

HP Solve Webletter

Richard J. Nelson

Rainer Boelzle is the editor of this monthly webletter¹ initiated by HP Calculator General Manager Wing Cheung in February 2008. The mechanics of preparing the webletter for the HP web site is done by a third party. Articles are written by contributors from HP, HP's vendors, consultants, and customers.

The "newsletter" is emailed each month to a mailing list of people who sign up for the HP website (managed by software) under the HP website umbrella of what is called HP Passport. The individual "issues" may be downloaded in PDF format from:

<http://h20331.www2.hp.com/hpsub/cache/580500-0-0-225-121.html>

There is a choice to sign up for the *HP Solve* webletter at this web page.

Figure one shows the format of the opening page of each issue. The format is continuously evolving. Each "issue" is called a volume – because of the preparation software. Volume #1 (February '08) uses a

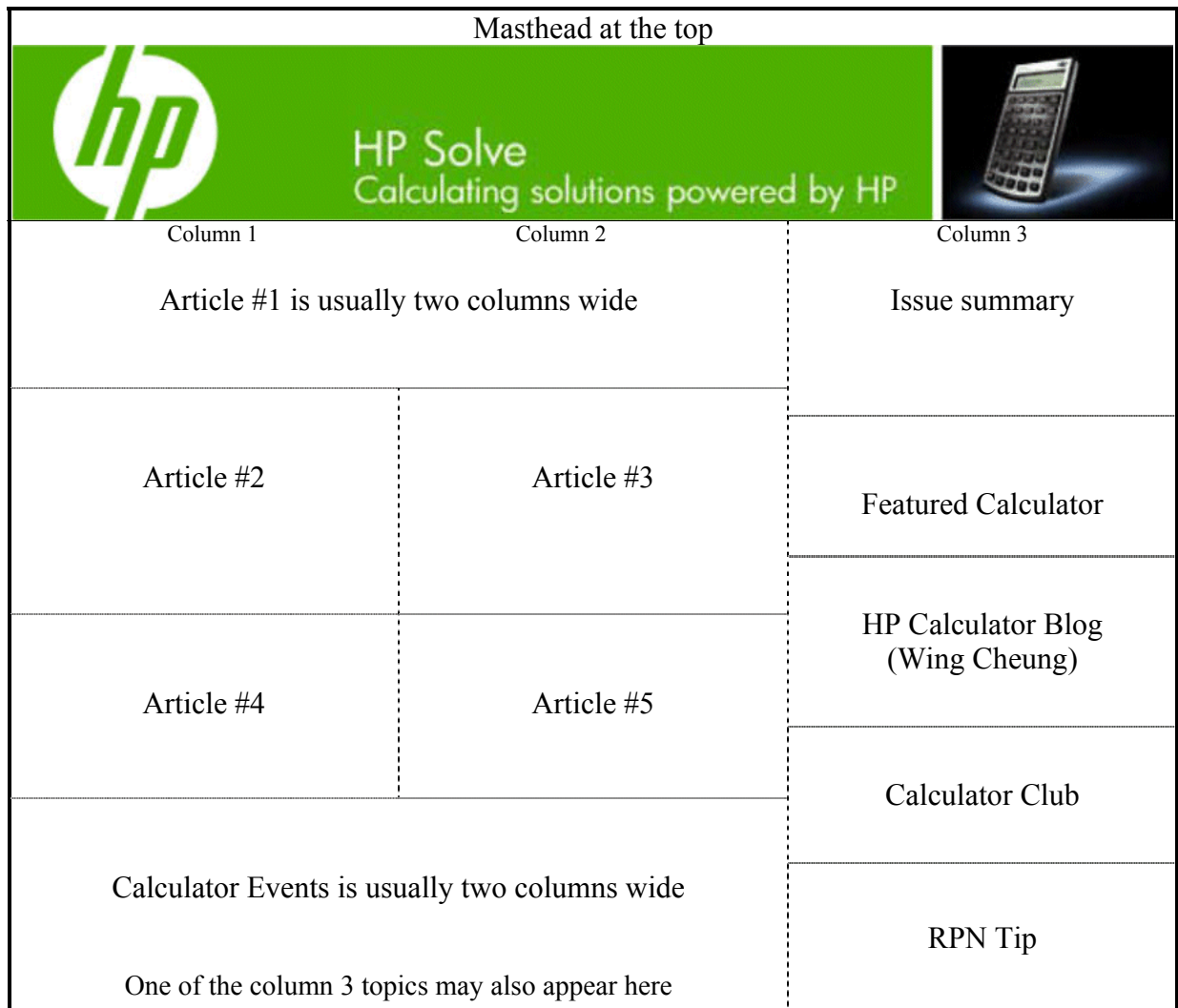


Fig. 1 – General layout of the Hewlett-Packard HP Solve webletter based on the Volume issue.

1. A newsletter is a complete single entity that is usually printed on paper. A webletter differs in that it is an electronic entity that has links to other documents and requires connection to the Internet to read in its entirety. HP solve is not a newsletter because it contains links to other documents on the HP web site.

slightly different layout and PDF settings than the later issues. Figure one is patterned after volume #2. The actual layout will vary from Volume to Volume. Column 3, for example, may have four or five entries. These will typically contain links to the HP web site because these topics are separately maintained on the calculator portion of HP's web site. One of these topics may also be moved to the Calculator Events area on the bottom left two columns of the opening page.

In addition to these "regular" topics (the Calculator Events is included in this category with the column three topics) there are five featured articles. The PDF version of the webletter, generally, orders these "feature" articles on the pages following the opening page. Table one shows a summary of the page count of each issue released so far with 11-3/4 pages per issue, on average, to date (May '08). The downloaded size of the PDF file is also included.

Table 1 – Webletter Page Count

Volume #	Date	PDF pages	PDF Size
1	February	12 pp	984 KB
2	March	9 pp	343 KB
3	April	8 pp	30 KB
4	May	18 pp	637 KB
Totals: 4	Four months	47 pp	2.0 MB

Table 2 - Volume 1, February 2008 HP Solve Article Content Summary

Article	Title	Author	linked	Page	length	Calculators
1	Online RPN Calculator	NO	YES	N/A	N/A	Generic RPN
2	Use Pi to measure a pie – or any circular object	NO	NO	3	8.5	HP39gs
3	HP focuses on the business professional	NO	NO	12	0.75	HP12c
4	Looking for an edge when taking exams?	NO	NO	11	0.5	HP33s, 35s
5	Discount of the month	NO	YES	N/A	N/A	HP39gs

Table 3 - Volume 2, March 2008 HP Solve Article Content Summary

Article	Title	Auth.	linked	Pg.	length	Calculators
1	Tax time is here and HP can help	NO	NO	2	0.5	HP10bII, 12c, 12cp, 17bII+
2	Be a CIO hero	NO	NO	8	0.5	None
3	The best selling real estate HP10BII calculator just got better	NO	NO	8	0.5	HP10bII
4	It's raining again in Seattle ... Wait, you mean San Antonio	NO	NO	5	3	HP39gs
5	Discount of the month	NO	YES	N/A	N/A	HP12c

Table 4 - Volume 3, April 2008 HP Solve Article Content Summary

Article	Title	Auth.	linked	Pg.	length	Calculators
1	April showers bring May flowers and Scientific Calculators	NO	NO	2	0.67	HP33s, 35s
2	Let's calculate the probably birth weight of your child	NO	NO	4	3.67	HP39gs
3	Why calculators are so popular among surveyors	NO	NO	7	0.75	HP33s, 35s, 50g
4	Credit Suisse benefits from HP calculators	NO	NO	8	0.75	HP17bII+
5	Special newsletter discount of the month	NO	YES	N/A	N/A	HP35s

Table 5 - Volume 4, May 2008 HP Solve Article Content Summary

Article	Title	Auth.	linked	Pg.	length	Calculators
1	New! HP39gs Graphing Calculator Classroom Kit	NO	NO	2	0.75	HP39gs
2	Let's make music with math!	NO	NO	10	15	HP39gs
3	HP's most powerful financial calculator is now sleeker than ever	NO	NO	17	0.67	HP17BbII+
4	HP17bII – A Financial Analyst's Best Friend	NO	NO	17	0.33	HP17bII
5	Special newsletter discount of the month (10%)	NO	YES	N/A	N/A	HP10bII

Observations and Comments

After more than three decades calculators have become routine tools that no longer have the glamour and user enthusiasm that they had in the first two decades – 1972-1992. Cell phones, PDA's, palmtops, and lap tops all provide a calculator capability. The handheld business, scientific, or graphing calculator will remain a viable product, especially for students, as long as the convenience (ease of use), and cost keep them competitive.

Technology improvements are another factor that increases the competition (a potential cause for their demise) for handheld calculators. The average consumer does not want to carry multiple electronic devices and advanced display technologies that integrate the keyboard into the display are more easily price tolerated in the more expensive competing devices.

Technology – the internet, wireless communications, and portability – increases our efficiency and ability to be more involved with each other in ways unheard of just ten years ago. Young people world wide have cell phones and they text each other in ways that are impacting all aspects of human life. Because of this an old element has become increasingly important – time. We live in an instant society and nobody wants to wait for anything. Attention spans become very short under these conditions and if a product doesn't work fast enough it is replaced with one that does. Upgrading is a normal part of this new high-speed society.

Replacing a normal newsletter with a webletter is in tune with what is expected by today's users of products from the world's largest technology company - HP. Old time newsletter readers will lament the "old days" wherein you could hold an issue in your hand and peruse it at your leisure under the full life conditions of home, office, or vacation. These readers will be unhappy that they can't print their *HP Solve* and take it with them because a webletter requires them to be connected to the Internet to read all portions of the publication.

This situation may only be temporary, however, because the ultimate handheld technology dream is to design a true PC that will provide wireless Internet connection wherever you are. Under these conditions a webletter will truly equal the convenience of a traditional newsletter.

The time issue of website visitation should not be underestimated in its importance. If a website, and by implication *HP Solve*, does not provide enough interest and convenience, interested people will simply not participate. A confusing and time consuming experience on the part of the visitor will not inspire a return visit. Continued visitation is vital for life and therefore growth.

Building a continued readership for *HP Solve* requires the same ingredients that all traditional successful newsletters have used. While *HP Solve* has many of these ingredients – e.g. professional appearance and content – there are two ingredients that are missing and the Tables 2 – 5 illustrate these.

The first missing ingredient is quantity and variety. The five new articles for each issue are good, but they are very narrow in their style and subject. Many are advertisements for various HP marketing activities cloaked in a calculator user title. The reader wants specific interest information. One way to accomplish this is many short articles in addition to the featured articles. This increases webletter depth.

The second missing ingredient is personal engagement. People are interested in other people. People do things for people. How can the reader take anything seriously he or she reads in *HP solve* if he doesn't know the source? Who wrote the article? The reputation of any source is as vital as the material itself. Included with this personal engagement is the natural situation of everyone being different and this leads to controversy which stirs the interest of the reader. HP should allow this engagement and incorporate the readers into the process and content of each issue. This human interest side of the webletter is sadly lacking and the while the presently sterile webletter may have some interesting articles it will never be very popular. Personally engage the readers and growth will ensue.

Webletter shortcomings

From a historical perspective the webletter is not "frozen" in time. Because the links may instantly change, the newsletter will change when the links change. You may no longer refer to the webletter because is it not a defined (fixed, real) entity. An example is reviewing *HP Solve V3* to determine the discount of the month. The link (default?) is to the calculator and is not the same as it was for the previous month. The only solution to this is to capture the linked pages and include them into the webletter and removing the links. The webletter enthusiast will argue that a webletter is a living dynamic document and this doesn't matter. If this is the case, why give it a date if it is "timeless"? Some Internet news articles provide a "launched" date and time and perhaps this is better.