



# Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> Phone Forum

## Getting the Word Out: Strategies for Writing Effective Commuting Newsletters

February 5, 2004

Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup>

*Available exclusively to Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup>, phone forums provide cutting-edge information on a range of topics related to commuter benefits. Moderated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), these forums feature experts on key topic areas.*

On February 5, 2004, Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> held a phone forum to assist employers in producing effective commuting newsletters. Patrice Thornton, EPA forum moderator, provided opening remarks and introduced the featured participants.

### Featured Participants

In December, the Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> team organized a newsletter contest. The three most eye-catching, informative, and persuasive newsletters won the competition. Their creators—Carol Berry, Paul Metzger, and Danielle Mancano—shared tips on writing effective newsletters in this month's forum.

#### Carol Berry, Western Washington University

Carol Berry is the employee transportation coordinator for Western Washington University. She began promoting the university's commuter benefits program several years ago with a very small budget and few materials. School administration granted Ms. Berry use of a number of information kiosks around campus, so she refurbished the kiosks to advertise their program and designed a newsletter to distribute.

To gain confidence in newsletter layout, Ms. Berry took a short graphic design

course. The following are a few tips for an effective newsletter:

- Use white space to make the newsletter visually appealing, uncluttered, and easy to read.
- Do not use more than three fonts.
- Give headlines impact by using a larger font size.
- Use pictures to break up blocks of text.
- Print the newsletter on high-quality, heavy paper (especially if it has to stand up in a distribution box on a kiosk).

When school administration saw the effects of Ms. Berry's promotions, they provided funding for more, higher-quality materials. Now she e-mails all employees a full 2-page newsletter in PDF format every year. A shorter, more frequently updated version is distributed at the kiosks, and a supplementary brochure is sent to new employees. It asks: "You Got the Job-How are You Going to Get to Work Every Day?" Ms. Berry also sends press releases about commuter benefits to the university's general faculty and staff newsletter and maintains a listserv of groups who are invested in the commuter benefits program: the staff/employee council, administrators group, and the faculty senate.

To conclude, Ms. Berry shared a final tip about promoting a commuter benefits program: "It's important that you emphasize that walking, riding a bike, or taking a bus to work is easy, fun, rewarding, and *mainstream*." She explained that commuter benefits are not only for employees who are devoted to saving the environment—they are for everyone, and everyone can take advantage of them.

For more information, contact Ms. Berry at <carol.berry@wwu.edu> or (360) 650-7960.



## Paul Metzger, Pfizer New Jersey

Paul Metzger is the commute options coordinator for Pfizer in Morris Plains, New Jersey. His primary goal is to encourage Pfizer employees to use alternative methods of commuting. He writes a monthly newsletter about commuting options, made accessible to employees through a link on Pfizer's intranet homepage. Three to four times a year, he holds a Commute Options Day in the Pfizer cafeteria, distributing informational materials and answering questions about alternative methods of commuting.

Mr. Metzger also shared some tips about the content of an effective newsletter:

- Keep it short.
- Include graphics to make it appealing.
- Make sure that your text is catchy and upbeat.
- Focus on a few topics each newsletter—do not overload your reader with information.
- Make it easy and fast to read.

Mr. Metzger's newsletter is always accessible to employees, either electronically or in hard-copy form at information kiosks. "Our program targets employees who have frustrating commutes," he said, "and there is always information available when they're thinking about rideshare."

For more information, contact Mr. Metzger at <paul.metzger@pfizer.com> or (973) 385-2267.

## Danielle Mancano, Wyeth Pharmaceuticals

Danielle Mancano is the commuter assistance center manager at Wyeth headquarters in Collegeville, Pennsylvania. She has made the commuter assistance center a "one stop shop" for commuting information. She distributes a monthly electronic publication called "The Commuter Chronicle." The newsletter, e-mailed to employees at the end of every month, includes:

- Commuting news - new bus lines, service changes.

- Shuttle updates (four shuttles run between Wyeth's Collegeville campuses).
- Construction/traffic advisories
- Fast facts about commuting (available from DOT, local TMAs, and <www.bwc.gov>).

Ms. Mancano noted that the "fast facts" section of her newsletter, containing attention-grabbing and easy to remember commuting facts, is the most commonly read section. These facts can also be used to add interest to posters and other materials.

For more information, contact Ms. Mancano at <mancand@wyeth.com> or (484) 563-7012.

## Open Discussion

Following the featured speakers' presentations, other forum participants had a chance to ask questions and provide additional information on some of the topics discussed.

- Patty Klavon from EPA asked how the speakers encourage employees to access their newsletters online. Paul Metzger from Pfizer explained that employees are not explicitly prompted to read his commuting newsletter. When it is updated, a special link to it appears on the Pfizer intranet Web site and it is listed in the "What's New on the Pfizer Web site" page maintained by Pfizer's information technology department.
- Patrice Thornton from EPA asked the speakers if they write and distribute their newsletters single-handedly. Paul Metzger and Carol Berry explained that they are the only people in their organizations who write their commuter newsletters. Ms. Berry mentioned that she only had time to publish a newsletter three or four times per year.
- EPA asked how the speakers select topics for their newsletters. Mr. Metzger acknowledged the difficulty of selecting new topics for a commuting newsletter: "We are selling a limited number of products; I rotate the focus of the

newsletter each time.” He emphasized that the purpose of the newsletter is “to keep reminding employees that [commuting options] are here for them.”

- Danielle Mancano explained that she receives updates from transportation management agencies and rewrites them in an appropriate form for her newsletter.
- Mary Closser from the City of Boulder asked how the speakers spice up their newsletters. Ms. Mancano emphasized the appeal of fast facts as attention-grabbers. She noted that some good facts to use are available in a book called *Divorce Your Car* by Katherine T. Alvord. Ms. Berry also suggested Andy Singer’s “carToons,” which she can print royalty-free if the cartoons are used to promote alternative transportation ([www.andysinger.com](http://www.andysinger.com)).
- Mr. Metzger mentioned that his employees were not interested in traffic advisories and construction updates “They’re already driving in that traffic,” he said.
- Ms. Thornton noted that a newsletter “should be able to capture a reader’s attention in one second.”

## Closing

Patrice Thornton from EPA closed by thanking the featured participants for their presentations and thanking the employers for participating in the forum. Ms. Thornton encouraged employers to learn more about creating newsletters and mentioned SkillPath Seminars ([www.skillpath.com](http://www.skillpath.com)) as a training option. She referred employers to the new Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> Online Employer Tool Kit, which currently includes sections on marketing commuter benefits programs internally and externally. She indicated that EPA will send out a summary of the forum to employers and post it on the Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> Web site. Ms. Thornton also indicated that the next phone forum will

focus on carsharing. Employers who have additional questions and feedback, including ideas for upcoming phone forums, can contact EPA at <[bwc@epa.gov](mailto:bwc@epa.gov)>.