

How To Create A Better Brochure

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Having a quality brochure makes a positive impression on a potential customer. It gives the appearance that you're serious about your business.

And it may give you an advantage over competitors who don't use brochures.

Printing technology has made big advancements in the last decade, including high speed, high-resolution color photocopiers and laser printers.

This has reduced the need for using printing presses and allows you to print small quantities with less expense. If you're printing only a few hundred brochures, this is the way to go.

If you're printing in the thousands, you may find it more economical to use a printing press. Your per unit cost can drop significantly.

But print production, especially involving color, is a complex subject and ignorance can be costly.

"The most important thing a business person should do is ask a lot of questions," says Phil Lewis of Vancouver's Generation

Printing.

“Many small businesses try to design their own brochures without consulting with a printer or graphic designer. They don’t understand that what you see on your computer screen isn’t necessarily what’s going to be printed. Inevitably, we end up having to fix many of the customer’s mistakes and charging for it. If they had consulted us before they started designing, we could’ve saved them time and money.”

With thirty years experience as a prepress production specialist and sales rep, Lewis has these suggestions when creating a brochure:

Hire a graphic designer.

It’ll cost you more up front, but it’ll give your brochure a more professional look and that gives your customers’ confidence. Shop around. Contact at least three designers and ask to see samples of their work. Get quotes and compare.

Know your market.

Would a glossy, color brochure make that much difference to your target market? If you’re selling financial services to wealthy investors, then appearance counts. But for most small businesses, it’s not worth the extra cost.

If you can’t afford to hire a designer and are creating the brochure yourself, ask questions before you prepare a computer file for printing. Does the printer want the source file or a portable document file (pdf)? Do you need to include fonts and linked graphics? If you’re going to create a pdf, be clear what options the printer wants you to select before creating it.

BROCHURE FORMAT

Brochures come in a variety of sizes. Probably the most common format is called a slim jim. It’s either a letter or legal sized sheet that’s folded two or three times vertically. It’s a popular format for small

businesses because it can fit a display rack or be mailed in a standard number-10 business envelope.

MORE TIPS ON REDUCING YOUR PRINTING COSTS

Don't include information that can get outdated quickly, such as prices. Instead consider creating a price sheet on your computer that you can quickly update, print from your desktop printer, and insert inside the brochure. That way you don't have to reprint your brochures every time you change prices.

If your brochure can fit into the same envelope as your invoice or other material you mail to customers, stuff the brochure inside. You save on postage.

I believe printed brochures are preferable to electronic versions. They're easier to read. However, if you think your prospects are computer savvy, you might consider putting a pdf version of your brochure on a diskette or CD. It's a novel and inexpensive way to distribute it.

If you're not sure how computer literate your target market is, then you should stick to a printed brochure.

You can also buy pre-designed brochures sheets for your desktop printer. You just add the text and graphics. Paperdirect.com has a good selection.

HOW TO GET BETTER CUSTOMER RESPONSE FROM YOUR BROCHURE

Here are some suggestions you should consider.

Make sure your address, phone and fax numbers, website and e-mail are easy to find.

Give your reader a reason to open the brochure. Start selling on the cover. And list the benefits your product or service offers.

Use testimonials. Nothing helps sell a product or service better than reading comments from

satisfied customers. (Be sure to get your customer's permission before quoting him.)

Have a "Frequently Asked Questions" section. Your brochure should answer common questions a prospect is going to ask about your product or service. If your business does quotes, include a separate questionnaire that the prospect can fill out and fax to you.

Include information that the prospect would find valuable. He's then more likely to keep the brochure longer. For example, you run a computer repair service, so you include in your brochure a small section called "Ten Ways to Boost your Computer's Performance" or "Little Known Windows Shortcuts to Improve your Productivity."

Tell the prospect what the next step he or she should take. Call for more information? Call for a free estimate?

Designing your own brochure will save you money. But I still think it's worth the expense to hire an experienced graphic designer. If you don't have a talent for design, your brochure will look amateurish and will reflect poorly on your business.

Dave Coyne is a copywriter,
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