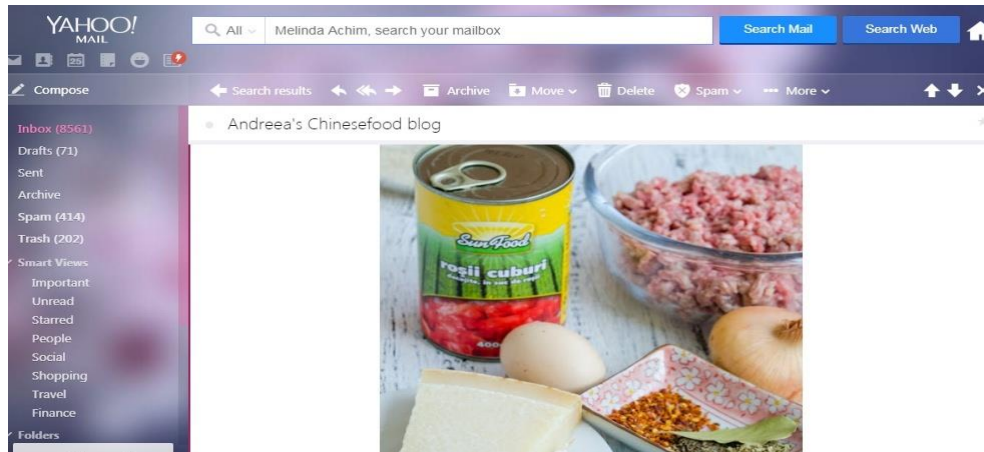


Fig. 4 Featured product in the newsletter from „Andreea's Chinesefood” culinary blog (print screen from the author's email)

In all these examples, we note that a certain brand of food is used in the preparation of various recipes, which can very easily lead to manipulation of the purchase of a product to the detriment of another. The Sun Food ad campaign is, thus, worth noting, being a less traditional, aggressive, well-targeted campaign that uses bloggers who are passionate about the art of cooking. So, the reader is inoculated with the idea that only a particular brand is suitable for the success of a preparation. An analysis of the number of readers who acquire this brand as a result of viewing bloggers would be welcome.

Regarding the newsletter communication activity by e-mail, on 25 May 2018, the EU passed Regulation 2016/679 / EU on the protection of individuals residing in the EU, known as General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) . The processing of personal data through the Newsletter service refers to informing customers about product news, offers and services of organizations. The purpose of the processing is to periodically send information about product news, offers, and services to organizations, and processed data, that is, only the email address, are used to deliver the newsletter service. The processing period is the length of time

for which the newsletter service is activated and the archiving deadlines. According to the GDPR, the rights of the data subject are: the right of access, the right to data portability, the right to object, the right to rectification, the right to delete the data, the right to restrict the processing. It is also acknowledged the right to address to the Personal Data Protection Authority and the courts if the person is deemed to be injured by the processing.

However, the GDPR framework, although appearing to be a serious hindrance to unsolicited advertising dressed up as newsletters, is by no means an antidote for it. Companies, media institutions, and other involved parties are required to ask for consent in acquiring, managing, and transferring to third parties personal data such as emails, so in theory, one should know all the time where one's personal data is. But given the carelessness with which we dispense our personal data, this may not always be the case. Furthermore, once approval is received and compliance secured (through honest pleading, incentives, or, why not, long blocks of text which no one reads), one could return to business as usual.

Conclusion

As a form of mass communication, the newsletter appears in different ways, from a notification from a company (about new products or services) to media products (as news) or articles on different themes published by bloggers. These forms of notification towards the public contain messages that manipulate on two levels: first, at the level of discourse, where there is no correlation between the newsletter title and the rest of the message. If the title gives us a thought about a certain action (culinary preparation, for the examples above) with different ingredients, the text instead proposes the use of certain brands that produce these ingredients. Secondly, manipulation is at the level of human behavior: if you want your dish to be a success, you must buy food from a particular company. We underline once again that every blogger is free to write what he/she wants on his/her personal page, and the choice is for the reader to let himself/herself be manipulated or not. However, more attention should be paid to these newsletters, both from bloggers (in order for them not to lose readers) and from those who receive them (in terms of their selection).

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