

CREDIT UNION JOURNAL

The Old CU Media

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By Ray Birch

TEMPE, Ariz.-Credit unions are cutting back on one of the long-time staples of credit union marketing - but most are not cutting it out.

The credit union newsletter still serves a purpose, say many marketers, especially for those with nationwide memberships or that serve SEGs. But most recognize the cost for print has become prohibitive today, and are shifting to electronic formats.

The shift to electronic - often a PDF posted on the credit union's website and not HTML - is the right thing to do, said [Nicolette Lemmon](#), president of [LemmonTree Marketing Group](#). But [Lemmon](#) cautioned against eliminating the printed newsletter until the credit union has a critical mass of members using online channels or has a large percentage of members' e-mail addresses. "At the majority of credit unions, I don't think we are there yet," Lemmon said.

[Sean McDonald](#), director of business development and marketing at Liberty Savings FCU, in Jersey City, N.J., agrees. He said the \$57-million LSFCU converts its quarterly print newsletter to a PDF and sends a link to members with e-mail addresses in the CU's system. The rest still get the printed product, but the PDF is reducing costs, now about \$25,000 annually. [McDonald](#) said the CU researches readership of the newsletter by inserting coupons and special offers. "We know our members read it, and we try to keep the news as interesting as possible," shared McDonald, who writes the copy.

[Amy Davis](#), VP-marketing at the \$540-million Red Canoe CU in Longview, Wash., believes that if a CU is just "caranking out" a newsletter in which content isn't relevant and fresh, it's wasting money. In Red Canoe's case, it believes the \$40,000 it budgets annually for an eight-page, four-color magazine-style publication, sees strong ROI. "For us, having a national reach, the newsletter is our only touch point to about 30% of our membership. So we make sure it is exciting and interesting." A bi-annual readership survey confirms that the newsletter "ranks highly" with members.

Putting the Money Toward Better Use

That is not the case at the \$162-million Cabrillo CU in San Diego. [Anne Legg](#), VP-marketing, said that after moving its newsletter online just over a year ago and monitoring readership, Cabrillo decided that interest was lacking and stopped producing its newsletter. "For those kinds of marketing dollars, \$30,000 a year, we could use that money in a different way and be more effective. We had been doing a newsletter for so many years, and when I look back on it, I think we have more robust content on our website, and it is updatable."

At the \$1.7-billion California Coast CU in San Diego, Marketing and Community Relations VP [Renee McKee](#) has transitioned her CU's quarterly, four-color newsletter to online to save money. But after monitoring downloads of the PDF, she said, CCCU is reevaluating the format and may move to HTML. "We think it may not be as effective online in its current format," said [McKee](#). "At this point we are trying to get clicks up."

[Kathryn Davis](#), SVP-marketing and HR at the \$780-million Xceed Financial CU in El Segundo, Calif., is pleased with the 35% open rate for the PDF and HTML versions of its member newsletter. The shift to electronic from print was made in concert with the credit union's emphasis on online marketing, and to support green efforts. "Our newsletter's opening rate continues to increase. We just feel it is really relevant."

In Missoula, the \$60-million Montana First CU's longstanding four-color print newsletter is on life support, said Chief Administrative Officer [Tyler Disburg](#). "The traditional CU newsletter is just a cost-center, at least for us. We are community chartered with high indirect lending penetration, and many people don't want a further relationship with us. If we were SEG-based it might be different. The only reason we have not disbanded the newsletter is because we need to find a vehicle that communicates certain information, like holiday hours."

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