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5 ways to get the most from even your most basic marketing materials

Staff

They are revered and handled with the greatest respect in Japan and many other Asian nations. Entrepreneurs are never without them and know well their messaging prowess and their ability to help stand out among the competition. Even self-identified techno-geeks have printed versions of their online counterparts.

Of course we're talking about the business card, the 3.5-by-2-inch billboard that carries important contact and other vital information about your business. Billions get printed (and sadly discarded) each year in spite of the main goal of their owners — to be kept, remembered and used when the need arises for their products or services.

What differentiates keepers from those that get recycled in the round file? Here are five key components that will help your business cards and corresponding printed marketing materials get noticed and stand out from the crowd in a way that means business for you and your company.

1. Stand out in order to be noticed

There are several ways your business card (and letterhead, envelope and other printed materials) can stand out for the right reason in order to be noticed. Logo design, color, fonts and graphics all play a part in catching the eye and keeping it focused on this small piece of real estate.

Local printers offering online services are a convenient way to take advantage of expertise as they have templates and a wide variety of designs and finishes from which to choose. Many printers also offer industry themes and colors. If you have a custom logo or design in mind, they should be able to work with you and import and size your graphics appropriately, depending on your printing need.

2. Convey differentiating information

This seems to be a no-brainer but often is overlooked. Sure, name, phone, website and email address are a must, but don't forget your go-to or differentiating products or services that let potential new customers know what you can do for them.

One non-profit consultant added two words (*Grant Writer*) to her business cards and saw a marked increase in returned phone calls. Think about adding a QSR code to your website or your

Twitter and Linked-in handles, especially if you're frequently posting pertinent information about your business sector.

3. Leave the gimmicks to others

Nothing hits the trash can quicker than round, oversized, undersized or irregular material cards. Fun and cute? Maybe. But also more expensive and often less convenient for the person who just wants your contact information.

If you're in a creative business, then an irregular card might work. For most small businesses, however, classic means classy — and getting noticed for the right reason is always a smart move.

4. Build your brand and identity through a singular look

Your business cards, letterhead, brochures, fliers and other printed marketing and office materials should all bear the same color scheme, logo, taglines (if you are using) and graphics. You want potential customers to recognize your direct mail and marketing material as yours. Consistent imagery and messaging is the best way to build your brand.

5. Clean, error-free copy

Be certain your copy is clean with no typos or other errors. Triple check, and then have a third party check again. There is no margin for error here.

One other bit of advice most small business people would do well to heed is to work with a pro.

Working with professional printers and those who have a reputation for quality and service will save you money in the long run and give you confidence in knowing your job will be done right the first time. You'll do well to work with those who provide small business services like printing for a living. They can offer a variety of options, will work on short deadlines, and are affordable, particularly when working with you in addressing a number of your printing needs.

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