Community group newsletters

Here we describe how a community group can create an attractive e-mail newsletter using its Digital Fife website.

Community group newsletters are normally sent to members and others who have expressed an interest in the group, so there is little chance of the newsletter being deleted or binned without being looked at.

However, you should not take your readers for granted. These days people are used to very high visual and editorial standards in their communications and you should not compromise on quality just because you assume the readers will automatically be interested.

The Digital Fife "List" widget allows you to create short articles that can each include a title, text content, picture and link. As well as making for an attractive web page, the widget can generate automatically an e-mail that can be sent to recipients using the Digital Fife e-mail tools.

1. Create the list of e-mail recipients

All organisations holding and using personal data need to comply with the General Data Processing Regulations. This is likely to hold true even after we have fully left the EU. In the context of community group newsletters, this means that you cannot hold contact details of individuals and send them e-mails and other communications without their consent.
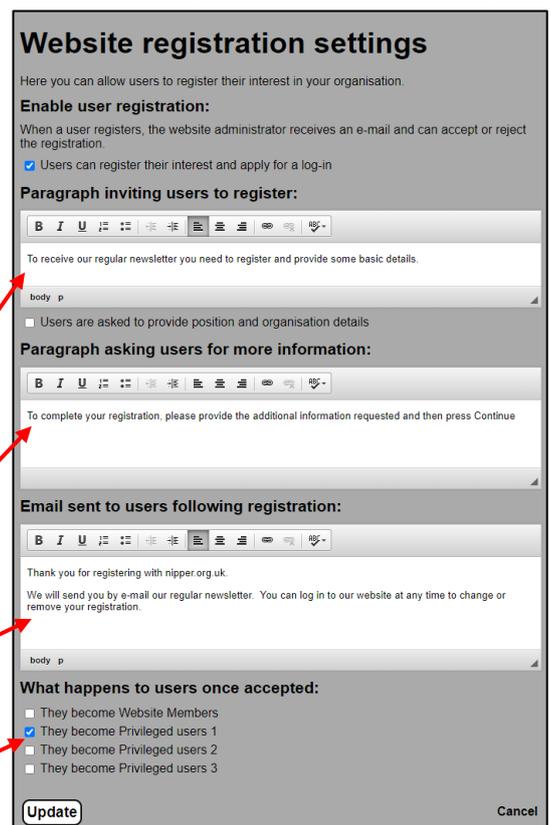
Digital Fife includes tools that allow you to build and maintain a database of users who consent to being contacted. The database is accessed through Admin > Advanced settings > Manage users:
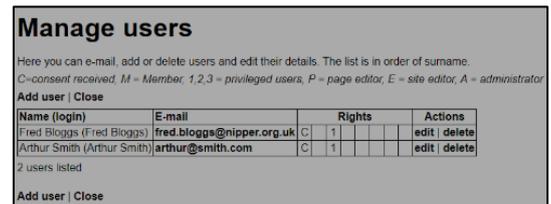
You can build this database manually from information you have received from members and others who have consented to belong to the e-mail mailing list. To do this click "Add user", fill in the user's name, a password and e-mail address and assign the appropriate user rights. "Consent received" indicates that you have the consent of the user and "Privileged user 1" allows you to select this class of user for your newsletter mailing.

You can also ask users to register themselves to receive newsletters. To do this go under "Advanced settings" to "Website registration settings". This offers a wide variety of options related to registration and logging in. Those related to newsletter registration are shown here.

Message on log-in page inviting users to register for newsletter

Message after user clicks "Register" on login page

E-mail sent to user on successful registration

Privileges if any granted to user on successful registration

When a user clicks "Login" an additional "Register" option now appears. When the user clicks this they are asked for basic personal information as shown.

The user is then sent a confirmation e-mail automatically and can subsequently log in to change their registration details. You are also sent an e-mail giving you the option to accept or reject the registration.

2. *Create the web page containing the e-mail content*

Starting with a new basic page, create a "List" widget in the main body of the page. There can also be other widgets on this page, for example in the information column.

The widget set-up box is shown on the right. Apart from the standard widget options, you can set a sort order for the articles. You can also set some formatting options.

Items are created and edited as follows:

Each item can contain a title, html content, link and picture.

The main content is entered with the help of a toolbar that allows for various formatting options. The link can be to a web page or to a document stored in the website library. The link text should clarify what the link does.

Finally, the picture can be sized and placed to the left, right, top or bottom of the text.

The first step is to build an attractive web page by creating each article and putting the articles in the correct order. The e-mail will look very similar to the web page, so it is worth spending time to get this right.

Clicking "generate e-mail" at the top of the widget pops up a window showing what the content of the e-mail will look like. This will be very similar to the widget on the web page. There may be some small formatting differences as e-mails use different layout tools to web pages. Most significantly, e-mails are formatted to be 640 pixels wide.

Overleaf is an example of the pop-up window.

Press "Cancel" to make any adjustments necessary and then press "Continue" to move on to complete the e-mail.

Here you can add an e-mail subject (compulsory) and a header and footer for your e-mail (both are optional)

You should also include your own e-mail address for testing purposes and choose who should receive the e-mail. Finally, there is an option to add a document from your library as an attachment. Pressing "Continue" then takes you to your e-mail library.

You can also access this library by clicking "Admin" > "Advanced settings" > "Manage e-mails".

3. Send the e-mail newsletter

When you have built up a list of consenting users – either manually or automatically – you can then send them an e-mail by clicking "Manage e-mails" under "Advanced settings".

It is always a good idea to send yourself a test message first and you can enter an e-mail address for this.

Clicking "Continue" takes you back to the list of e-mails and you can click "View" for a final check of the e-mail content and formatting and then "Test" to send yourself the e-mail. When this has arrived, check it to confirm all is as you expect and then click "Send" to prepare to send out the e-mail to all selected users.

When you send the e-mail you will be asked to confirm by retyping random numbers in a box and will then see a list of those to whom the e-mail has been sent.

Bob Crichton - HOP Associates, 15th December 2020