

Updating Brochures with Clever Production Tips

Your company's brochure is a great sales tool. It conveys much more information than can be put on a business card, a display advertisement, or even a flyer. And when someone asks you for your company's brochure, it could be a signal of real interest in your product or service.

Anatomy of a brochure

Examine a variety of brochures, and you'll find they share certain characteristics: all have text mixed with visual elements such as photographs, illustrations, diagrams, charts and graphs; all have an underlying organization; and all provide the identity and contact information of the company that published the brochure.

Writing the copy

To write effective copy for your brochure, you must know your audience, know your product or service, and translate the product or service features into recognizable benefits for the audience. An easy way to make the translation is to think of a feature, then ask yourself "What's in it for me?" For example, if your product is made of a different kind of material than your competitor's, the benefit could be that it will last longer or maintain its new appearance. Be aware that a single feature could have more than one benefit, and be sure to mention all of them.

We stated before that a brochure is a good sales tool because it can present more information than other marketing materials. An effective brochure accomplishes this with concise writing that leads the reader to the important points. Rather than a straight text narrative, brochures use bulleted lists, headlines and subheads, reverse type, captions and pull quotes to emphasize the message to the reader.



Creating visual interest

Visual images help readers understand complicated concepts, retain more of what they are reading, and keep them interested in the text. Images are more likely to capture the reader's attention and often will evoke an emotion – which is what purchasing decisions are based on.

The Internet is a good source for collections of images, particularly illustrations, drawings, and stock photography. Two of our favorite sites are Shutterstock (www.shutterstock.com) and iStockphoto (www.istockphoto.com). Shutterstock has more than 1 million images and works on a subscription basis that allows the user to download up to 25 images per day, while iStockphoto offers its images at very low individual prices. Both sites have stock photos and vector art that can be used for print and for the web. You may also be able to obtain images from a trade association or similar professional

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organization within your industry.

Brochures tell a story

An effective brochure is like a book – it has a beginning, middle, and ending, and tells a story. The story is developed logically and by the end, the reader understands the purpose of the brochure.

When laying out a brochure, keep in mind the order in which the panels of the brochure will become visible as the reader unfolds it, and put the parts of the story on the appropriate panel. A good method to determine when a specific panel will be revealed is to fold a piece of paper into a brochure. Write a number sequentially on each panel as it becomes visible to you, and use the numbers to determine the sequence of the story.

One exception to this method is the back cover. If you are designing a brochure that is a self-mailer, then the back cover will be the mail panel where the return address, postage and addressee information will be placed. If it is not a self-mailer, then the back cover is often used for company contact information and perhaps testimonials from satisfied customers.

Formats for brochure layout

The most familiar brochure style is the standard three-fold, six-panel layout, usually on an 8 1/2 x 11 inch sheet of paper. The brochure folds are parallel; the right side folds in toward the center and the left side folds over the right to create a brochure that measures 3 3/8 inches wide x 8 1/2 inches high. Although some variation can be created by changing the sheet size, the basic format is the same: six panels on which to tell the story.

To add interest and tell your story more effectively, try a variation on the standard trifold brochure. For example, fold an 8 1/2 x 14 inch sheet like an accordion (aptly called an *accordion fold*) and you'll have an entirely new way of revealing the panels. In another variation, fold the front cover so it is one-half an inch narrower, revealing a glimpse of what appears inside when folded.

For another variation, fold an 11 x 17 sheet in half, then in half again to create a 8 1/2 x 5 1/2 inch, 8-panel brochure. Or fold in thirds to create a super sized 6-panel trifold.

The key to it all is to gather several sheets of paper and start folding, unfolding, refolding, and reverse folding until you find a number of panels in the right size to tell your story, one page at a time.

Trimming the brochure layout

Here's another idea: after folding the sheet of paper into the brochure style you prefer, mark the corner of the front cover and cut off a corner or a larger part of the sheet at an angle. This will create two interestingly-shaped panels (one on each side of the sheet) that can be used to progressively reveal information. There is a slightly greater cost to trim at an angle versus a straight cut, but this is fully compensated by the uniqueness of the brochure.

Adjusting panel width for folding

One word before we leave this topic: since all the brochures we've discussed include a fold, we'd like to remind you that an adjustment must be made in some panels so the fold will lie flat. In a trifold brochure, the right hand panel that folds in should be adjusted to be 1/32" or 1/8" narrower than the other panels, depending on the thickness of the paper – the thicker the paper, the greater the adjustment. Remember to adjust the panel width on both sides of the paper. The narrower panel will be on the far right panel on one side and the far left panel on the reverse.

For some of the fancier folds we've mentioned in this issue, adjustments may have to be made to additional panels.