



A home computer and digital photography make it easy to publish an interesting "company" newsletter for your operators. Alan Saatkamp photo

Newsletters to inform and entertain your guests

Having friends over to operate my HO scale Wisconsin-Dakota RR is a lot of fun, so I decided to report the railroad's ongoing activities to my guests and operators with a prototype-style newsletter.

My first effort, *Points from the Junction*, was named after a division point on my model railroad. It provided information about operating sessions and kept my operators up to date about recent changes on the railroad, such as the arrival of new locomotives and rolling stock. I also found my newsletter was a great way to recognize and thank my friends for their special contributions.

Points from the Junction began with a modest two pages of single-spaced text. I published it three times in one year and distributed copies prior to operating sessions.

A move back to South Dakota gave me the opportunity to build a new model railroad. This time I've combined elements of the Wisconsin & Southern (WSOR) which interchanges traffic with another favorite regional railroad, the Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern (DM&E). During the new layout's planning process, I decided to rename the newsletter *Prairie Ponderings* to capture more of the Midwest's granger railroad flavor.

I publish *Prairie Ponderings* quarterly, and it still offers news of

the model railroad. But I've given it another dimension by using modeler's license to bend reality for my purposes. By blending real events with the layout activities, the newsletter adds realism.

For example, when model DM&E boxcars became available, my railroad's management announced the new arrivals and explained how these new cars would generate additional revenue. Likewise, when model WSOR grain hoppers showed up, their acquisition was announced with a note that they were assigned to haul corn to an on-line ethanol plant in Milton, Wis.

My friends and operators continually offer help and useful suggestions to improve the railroad, so I recognize their contributions in the newsletter. In the process, I add appropriate titles to enhance their credibility. Thus, Tim's comments about potential improvements to the yard are attributed to Davis Junction Yardmaster Tim Smith. And my mentor Gary Freseman's recommendation for a crossover also recognizes him as a consultant. After all, that's the role Gary has ably fulfilled on my last three layouts. Everyone enjoys seeing their names in print and being realistically woven into the fabric of the W-D RR.