

All I Really Need is a Brochure by Susan Henken and Patricia Huff

How many times have you thought that all your business needs is a nice brochure? Nothing fancy, just something to pass out at trade shows. It would surely solve a lot of your sales problems. You may even think it shouldn't cost much. It would look great printed on the new office color printer, right?

Unfortunately, nothing in life or business is quite that easy. Many small businesses rely on brochures as their first form of sales communication but find them unsuccessful because they underestimate the skills and resources necessary to publish effective and attractive materials. The appearance and content of brochures and other sales material are so important because they represent your company to customers, suppliers, investors and employees. This is the first impression and, basically, your sales materials *are* your company in many people's minds.

For that reason, even small businesses benefit from hiring qualified professionals to create their communication or advertising materials. However, for some businesses, the do-it-yourself route is the only option early on. Ultimately, whether you use professionals or rely on your own desktop publishing expertise, the following list of helpful hints can keep your brochure moving in the right direction.

Talk to your reader. This gets back to the important premise of 'know your customer'. First, who is your audience? What is the best way to communicate with them? For example, when you talk to engineers, do they want to see photos of your company's equipment or charts on your product's performance? When you talk to the manager of a customer's purchasing department is he or she most interested in productivity, yield, costs, customer service or invoicing systems? Do you know whether customers want to see photos of your facility or your employees or both? Bottom line, what will make potential customers take the time to read your brochure?

Clearly define the purpose of your brochure. Will it be your only sales piece? Will you hand it out at a trade show with other materials or mail it to potential customers with a cover letter? Does it need to communicate only general information about your company or actively help you make a sale? The purpose determines its design and content. Define and communicate this clearly to the writer and designer of your brochure.

Get ideas about design and information. Check out brochures and other sales material from your competitors and others at the next trade show you attend. Pick up samples that you find attractive and informative to use as a basis for your own project. Look up catalogues in the *Thomas Register* and check out web pages on the Internet. Try to understand how these companies convey their message. Analyze the information, photos, writing and designs in the materials and use them as a reference when designing your own brochure. One word of caution and advice, don't let those expensive, glossy materials from the large companies intimidate you; learn from them. Get ideas that work from the expensive materials and adapt them to fit your budget. Large companies put large budgets of research and design into their materials, by

reviewing them, you, too, can understand what works and use it too.

Tell the benefits of your product or service. Remember that you are in business because you solve a problem for your customers and thus, give them a benefit. For example, your potential customer really needs a contractor to build *and* design parts for his airplane. If you are a parts manufacturer and have aerospace engineers on staff to design these parts, that is a benefit to your customer – be sure they know! How well you communicate your unique benefits to your customers will determine whether or not they will choose to do business with you.

Provide something memorable and valu-able. Don't bore your audience with sales clichés or the same old industry charts that everyone uses. Try to create the brochure that people not only remember but also keep on file!

Incorporate a call to action. Say "call now" or "visit our website" with the con-tact information immediately following.

Commit the necessary dollars. Although it is tempting to cut corners, this is not the time to give an out-of-work relative the chance to earn a little extra income. Hire an experienced profes-sional to help you with the graphic art and copywriting. It is ideal to hire a market-ing communications specialist to coordi-nate your communications and sales mate-rials. Companies with smaller budgets can find many skilled independent graphic artists and writers rather than large agencies.

When hiring graphic artists, copywrit-ers or printers, be sure to review samples of their previous work and ask for writ-ten bids. You can find these professionals through your network of business asso-ciates or through reference materials.

Take your brochure seriously. If you are willing to spend time and money on a brochure, make sure the project is com-pleted on time, on budget and that the company actually uses it for the intended purpose. Place it on your list of projects to manage with very definite timelines. Don't assume that someone else will take care of the details, including proofread-ing. Remember, this represents your com-pany to the world - give it the time it deserves.

Enjoy the project and the rewards. Remember that a well-done communica-tions project impacts your company's profits as well as its image. A good marketing piece also helps inform and focus the sales staff and provide them tools for the trade. Develop the message with your sales force and they will utilize the brochure in their customer calls.

Copyright, 2003, Highland Team