



Developing Effective Marketing Materials: Brochure Design Considerations

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Introduction

Brochures can be a vital communication tool should a business decide to use it in their marketing plan. They can be a highly effective device for attracting attention, providing information or promoting a product or service to a larger target audience while motivating them to take action. Though it is important to focus on a specific audience brochures can be used to remind existing customers about your enterprise or to attract new customers. In addition, when designing a brochure, the words and images used should reinforce an objective you want to achieve.

Brochures generally have a longer shelf-life than other marketing materials and are often designed to last one or more years. They require significant time for planning and development.

Developing a Functional Strategy

Brochures are often expected to accomplish multiple tasks as they can be presented to many different audiences with different needs. They should be designed to get consumers excited about your products or services, provide information to influence a purchasing decision and motivate them to act. While brochures commonly illustrate a product, product line or service they can serve many functions:

- Direct mailer to potential or existing customers
- Handout to attract new customers
- Included in a press kit or business proposal
- Marketing piece used at fairs, festivals, trade shows or speaking engagements
- Promotional piece left at other businesses with similar target audience(s)

Before designing a brochure, consider the following to develop its functional strategy:

1. Primary Purpose
What is the primary purpose of your brochure?
2. Primary Benefit
What unique benefit can you offer customers? What primary customer value or need can your enterprise meet?
3. Secondary Benefit
What other key benefits will customers receive from your products or services?
4. Target Audience
At whom (what target market) are you aiming this brochure?
5. Audience Reaction
What response do you want from your audience (come to the operation, visit a website, call an information line)?

6. Company Personality

What image do you want to convey in your brochure?

If you only plan to develop one brochure, but have multiple target audiences, then the brochure should be designed in terms of its highest potential financial outcome. Simply put, which audience is most likely to generate the most revenue for your business. The vast majority of the information provided in the brochure should focus on that group.

Collect Useful Information

After determining a functional strategy, the next step is to collect useful information to include in the brochure. Consider the following:

- Descriptions of your enterprise
- Descriptions of your products or services
- Contact information
 - Mailing address
 - Phone number
 - Fax number
 - E-mail address
 - Website address
- Hours of operation
- Special events or seasonal calendar
- Directions / map
- Visual elements
 - Logo
 - Photographs
 - Illustrations or clip art images
- Testimonials
- Recent publicity or news articles

Once the information and materials to include in the brochure have been gathered, it is often helpful to either draft an outline or create a mock-up version of the brochure on a folded sheet of paper so that it represents the layout of your brochure.

Components of a Brochure

Common components such as headlines, copy and signature information can be found in most brochures. Additional elements which may be included are subheadings, disclosures and illustrations. Let's take a closer look at each component:

Headline

Headlines should promote consumer benefits. The headline located on the top third of the front panel of a brochure is the most important element. If it fails to grab the reader's attention then the entire brochure will likely go unnoticed. This is especially true when it is placed in a brochure rack and the top third is the only portion that may be seen. Headlines may be presented as a statement, question, warning, or as a news alert. They should also be used throughout the brochure to create a balanced design, breaking up too much content making it easier for the reader to skim the page.

Subheading

The subheading is an answer or support to the question or curiosity that the main headline evokes and is designed to further draw the reader in. It can act as a break between the headline and the body copy and makes it easier for the reader to skim the brochure for pertinent information.

Body Copy

The body copy contains descriptive text that should create a visual image of your product or service. Create excitement by using action words. The copy should persuade the reader to take action. Highlight product features, key benefits and include supporting facts. Keep paragraphs as short as possible. It is best to limit paragraphs to only two or three sentences. Delete extra words or sentences that are not absolutely necessary.

In the body copy talk to your audience and not at them as if you are addressing only one person instead of a mass of people. Use the words “you” and “your” while avoiding the words “we,” “they” and unclear generalities.

The use of subheads and numbered or bulleted lists can break up a sea of type, highlighting a number of ideas quickly. However, overuse of this technique will reduce contrast and balance therefore losing its effectiveness.

When writing copy remember to keep messages positive and avoid negative connotations or comments about competitors.

Grammar and spelling are important. Run the spelling and grammar check functions on your software. It is also advisable to have several other people read over your materials to find mistakes that might have been missed.

Signature

The signature is where the business name, logo and contact information such as an address, phone number and website address are located in the brochure. Placement of the signature is most often located in the back panel of the brochure.

Disclosures, Terms or Conditions

When offers contain special stipulations to the sale; all disclosures, terms or conditions should be included in your brochure. This is often referred to as the fine print. Additional offerings such as warranties, options, incentives or financing terms should be included in this section.

Illustrations

Though visual elements are not required, incorporating them will help draw attention to your brochure. There are various types of visual elements used in brochures such as photographs, hand-drawn illustrations and graphic designed imagery. When possible, visual elements should show action or a product in use rather than static. This design strategy is even more effective when the action features people or other living things. Additionally, using captions along with photos help promote the overall message of the brochure.

Quality is essential when working with photographs. They should be of a high resolution and sizable. Crop photographs to showcase their best light if necessary. Consider hiring a professional if you are unable to provide quality photos of your products or services. Another alternative is to purchase stock photos for use in your marketing materials. Stock photos are professional quality photos which represent a common product or service. For example, if you owned a pick-your-own apple orchard then a stock photo of a child picking an apple would be considered a good option for use in your brochure.

Design Considerations

Before developing a brochure consider the following design principles:

The Rule of Thirds

When laying out your brochure use the rule of thirds. Divide the page into thirds both vertically and horizontally. Areas where the lines cross are excellent points on your page for important visual elements such as a headline or image. Use the other lines to line up body copy, graphics or other page elements as needed. Note that a tri-fold design automatically incorporates the rule of thirds, but it is still possible to crowd the space by putting too much content along the fold so use the horizontal lines to aide with important graphical elements.

Type

1. The typeface or font used in a brochure can make a big difference to the results you achieve. Limit brochures to two types of font. A sans serif font such as Arial for headlines and a serif font like Times New Roman works best for text located in the body copy. Sans serif fonts are clean and look modern but can be hard to read. Serif fonts have tiny serifs or lines on the edges of the letter which reduces eyestrain among readers and makes words easier to read.
2. Use no more than three different font sizes. The size of the font is measured in points which simply refer to the font's height. A good rule of thumb is for the heading text to be twice as large as the copy text and the subheading text should be half-way between. For example, in a brochure, set the headlines font size to 24 points, subheadings at 18 points and copy text at 12 points. Remember, it is best not to use a font size smaller than 10 points.
3. Upper and lower case typeface has been shown to make headlines more readable.
4. Do not mix too many type styles such as words in all capital letters, italics, bold-face or underlined. Overuse of these styles will deemphasize the message.

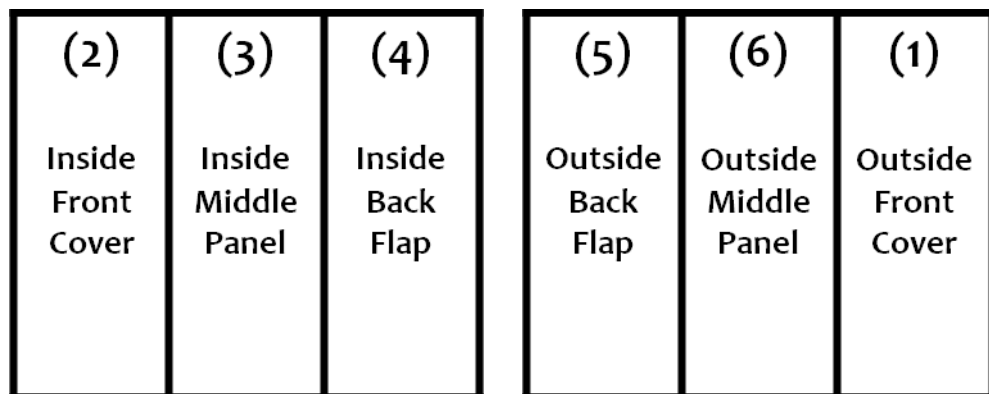
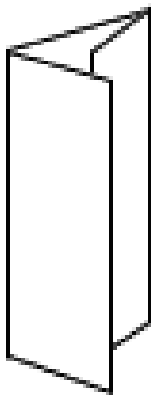
White Space

White space is the area on a page without words or that is left blank. This term applies even if the background has color. Crowding a brochure with too many visual elements or information will make it look cluttered and difficult to read, therefore reducing its overall effectiveness.

Brochure Layout

While a basic tri-fold design with six panels is the most common layout used, brochures come in many shapes and sizes. Other typical layouts include the bi-fold layout with four panels, z-fold layout with eight panels, or rack cards with only a front and back panel. Examples used throughout the remainder of this publication will focus on a standard tri-fold design; however the information can be adapted and applied for use with other layout designs as well.

Example Tri-Fold Brochure



(1) Outside Front Cover

- Attention getting headline should be placed on the top one-third of the page
- Business name, logo and other key information should be placed lower on the page
- Visual elements such as photographs or illustrations are encouraged but should not overshadow your message

(2) Inside Front Cover

- Include a brief synopsis of information about business, product or service
 - Focus on customer benefits
 - Use bulleted lists

- (3) Inside Middle Panel and (4) Inside Back Flap
 - Expand on customer benefits, products and services you summarized on inside front cover
 - Include detailed information
 - Contact information
 - Website address
 - Special events
 - Map
 - Use brief statements and bulleted lists
 - Include visual elements
- 5. Outside Back Flap
 - Generally the second panel viewed by the reader
 - Summarize most important information for a quick reference
 - Days and hours of operation
 - Pricing
 - Phone number
 - Website address
 - Favorable location for a promotional coupon or event registration
- 6. Outside Middle Panel
 - Business logo
 - Website address
 - If using as a direct mailer
 - Space for customer address
 - Return address
 - If using as a direct hand-out
 - Map or directions

Summary

Brochures can be an effective marketing tool when time is taken to carefully develop a proper strategy. Special attention should be given to the layout and other design considerations. When done correctly a brochure's front cover will grab a reader's attention by appealing to their needs. Focusing on the benefits will persuade them to open the brochure for further investigation. Communicating your company's unique advantage will motivate readers to take action, thus resulting in your communication objective being met.

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