BUSINESS REPORTS

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INTRODUCTION:

It can be defined as a communication in which a person, who is assigned the work of report making, gives information to some individual or organization because it is his or her responsibility to do so. Speaking briefly, it is an assigned communication for a specific audience to meet specific need. And this specific need is decision making as decision making and research conclusions are dependent on the information and recommendations presented in the reports.

The word 'report' is derived from the Latin word - 'reportare' - means to bring back. A report may be defined as a formal document based on a collection of facts, events and opinions and usually expresses a summarized and interpretative value of this information. It may deal with past accomplishment, present conditions or probable future development. Reports have become a part of life of each and every employee whether low profile or high profile. For when the sale of some company declines, the sales manager has to prepare a report looking in to the causes of declining sale and offering some constructive suggestions to arrest the decline.

The purpose for which reports are written very widely, given below are some important purposes of reports:

- To give information about a company's activities, progress, plans and problems.
- To record events for future reference in decision making.
- To discuss and analyze data.
- To recommend specific action.

⬜ To give feedback, suggestions or recommendations.

Reports can be classifies as follows:

(i) Formal and Informal Reports

(ii) Routine and special Reports

(iii) Oral and written Reports.

(iv) Informational and Analytical Reports.

(i) Formal and Informal Reports:

This type of report is classified on the bases of legal formalities to be compiled with.

A formal report is one which is prepared in a prescribed form and is presented according to an established procedure to a prescribed authority. It is prepared to help the management in framing policies. The length of these reports may vary from a few pages to hundreds of pages. Annual reports of companies, project reports, and thesis are examples of formal reports.

An informal report is generally in the form of a person-to-person communication. It can be a brief account of a specific business on professional activity. It is usually written to provide introductory information about a routine affair. Laboratory reports, daily production reports trip reports are informal reports.

(ii) Routine and Special Reports:

These types of reports are classified on the basis of frequency of the issue.

Routine or Periodic reports are prepared and presented at regular intervals in the routine of business. They may be submitted annually, semi-annually, quarterly, monthly, fortnightly, weekly or even daily. They contain just facts and figures without any recommendation. These reports include sales and production report, cost report etc.

Special report is prepared and presented to convey special information related to an individual occasion or problem. Some of the most important decisions are taken in the organization on the bases of the information contained in special

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report prepared by either an individual on a committee. Enquiry reports, research reports, thesis, dissertation are special reports.

(iii) Oral and Written Reports:

These types of reports are classified on the bases of their communicative modes:

Oral reports are simple and easy to present brief information related to routine activities. Reports of accidents, sales, production, joining are examples or oral reports.

However, most organization prefer the reports in written form as they can be kept to the permanent record, audience can ponder over these reports at their own peace and they can be edited, reviewed, stored.

(iv) Informational and Analytical Reports:

These types of reports are classified on the bases of functions.

If a report presents facts to an issue without any analysis, interpretation or recommendations, it becomes informative report. On the other hand if a report analysis facts, draws conclusions, it becomes analytical or interpretative on investigative report. For example if a report presents the sales figures of a particular period, it is informative. But if the writer presents reasons responsible for declining sales and recommendations to arrest the decline, it becomes analytic.

FORMATS OF REPORTS:

To write technical reports, one can have the following four types of formats:

(i) Printed Format

(ii) Letter Format

(iii) Memo Format

(iv) Manuscript Format

Which type of format one should use depends on the nature and function of the report and type of addressee. All these formats are explained in detail.

(i) Printed Format :

Reports having routine matter may be written in the prescribed form by the organization. All one needs to do is to fill in the blanks in this printed form.

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For example companies keep printed for recording daily production, monthly sale, and to keep information regarding tour, conference, inspection and so on. Printed forms are widely used to submit reports because they are systemic, objective and time saving.

(ii) Letter Format :

When one wants to write short reports of a few pages outside the organization, he or she can choose a letter format. Besides all routine parts of a letter, this type of format includes illustrations, footnotes, references and so on. The letter format can be used for formal-informal, routine special and analytical type of reports.

(iii) Memo Format :

A memo memorandum format is mainly used for short reports to be communicated within the organization. It is used to send information from one department to another. It helps the administration in making decisions and solving problems. Like a report in the letter form, a memo report contains headings. But they differ in structure and size.

(iv) Manuscript Format :

The manuscript format is generally used for long and formal reports. The length of such reports can range from a few pages to several hundred pages. Here the writer needs to be careful about its structure and elements. The next unit is a detailed discussion of the structure of formal reports which are prepared in manuscript format.

STRUCTURE OF A FORMAL REPORT

Formal Reports, as explained in the unit No.9.3, are written in the manuscript format. The content of these types of reports has to be organised in a logical way to help the addressee to understand the message clearly.

The following elements must appear in the structure of every report:

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(i)　　The Title Page

(ii)　　Acknowledgement

(iii)　　Letter of Transmittal

(iv)　　Table of contents

(v)　　Abstract and Executive Summary

(vi)　　Introduction

(vii)　Findings

(viii) Conclusion

(xi)　　Recommendation

(x)　　Appendix

(xi)　　References and Bibliography

(I)　The Title Page

Includes:

☐　Name and status of author.

☐　Department and date of issue.

☐　The Heading (title of the report) should be short, clear and unambiguous.

Market Potential and Entry Strategy Identification for Consumer Paper Bags

Submitted to

Mr. Ravi Kumar

Director and Chief Executive

By

Anil Gupta

Marketing Manager

Lal Badshah

Packaging Ltd.

Thane, Maharashtra

September 29,2009

(II) Acknowledgements

You should thank everyone associated with the assignment and preparation of your report. Be generous in expressing your gratitude; For example,

I thank my organisation Lal Badshah Packing Limited for giving me an opportunity to conduct the research project. A special word of thank to Mr Ravi Kumar (Director & Chief Executive), Mr Nitin Kapur(DGM) and Executives of Lal Badshah Packaging Limited for giving me the necessary guidance and help in research work.

I also thank all the respondents of survey, who gave me valuable information to carry out the study.

Finally, I wish to thank my colleagues of the marketing department, who contributed valuable inputs of the research work.

Cover Letter

A cover letter is usually written by top management/or project guide as a preface of forward to a report, reflecting the management's policy and interpretation of the report's findings, conclusions and recommendation. It is placed between the cover and title page. It is never bound inside the report. It can be written as a memo or a letter or a forwarding certificate.

(III) Letter of Transmittal

Many times, a formal report is accompanied by a letter to outside reader. Although the letter of transmittal is usually placed after the title page, it functions as a greeting to the reader.

The letter covers a summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations to give an idea of the report. It is best written in a direct conversational manner.

1. Begin directly by talking about the subject of the report.

    Dear Miss Shobha,

    Here is the report you requested on August 20 about a nice plot of land for your proposed play school in Greater Noida.

2. Give a brief review of the contents of the report.

3. Acknowledge the contribution of others to your study, if any.

4. End the letter by thanking the authorizing person or body and expression hope for helping again.

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You should write this letter in the personal style of a business letter - use personal pronouns, first person and active voice. The tone should reflect your sincerity.

Nowadays, a cover letter is generally preferred to alerter of transmittal.

(IV) Table of Contents

Long reports must have a Table of Contents placed after Acknowledgements and before the Summary. It is an important element in a long formal report. It identifies the topics and their page numbers in the report (or any long document) for the reader. The Table of Contents indicates the hierarchy of topics and their sequence also. Also mention the main sections of your report in the contents exactly as they are worded in the text.

Sample

TABLE OF CONTENTS

(V) ABSTRACT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An abstract or summary is placed immediately after the list of tables, of after the title page or expectations of the readers. A company's practice may be to have both an abstract and executive summary with long reports.

A summary-

☐ Should give the context of report.

☐ Provide most important findings, conclusions and recommendations

☐ Should act as a time saver for the busy management.

Usually management reports use executive summaries instead of abstracts. An abstract is a summary of the report's most important points. An abstract can be either descriptive or informative, it is generally written in about 200 words in just one paragraph. An executive summary is a more detailed overview of a

report than an abstract. It can run into one or two pages. It presents the reader with a preview of a report's main points, conclusions, recommendations and the way the findings are likely to affect company planning. Often, we like to know the contents of a report specially its conclusions and recommendations, just by reading a detailed synopsis in the form of an executive summary.

Descriptive Abstract

A descriptive abstract only mentions the topics discussed in a report. It does not give details of those topics. For details, the reader has to go through the report. Executives have little patience with such a skeletal account of a report's important conclusion and recommendations. Therefore, abstracts are less popular with writers of business reports. For example, consider writing a descriptive abstract of the report on "Market potential and entry identification for consumer paper bags". It would be as follows:

The study finds that the market potential for paper bags is not picking up due to its price as compared to price of polybasic. It is recommended that the company PPL Feedback should supply paper bag at a lesser cost to compete with poly bags.

Informative Abstract :

An informative abstract discusses the main subjects, presents conclusions and recommendations. Formal reports and scientific and technical articles often are an informative abstract. An informative abstract on the same report for which the descriptive abstract was just given would read as follows-

This report explores new ways to expand the company's (PPL Feedback and Packaging Limited) business to meet its growth targets from industrial packs to consumer packs.

The objective of the study was to study the market potential of consumer paper bags for rice and to identify the entry strategies of the company. It was found that the market potential for paper bags for rice is about 27 lakh bags per annum at present; there is an interested segment whose requirement is 27 lakh bags. The recommendation is that the company (PPL Feedback) should supply bags at cost lesser than that of poly bags.

The abstract provides more details of the report's contents than the earlier descriptive abstract.

Executive Summary

An executive summary covers all the major elements of a report's content-

(a) Background of the problem

(b) Major topics

(c) Important details

(d) Major conclusions

(e) Recommendations

(f) Discussion of the ways that the implementation of recommendations would affect the company.

(VI) Introduction

States the details of the-

- ☐ Authorising person or body requesting the report
- ☐ Author or group of authors responsible for investigation (and submission of the report)
- ☐ Purpose or reason for the report
- ☐ Methods of enquiry (the research method used)
- ☐ Arrangement or grouping of data
- ☐ General background to report's subject

(VII) Findings

Presents the results of the investigation.

(VIII) Conclusions

- ☐ States the results of the investigation.
- ☐ Offers answers to questions raised in the beginning of the report.
- ☐ No new information should appear in the conclusion.

(IX) Recommendations

- ☐ This part is the action centre of the report.
- ☐ State how the conclusions should be acted upon.
- ☐ Make clear and definite recommendations.

☐ If further investigation is required, mention it as a condition for a more comprehensives study of the problem.

You cannot have a report without recommendations, even if out have into been asked to give them. Recommendations flow out of conclusions, as conclusions do from discussion.

Discussion of findings and analyses:

This part is the main body of the report. It discusses findings and analyses results. The information is developed in one of the ways given, below.

Chronological Development :

• Chronological development-The information is arranged in the order in which the events happened. This is the simplest method of presenting information-in its sequence of occurrence, like a story with a beginning ☐ a middle ☐ the end. Chronological development requires little planning and organising. The writer selects and arranges the major topics in the order of their occurrence. Non-significant events are left out.

This method is usually used for writing short reports, progress reports describing progress of a project and investigative reports that discuss investigations conducted over a ling time and involved visits to different places to gather evidence.

By discussing each event step-by-step, the cumulative effect of a variable (factor/thing) can be seen through the conclusions drawn at suitable intervals. The sequencing of information is easy to determine, for the report write is guided by the order in which the events actually took place.

Subject wise Development

• Subject development - The information is arranged according to the subjects. The subjects are grouped in a predetermined order. This arrangement makes the presentation of information coherent and logical.

When a research involves the study of two or more variables acting upon an event/happening, the writer has to arrange his discussion in subject order. The writer would describe the effect of one variable on a subject and would go on in chronological order to determine the cumulative effect of the variable on the

subject of study. Then, in a similar manner he would study and describe the effect of the other variables, and record chronologically its cumulative effect.

The question is in which sequence the effect of each should be presented, if there are several variables. The writer has to choose

the sequence according to the variable he wants to recommend. He can move in increasing order of suitability or begin from the most suitable to the least suitable. but before structuring information he should make his choice of order clearly known by sating, whether he is following the ascending or descending order in discussing each variable.

Suppose you want to recommend, as an automobile dealer, the most suitable model of a luxury car to an executive. You will follow the subject method and tell him/her that out have evaluated the price, fuel consumption, speed, automation, seating capacity, space and after-sales services guaranteed (free servicing for a year) for different models of luxury cars. you would then recommend the most suitable model for his/her use.

You have in fact, made a comparative study of the essential parameters that determine a buyer's choice of a car, and presented the information accordingly.

Concept Development

- Concept development- The information is organised "concept wise". The writer develops his argument and reasoning on the lines of his thought.

    As a report writer, you can arrange the details of your topic by following the logical sequence of your investigation. You can develop the topic by describing each step as a sequence to the step that follows it, in a series of steps, which finally build up your argument (topic). The logic of your argument guides your organisation of the subject. Each part or stage of a project is seen as well-linked procession of ideas forming a complete concept.

    In the concept method you tell the reader how you arrived at the results and why they are valid.

    This method is to be employed when the topic is complex and reasoning is required to explain the reader the various ideas and their careful consideration, in reaching the end result of the investigation. When a selection of the best

result can be made, for instance, the choice of a car, or a site for a new house by a simple and direct analysis, the subject development would of developing the main argument of your report, see that the report is logically organised and the narration is interesting and convincing to the reader.

Distribution list When a report is meant to be sent to several person, it will contain a list of all the persons who are supposed to receive a copy of report. The distribution list is placed according to its size or the customer's choice or company's practice. However, it seems proper to place it as a separate appendix if the list happens to be long. But a short distributions list can appear at the foot of the table of contents page.

Glossary

- Glossary is the list of technical or special terms used in a report/technical paper placed at the end of a report and before the index. It alphabetically lists words or phrases which need special attention. It explains the usage of technical terms peculiar to industry. A glossary also acts as a dictionary of some select words, which often get confused, misused or wrongly spelt. These are:

  - Words often are confused because they are similar in meaning; for example diplex and duplex, ground floor and first floor, postpone and cancel or imply and infer.

  - Common unnoticed errors of grammar, such as many a times (should be many a time), one of the best option (in place of one of the best options), comprised of (for comprises)

  - Words that tend to be wrongly spelt; e.g. ageism (correct ageism), accommodation (for accommodation), separate (should be separate).

  - Words having more than one acceptable spelling; for example, program, programme. In case of words like symposiums and symposia where both versions are in use, both are given in the glossary and a choice is indicated for one of them.

  - Words like data, often wrongly used as singular or used as datas in the plural, are specially entered in the glossary and their usage is fully explained. Data is plural, (also treated as singular, although the singular

form is datum). in scientific philosophical and general use, data generally means a number of items and i thus regarded as plural with datum as the singular. But in computing and related subject, it is taken to denote a mass or collective noun and therefore used with words like this, that and much, with singular verbs, for example, useful data has been gathered. The glossary, like the Oxford Dictionary, will draw our attention to the usage of the word data and point out that although some people consider the use of data with a singular verb incorrect, it is now in common use. It will also point out that data is not a singular countable noun and should not be preceded by words such as 'a', 'every', 'either' or 'neither' or be given a plural form datas.

(X) APPENDIX

The appendix is used to give a variety of information separately, as its inclusion in the main body could interfere with the smooth reading of the report. It usually includes the text of questionnaires or other instruments of survey. Tables, flow charts, maps, summaries of raw data and details of mathematical formulation are generally included in the appendix. Each appendix is numbered Appendix A, Appendix B and so on to help the reader identify the material given in appendix.

(XI) BIBLIOGRAPHY :

All published and unpublished sources of information used in preparing the report are listed under Bibliography. All reference documents, previous reports, books, periodicals, and even letters written and received by the writer are mentioned in it.

Index :

Index (plural indexes or indices) is the alphabetical list of subjects, names and so on with references to page numbers where they occur in the report or a book. It is usually placed at the end. It should not be confused with the contents which always appears at the beginning of a report or book.

In long reports and voluminous works index helps the reader locate a subject easily in the text of the report wherever it has been mentioned or discussed. For

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example, order refusals 115 entered in a report's index means we can find it mentioned on p. 115. In a book's index, an entry like Research question 34 a - 675 would mean it appears on p. 675 discussed under section 34 a.

The Process of Investigation

A report involves three things-

1. Research (investigation)

2. Analysis

3. Presentation

The reader's interest in the reports is primarily in its well documented presentation of facts and conclusions. But a report can never meet the expectation or needs of the reader, unless the writer labors through careful research and makes a critical analysis of the data collected through research.