

How to Set Up a Local Newsletter

Adapted from an article by the producers of "The Pork-bolter"

1. ORGANISE A MEETING:

You've talked about it down the pub with a few mates. You all think it's a great idea. There are a few more people you can think of who'd be interested. So just get on with it - it's not going to happen otherwise. Fix a date, time and venue (could be someone's house, it's not a public meeting). Leave other possibilities wide open. It's important for everyone to have had a say in the shaping of the project from the start.

2. GET IT ALL SORTED:

There's no point in having your founding moment and then coming away having vaguely agreed to do something soon. Probably. When we've got our act together. The minimum you should have agreed is a name and address, which will in turn enable you to set up a building society account in your newsletter's name. We use a PO Box, which costs about fifty quid a year. It would probably be better to have an actual local street address, not just to save cash but so people could drop stuff in by hand and bypass the official mail system.

3. THINK OF A GOOD NAME:

OK, maybe you can't take that advice from a group with a title like The Pork-Bolter. But it is a genuinely historical nickname for Worthing people and the piggie identity has provided us with hours of puns. The main requirements are that it should be a local name and that it shouldn't put people off reading your stuff by being too overtly political. This may not come naturally to most would-be rabble-rousers, but you are addressing ordinary people here and not fellow subversive scum. On the same lines, there is no need to invent a separate name for the group producing the newsletter. It may well prove an own goal to declare that ON THE BOG - What's Going Down in Little Bogweed is published by the South Bogshire Emiliano Zapata Revolutionary Militia Propaganda Outreach Cell.

4. THE NITTY-GRITTY:

Thinking of a name is the fun bit and may

well take up 95% of your opening meeting (if you let it). But you've also got to think about boring detail, like what size is the newsletter going to be, how often will it come out, how many will you get printed and so on. Without wanting to come across all sycophantic, we were greatly inspired by Schnews in our inception and had no qualms about blatantly copying their format. You'd be amazed at how much you can fit on a double-sided piece of A4. As far as frequency is concerned, once a month seems about right for us. Quantity is obviously limited by funds. Try getting 500 done to start with, then up it to 1,000 or more if your distribution is working. Another advantage of double-sided A4 format is that it is easy to photocopy and you may be able to supplement your print run with the help of office-worker volunteers (and various people will be busy copying and distributing them round their mates and colleagues who you won't even know know about...)

5. PRINTING:

Cheap photocopying/printing is hard to come by, but very useful. Don't just rush out to the nearest High Street print shop. Ask around for ideas about cheaper options. Try your local student union or college print department or local resource centre. If all else fails, why not bring out the newsletter at whatever cost and appeal to readers for leads on cheaper printing. You never know who may come forward.

6. PAYING FOR IT:

You'll probably find yourselves fulfilling this role. But spread between the group members it doesn't come to much. If you meet at someone's home instead of in the pub, you'll have probably paid for the next issue from what would have been spent at the bar. Other costs may well be covered by donations/subscriptions.

7. GETTING IT OUT:

Distribution is a piece of cake when it's free. It's just a question of getting them all out into

the hands of the local population. You can do that most directly by standing in the town centre and thrusting them rudely into people's hands (with a smile on your face). And you can leave them in public places like the library and town hall (small amounts but frequently - they tend to get removed). Ask in shops if you can leave a pile on the counter. And in pubs. You'll be surprised at the positive reaction to a lively local newsletter. Keen people should also be able to subscribe for a small charge to cover postage (though since they're local you could drop them in by hand and save the stamp).

8. CONTENTS:

You'd forgotten about that small detail, hadn't you? What do you put in the bloody thing? This should not really be a problem for anyone who's got as far as even thinking about doing a newsletter. First of all you read all the mainstream local papers. And then you get very angry with all the stuff the council's up to and the MP is spouting on about. And then you don't just forget about it and resolve not to read annoying local papers anymore, but instead you cut out the relevant bits and bring them along to the next newsletter meeting. And everyone else says how crap the council is and takes the piss a bit and someone else has cut a bit out of The Big Issue which sort of fits in. Meanwhile, a person with biro-manipulating skills writes down the best bits. And lo, the contents start to emerge. Add in your own little campaigns (anti-GM, anti-CCTV, anti-negative attitudes etc), plus titbits about worthy local groups (Friends of the Earth, animal welfare, etc, etc) and you've got a newsletter.

9. CAMPAIGNS:

Gives a positive focus amidst all the sniping from the sidelines. But obviously depends on what's happening locally. And what you're into.

10. KEEP IT LOCAL:

Forget the recommendation to act locally and think globally. You have to start thinking locally as well. Only then can you go on to draw your political conclusions. For instance, trying to persuade people here

that global capitalism is a bad thing because it is destroying the Amazon rainforests is a waste of time. But talk to them about the way that money-grabbing property developers are allowed to build all over green spaces on the edge of your town and your readers will understand why you then call for an end to the rule of greed and money over people and countryside. In your newsletter your views can clearly be seen as common sense. You are normal and the council/property developers/government are the outsiders - reversing the way radical views are conventionally presented. Use words like 'we' and 'our' a lot.

11. HAVE A LAUGH:

A jokey approach makes people read your newsletter and explodes certain ill-founded stereotypes about types involved in radical political initiatives. Could be a problem, though, if your group does in fact happen to be entirely composed of humourless left-wing gits.

12. LAW-ABIDING:

Remember that you can get done for libel if you make certain claims about individuals. Get round this with humorous digs and heavy use of satire and sarcasm (think Private Eye, Have I Got News For You, etc). It is worth knowing that you cannot libel a council - so go for it!

13. MEDIA:

You yourselves are the new media for the town, so you don't need to worry about publicity. But if they want to give a rival organ a boost, that's just dandy.

14. CARRY ON PUBLISHING!

There will be ups and downs. New people will join your circle. Others will drift away. It might seem like nobody's taking any notice of you at all. But in fact your subversive message will be permeating the very fabric of your community. It's got to be worth it.