

Marketing Tune-Up for 2002

By Diana Ratliff

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Like your car, your marketing materials need regular attention if they're to get you where you want to go. Oh, sure, you MAY get there using those old brochures or radio ads from ten years ago. But you're bound to impress a lot more people (and get there much quicker) if you use a sleeker, classier, more up-to-date model.

So ... have your marketing materials — your fliers, brochures, display ads, billboards, radio spots, business cards — had a tune-up lately?

No need (unless your marketing vehicle is HOPELESSLY out of date) to hire an expensive mechanic. You can probably do this yourself. As an illustration, let's pull your business cards into your virtual garage ...

Take a long, hard, objective look. Ask yourself:

- * What are your business cards telling your customers and prospects about you?
- * Do they convey the image you want? Are they accurate and up-to-date?
- * Do they provide complete information?
- * Do they make people want to do business with you?

In short, what kind of mileage are you getting from them? Think about what your current card is costing you, in terms of lost sales and missed opportunities. Can you afford to keep using them?

If you haven't updated your cards in the last year, if you're using generic "printer's special" cards, or, heaven forbid, if you're using pre-perforated cards, it's probably time for a brand-new model.

So what features do you look for?

First things first. Analyze the OBVIOUS information on your card.

ACCURACY:

Is the information up-to-date? If you've added a website or new location, changed phone numbers, or been promoted to a new position, redo your cards to reflect the changes. Passing out cards with crossed-out phone numbers is a sure way to lose credibility with customers. So, too, is using a photograph so "retouched" that your mom wouldn't recognize you.

QUANTITY:

Does your card have enough information? Mere contact details are no longer enough. Describe

what your business does and who it does it for if it's not evident from the name. Give people a reason to do business with you. Are you exceptionally skilled (awards, certifications, experience)? Easier to locate? Open longer hours? Do you offer free delivery, free training, or free estimates? (Design hint: Don't drop the font size and cram all that information on the front. Use the BACK of your card, too.)

Now look at the SUBTLE messages your card is sending. Remember that your business card is YOU, and you may only have a few seconds to catch and keep someone's attention with it.

STYLE:

Is your business card classy? A card in an appropriate, tasteful color, with a nice texture and an attractive logo or photo is much more likely to be kept than a "plain vanilla" card. It shows that you're different from your competition... that you believe in yourself enough to invest in your business... that you're willing to put forth some extra effort.

There are simple ways to add a distinctive touch. For example, rather than a photo of your head, add a photo of you doing whatever you do. Add color, or use a distinctive (but legible) typeface. Or scan your signature and use it as a graphic.

USEFULNESS:

Is your business card useful? Almost ANY business can add something relevant to their business or industry which prospective customers will find useful. A tire salesman can add a mark that indicates the minimum safe tread depth. A realtor can add a mortgage calculator, or addresses of carpet cleaners, home improvement specialists, or siding installers. (Of course, a savvy realtor will ask those business owners to distribute HIS cards, in return.)

UNIQUENESS:

Does your business card still reflect your most recent image or current brand? Is your card different from your competitors? In other words, how are YOU different from your competitors? If you're the only dog groomer in town who'll come pick up Fido and return him looking adorable and smelling clean, say so!

While there are practical and perhaps sentimental reasons to keep an old car running, marketing materials that are used, dated, and worn have very little "sales value" for you. Regular maintenance and upgrading pays off in a smoother, faster journey to your business goals.

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Entrepreneur Diana Ratliff specializes in helping you be favorably remembered by important prospects. Shouldn't your business card work as hard as YOU do? Get her book and subscribe to her FREE ezine at <http://www.businesscarddesign.com>

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