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Distribution

Once the newsletter is off the press, it has to get into the mail. The performance of that final operation is the subject of this chapter.

All groups, regardless of size, must provide for the steps in the distribution process. Some large groups are willing to pay the printer to collate and perhaps even to staple and trim the copies, in view of the labor they save. But most groups still do their own assembly, usually combining it with the labeling and bundling steps. The section on circulation in this chapter assumes familiarity with the mailing requirements and advance folding and stapling of the newsletter. Its recommendations for preparing labels, keeping up to date with address changes, and so forth, can apply to groups of any size.

NOTE: Even though postal regulations may appear to be very clear and specific, interpretation is left to the local post office. Individual postmasters may differ greatly in their understanding and application of such policies as what to classify as advertising. In all cases, you must learn and abide by the regulations as interpreted at your local post office. Do not expect your postmaster to be overly protective of your mailing permit.

Assembly

Some groups call it “FS&M” (fold, staple, and mutilate, marinate, or mail, as the case may be); some call it “lick & stick”; some have even more idiosyncratic and obscure terms for the process. What they are all talking about is the step between picking up the newsletter from the printer and delivering it to the post office. All told, it

involves collating the pages (if there is more than a single sheet per copy), folding, stapling, attaching mailing address labels, applying stamps (if first class) or (if second or third class) bundling in ZIP code groups, making a count of copies for the records, and preparing the postal forms required for bulk mailing.

Even if the size of your mailing is small and you figure you can handle it yourself—with, perhaps, a spouse, roommate, or offspring pressed into service—consider making it a group effort. A mailing of just fifty copies quickly grows tedious, and an extra pair of willing hands can turn mindless drudgery into a lively social occasion. Don't deprive your members of the opportunity to contribute to the group's support in a way that requires no special talent or skill but that produces concrete, worthwhile results. Many groups find that FS&M has special appeal to new, shy, or socially cautious members: a work session relieves a great deal of the social pressure of meeting new people while offering a sure introduction to the group's busiest, most active members. All it takes to make newsletter assembly a collaborative project is a location and enough notice to summon helpers by phone, if not by advance announcement in a prior issue. Some members may come who don't attend anything else, and there may even be those who enjoy it enough to plan their time around it. These are things we do not question.

The remainder of this chapter is represented below in skeletal form only; some, if not all, of the information it contains is out of date and potentially misleading. Editors should obtain current information and guidance on these topics from the appropriate sources. —M.A. 1/26/2002

Preparation

Collating, Folding, and Stapling

Labeling and Bundling

Second Class Mailing

Prerequisites

Procedure

Bulk Rate

Circulation

Preface

Spreading the Work Out with a System

Label Updates, Precounts, and Sorting

The Mailing Party

Conclusion