

Creativity Networking and the *ICN Newsletter*:  
An Executive Summary of Stengel's 1994 Master's Project  
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Introduction

In this project Mary Theresa Stengel examined and compared a sample of newsletters including the *ICN Newsletter* and other creativity newsletters in order to make recommendations concerning the enhanced use of the *ICN Newsletter* as a networking tool for creativity practitioners and researchers (Stengel, 1994). The author provided an overview of newsletters in general, including definition, characteristics, history, development and function. A special emphasis was placed on their role in networking, particularly in non-profit and grassroots organizations.

Stengel's sample consisted of more than one hundred newsletters varying widely in purpose, content, format, scope and editorial style. Fifteen examples were selected for further study and were included in the actual project as appendices. She approached her examination of the sample using the following five questions as a framework:

1. What are both the historic and current levels of development for newsletters in general?
2. What are the levels of development among creativity-based newsletters?
3. How does the *ICN Newsletter* compare to newsletters in general?
4. How is the *ICN Newsletter* similar to, or different from, other creativity newsletters?

5. How does the *ICN Newsletter* serve a specific role in the creativity field, unduplicated by other publications? (Stengel, p. 9)

After conducting her analysis and comparison, Stengel made 10 recommendations for improvement of the *ICN Newsletter*.

### Context

Some background was included to help readers understand the context of the project. She described the *ICN Newsletter* as the official publication of the International Creativity Network (ICN), an association established in 1991 as a result of a desire expressed by many creativity organizations and centers to promote creativity. The quarterly *ICN Newsletter* was originally conceived as a networking tool that would encourage and enable dialogue among creativity professionals from various centers and organizations. The newsletter was published from 1991 to 1996 by the Center for Studies in Creativity in Buffalo, New York. In an effort to encourage collegiality and to provide nurture for the emerging discipline, the ICN also created two other communication vehicles: a referral system or membership directory listing members' interests and areas of expertise; and an annual gift of a publication devoted to a creativity issue or topic.

Stengel also examined other creativity newsletters published concurrently with the *ICN Newsletter* including the Center for Creative Leadership's *Issues & Observations*, the Creative Education Foundation's *Creativity in Action*, the Occupational Research Centre's *KAI International* and Creative Learning International's *The Innovator*.

### Method

Stengel began the project by conducting a search of the literature to find background information on newsletters and to build a framework of understanding. She

assembled examples of more than one hundred newsletters and after examining them chose 15 including the *ICN Newsletter* and four other creativity newsletters to be included in her comparison study.

Following an analysis of the *ICN Newsletter*'s published content since its inception and an examination of the other 14 newsletters, Stengel selected nine categories to be used in her comparison study. She compared and contrasted the *ICN Newsletter* to the other newsletters according to these nine categories in order to determine recommendations about its development and use as a networking tool in the field of creativity.

### Outcomes

Stengel observed that newsletters have served throughout the years as vehicles for linking people and disseminating information, particularly in grassroots and non-profit organizations where people united by a cause or concern may never meet face-to-face. She also found that newsletters have served as archives, documenting efforts both organizational and individual that might otherwise have been forgotten. She noted that networking was most effective when each reader felt at the center of the network and that the *ICN Newsletter* and newsletters in general “must reinforce this view” (Stengel, p. 47).

After an in-depth analysis of the *ICN Newsletter* and 14 other newsletters - particularly the other creativity newsletters constituting the ‘competition’ - the author made the following 10 recommendations for the *ICN Newsletter*'s development:

- TITLE: Initiate a reader competition to create a more imaginative and memorable title that cleverly and aptly describes the purpose and focus of the newsletter.

- **COLOR OF PAPER:** The least expensive way to add color to the newsletter would be to print not on white paper but on a pale shade of colored paper that would not interfere with subscribers' duplication of pages.
- **FREQUENCY OF DISTRIBUTION:** Change the newsletter from a twelve-page quarterly to a six-page bi-monthly. The newsletter would be offering annually the same number of pages and same amount of content but would be engaging the readership more frequently. The author also suggested formatting the newsletter as a self-mailer in order to offset some of the costs created by the more frequent mailings.
- **ILLUSTRATIONS:** More illustrations, particularly line drawings, were recommended as a way to break up the text and give the newsletter a lighter appearance.
- **MEDIUM:** Experiment with distribution methods and multi-media presentation to find new and unique ways of packaging and delivering information to the readership.
- **PROMOTIONS:** Explore the possibility of sharing resources and membership with the Creative Education Foundation (CEF). Complimentary subscriptions and free sample issues may attract article submissions and new members.
- **SPECIAL EDITIONS:** Occasionally devote an entire issue to one specific topic.
- **INFORMATION ON READERS:** Utilize both paper and telephone surveys to elicit feedback from readership. The author provided drafts of each.
- **RECURRING FEATURES:** Establish regular columns such as games and puzzles, children's features, a section on software, and other recurring features.

- FORMAT IDEAS: Experiment with formatting to find something unique and intriguing. Use of a second ink color is mentioned.

Stengel made these suggestions in the hope that the *ICN Newsletter* would become a more effective networking tool, convince its creative readership of the benefits of networking, and serve as a demonstration of networking in action.

As an additional outcome of the study, the author annotated the *ICN Newsletter* and the four other creativity newsletters of the time for the Creativity Based Information Resources (CBIR) database. This addition provides a valuable and interesting resource for those who are interested in the context of that timeframe or the institutions or sponsors who were providing service to the field.

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