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STRATEGY SESSION

## Creating an effective promotional brochure

By Nancy Simonds

**D**oes this sound familiar to you? You own a small business that needs written promotional materials in order to grow, but you keep putting off writing a brochure because it seems so daunting.

You're in good company. Most small business owners find that writing about themselves and what they do is a difficult and sometimes painful process.

Taking time to think through the project before you begin it can make the development process much easier and the final result more effective. Here are three points to think about before starting the writing process:

**Be clear about the purpose of the brochure.** Is it intended to sell a product or service? Present information? Spread a message? Attract new business? If you have more than one mission for your promotional materials, don't try to accomplish them all in one piece.

**Think about your intended audience.** Who is it you're trying to attract? Consider the demographics of the group — factors such as geographical location, age, income level and education level. Also think about the psychographics of your audience — how and what they consume, their buying patterns, and their need for your product or service.

**What is the message you are trying to get across to your intended audience?** If you're selling a product or service, your message should focus on how it is of benefit to your customer, and what sets you apart from your competition.

Once this preliminary work is done, you will find it easier to write the copy for your brochure.

Now let's focus on the actual components of an effective promotional brochure:

**The cover.** It should catch the reader's attention and give a reason for looking inside. Use color if you can, and an interesting photo, graphic or illustration. Perhaps pose a question to the reader that requires a "yes" answer and stimulates interest in reading further.



**A unifying theme or concept.** This will keep the reader's interest and enhance the flow of your written copy. For example, use a symbol that visually represents your product or service, or a concept such as "We help you rise above the rest."

**A description of your product or service.** This is where you emphasize what is different and better about your product or service. Create bullet points that tell what you do — for example, bake heavenly bread, create financial statements, or build custom single-family homes.

**The benefits to the customer.** Tell the reader how he or she will benefit from your product or service, and be as specific as possible. For example: cut costs on office supplies; get the best mortgage rate; consolidate all of your insurance under one portfolio.

**Testimonials from satisfied customers.** These can be very powerful if they are direct quotes from real customers, with their full names and their cities or companies. Don't use testimonials with no signatures or with a set of initials — they look like you made them up yourself.

**The call to action.** What is it you want the prospective customer to do after reading your brochure? E-mail you, order

a product through your 800 number, fax you a request for a quotation, make an appointment for a consultation? Make sure you express clearly what the next step is, and include the means to respond.

**White space.** Try to leave a bit of space here and there to allow the reader's eyes to rest. Don't pack your brochure panels with a jumble of copy, graphics, photos, bars and bullet points.

**Accurate facts.** If you're quoting someone or using statistics about your product or your competition, make sure your information is accurate.

**Correct spelling and grammar.** Your credibility plunges if your copy contains misspellings and incorrect usage. Have two or more people proofread your brochure before it goes to print.

Once you've written the copy for your brochure, you will need to think about technical considerations. A graphic designer can help you lay out the brochure; design a logo for your company, if you don't already have one; import graphics, logos, photos and charts; help you make decisions about color, typeface and size, style (2-fold, 3-fold) and weight of paper; and help you decide whether the brochure will be used as a self-mailer, an insert or a handout.

There are also technical considerations for the printing of your brochure. Consult with a printer about the number of copies to be made, the size of the finished product, the weight of the paper, the color of the paper and ink, and whether there will be inserts, pockets, flaps or cuts for business cards.

Keep in mind that your brochure is your company's "resume." If you can create a professional-looking brochure on your own computer, then do so, by all means. However, if your brochure looks too "home-grown," you'd be better off spending the money for professional help. ■

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