e-News: Reaching Members in the Digital Age

Overview:
Just as our Madison Symphony Orchestra strives to maintain and expand its subscriber base, the MSOL wants to maintain its base of members (our subscribers.) We realized that more frequent and timely communication with members was critical to keeping them engaged with the organization. Our e-News project was born out of the belief that the greater the connection a member has with the organization, the more likely they are to renew.

Project Description:
The Madison Symphony Orchestra League (MSOL) began in the paper era when member communications were printed and mailed. For decades the MSOL produced a monthly newsletter, which was very labor-intensive. In 2011, our news was given its page in The SCORE, the Symphony’s quarterly newsletter distributed to all subscribers. Once we no longer had a members-only newsletter, when we had specific news to communicate just to members, we began sending emails. These were sporadic, not consistent. It became clear over time that a section in The SCORE alone wasn’t enough to communicate effectively or frequently with members. Returning to a paper newsletter wasn’t an option: no one was going to volunteer to produce that each month! We needed a modern technique which could include hyperlinks and be sent by email. However, going digital required someone with digital communication skills. Luckily for the organization, a member had recently joined who had such skills as the owner of an advertising and marketing business. She saw our need and, best of all, was willing to take on the task. Our monthly e-News was born! We are now able to consistently showcase our initiatives, list new members who joined the past month, link to upcoming events, and more. The e-News has proven an ideal way to share information and engage members on a regular and timely basis.

Goals & Measurement:
Our goal in creating the e-News was to provide members with ready access to information and keep the organization front and center with them. We believed by doing this they would remain interested and committed members and spread the word to others. At the time we submitted the e-News for award consideration, we had a monthly open rate of 49% (music industry standard is 15.6%). Our click-through rate was 20.7% (industry-standard 2.9%). We also looked at membership growth; we experienced a nearly 20% increase in new members and were able to retain 95% of our members. We continue to have strong engagement with members through our e-News.

Cost:
The time to produce this monthly e-News is donated. It takes her approximately four hours each month to compile, write, and design the newsletter. Based on the rate she would bill a client ($125 per hour) each monthly e-News could cost $500 if we had to pay for it.

Volunteer Involvement:
The e-News is 100% volunteer-driven with assistance from staff to obtain photos or Symphony created content (as requested).

Considerations & Recommendations:
• Consider doing a member skills assessment to determine if there is someone with digital communications background;
• Use the creation of your e-News as an opportunity to recruit younger member(s); highlight that this is a role that can be done remotely;
• Take advantage of the ability to add links to your web page for event registration, volunteer sign-ups and member renewals;
• Cross-promote timely Symphony content (especially season subscription renewal) through links to the website;
• Illustrate each e-News item with a photo and feature photos from your events and activities.
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MEMBER E-NEWS

To our MSOL members,

We express our gratitude for your support of the Madison Symphony Orchestra League and your participation in our MSOL events, volunteer activities, and our MSOL docent support of the music education in our schools and community engagement projects.

About the MSO and MSOL:

Now in its 94th Season, the Madison Symphony Orchestra (a Group 3 Orchestra) enriches the cultural and educational environment of Madison and the surrounding area with performances of the great masterworks and top-tier guest artists from around the world. In addition, MSO’s nationally-recognized Education and Community Engagement Programs bring the joy of music to more than 25,000 children and adults annually. Under the artistic leadership of Music Director John DeMain, the Symphony has grown to be one of America’s leading regional orchestras. In 2018 the MSO celebrated John DeMain’s 25th anniversary with the orchestra.

Part of the Madison community since 1956, the Madison Symphony Orchestra League (MSOL) is an organization of more than 370 members committed to supporting the Madison Symphony Orchestra’s artistic, financial and educational mission. Membership is open to all.

View the MSOL April e-News online: madisonsymphony.org/msol- enews-apr-2020

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