

Creating an Effective Business Card.

Business cards are very important, and they do have an effect on someone's first impression of you. Therefore, it is important to tailor your card to the impression you're trying to make.

Have you ever tried on an article of one-size-fits-all clothing? It didn't fit you all that well, did it? That's why clothing manufacturers make different sizes, and if you want something that's absolutely perfect, you spring for some extra bucks and go to a tailor.

Business cards are part of your marketing materials. When you're designing your marketing materials, you certainly want them to be tailor-made. Using a generic approach in your ads, brochures and Web sites won't set you apart from the crowd; it won't tell people what's distinctive about you, your business, your products and services. It won't cause you to be remembered.

When you advertise your services or products, being specific marks you as an expert. Networkers know that the more you bring your unique personality, needs and capabilities into your business identity, the more referrals you're likely to receive. The same applies to your marketing materials. To get the kinds of customers you want, good marketing requires you to be specific about what you do and what makes you unique.

A business card is an integral part of a good marketing plan. For its size and cost, it is probably the most powerful part. So it's especially important that your card be one that is memorable and makes a favorable impression. Otherwise, it will probably get tossed into a drawer full of ancient, smudged, forgotten cards that keep accumulating long after the businesses they represent have faded away. That is, if it doesn't get dropped into the nearest circular file.

Your card should display the same design and basic information as your other marketing materials. But a business card is not a brochure or catalog; space is limited, so you must choose your words and images carefully. Which information is absolutely essential? What else can you include that will help persuade a prospect to contact you? Equally important, what should you leave out? Too much information can dilute or obscure your message.

How do you solve this space-vs.-content problem? A good approach is to break the essentials down into three areas: identity, credibility and clarity. Identity and credibility are concerned with what you should include on your card at a minimum; clarity is more about what to leave off.

Choose a card style that's appropriate for your business, industry and personal style. If you're a funeral director, you don't want to be caught handing out day-glow cards with cartoon figures on them. If you're a mechanic whose specialty is converting old Beetles into dune buggies, a formal, black-on-white engraved card will probably be drooped into the nearest circular file. Start with the style that best supports the business image you

wish to project. Here are five different card styles for you to consider:

Basic cards: This is a good card style when utility is all you need. It's a no-nonsense approach that can appeal to clients and prospects who would not be impressed by fancy design features--the people who want "just the facts, ma'am." The design is simple, and the information is clear and concise. A basic card is usually printed in black ink on plain white or cream stock.

Picture cards: Having your face on your card--whether it's a photograph, a drawing or a caricature--helps a contact remember you the next time she sees you. Images representing a product or services, or a benefit your business provides, can help you communicate your business better than dozens of words. Color is often helpful on a picture card, too.

Tactile cards: Some cards are distinguished not so much by how they look as by how they feel. They may use nonstandard materials, such as metal or wood, or have unusual shapes, edges, folds or embossing. Tactile cards tend to be considerably more expensive than regular cards because they use nonstandard production processes such as die cuts.

Multipurpose cards: A card can do more than promote your name and business--it can also serve as a discount coupon, an appointment reminder or some other function. It may also provide valuable information that the average person may need. For example, a hotel may include a map on the back of its card for any guests who are walking around the vicinity. A card of any type can be made multipurpose by adding these types of features.

Outside-the-box cards: A wildly original, fanciful or extravagant presentation can draw extra attention. Creativity knows no bounds--except the amount of money you wish to spend. I've seen examples of these types of cards that were made of chocolate or that folded out into a miniature box to keep small items in. One of the most notable was a dentist's card that included a small compartment for dental floss to be pulled out. These are all examples of "outside-the-box" thinking.

For more detailed descriptions of these and other types or categories of business cards, take a look at the book 'It's in the Cards.' In it, my co-authors and I review more than 2,000 business cards from 10 countries and select more than 200 examples of some of the best, which are shown throughout the book in full-color.

I have one other recommendation about networking and business cards. If you collect cards by the dozens at conferences, trade shows, mixers or sales meetings, you may find that a card scanner is a huge timesaver. They generally come in palm-sized devices and can be used anywhere there's electricity. They make an image that can be downloaded onto your computer, where they can be read by your database software. We used CardScan by Corex to track the thousands of cards we reviewed for our book. It's a great type of device for any master networker who needs to manage his or her business cards.

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chapters throughout the world. He is also the author of five books, including his New York Times bestseller, *Masters of Networking*, as well as Entrepreneur Press' forthcoming *Masters of Success*. Reprinted with permission from Entrepreneur.com