The following set of guidelines will help you if you decide that written materials – promotional fliers, a brochure, Web site information, etc. – for promoting your product.

• First, outline what you want to convey to your readers. Are you selling a product? Cultivating interest? Providing a brief education/introduction of your company? Pretend you have only five seconds to gain someone’s visual interest and decide whether or not they want to read further; would your materials pass the test?

• Next, determine the best promotional material format for your information, keeping the first bullet (above) in mind. For example, tri-fold brochures at trade shows are easily thrown away, but those designed as self-mailers or with coupons tend to be saved. Flyers work well for concise bullet points with large graphics and less text to convey your message.

• You don’t have to be cute – but use words that grab interest. Make your key words stand out visually. Don’t include everything in your promotional pieces. No one reads a brochure that opens up to 10-point text and fills the entire page. Use highlights and main points, not paragraphs in your promotional efforts.

• Stress the customers’ return on investment – what do they gain by reading your piece? How does your product, service, etc., benefit them or is better than your competition?

• Use language used by your customers or whatever group you are addressing, not the jargon of your own niche business.

• Stress authority. This is another way your research pays off. Someone else may be able to give you a testimonial or words of wisdom that fit the message you want to spread. A testimonial from a well-known or famous source may work well to launch a new product.

• If possible, use statistics. Was there something recently in a trade magazine or newspaper?

• Always get a second opinion and always have someone else proofread for you. Any written piece that is done in-house by you or associates should be tested on potential customers or recipients. If you use an agency to do the piece, then make sure this activity is included in what you are getting.

• Step back. If you are the one responsible for the product’s success, you are probably too close to be the one to have final say in its promotion. It needs some logic applied, not your heartfelt (though possibly accurate) assessment. Let another professional or even a business associate help you out.

• You may think a written piece is about you, but it is really about your customer. Emphasize what you have learned about your customer’s needs and wants in what you write.

Types of Promotional Materials
The following are common types of promotional materials used by small businesses. Being consistent in the look and feel of all these materials results in a branding of your business and creates a consistent recall in your readers when they see your images, colors, logo, etc. Be consistent in your efforts while utilizing the following types of promotion.

• Press releases. A press release is used to announce news from your business. A press release should always be written as a factual news story and include, who, what, where, when, why and how. Upcoming events, new services and products and new staff hires are good examples of when to send a press release.
• **Brochure.** A brochure is used to draw interest to your business, through distribution at events, trade shows, meetings, mailings, etc. Think of a brochure as a quick glance at your business for readers. Include who you are, what you do and how to contact you. Photographs and color are important to gain visual interest from readers. You want your brochure to be noticed and picked up from a booth or mailing.

• **Newsletter.** A newsletter is used for two purposes – one to convey information to your members or those interested in your business. For example, a co-op may send a monthly newsletter to all members and a greenhouse may send a monthly newsletter to those who sign up as interested in flowers, tips, articles, etc. on flower care and arrangements. Secondly, newsletters contain news stories; feature stories on a particular member, business, service, item or idea; financial information if the newsletter goes to members of a business; contact information; upcoming events and other items as deemed necessary to include.

• **Flyer/Poster.** Flyers and posters serve the same purpose – to draw readers in for additional information. Flyers and posters should include minimal text and large graphics to capture interest and attention from readers. Flyers and posters work well for announcing an upcoming meeting or event, advertising a product, service or your business in general.

• **Web site.** Determine your goals for your Web site. Does it serve as a contact point for readers trying to find you? Are you providing information to your readers? Do you intend to conduct e-commerce/business on the site? First and foremost, your Web site should allow readers to quickly determine what your business is, what you offer and a contact point for readers, with a physical location. Some people still prefer to pick up the phone and call, or drive to your business. An e-mail address alone on a Web site will not allow that. Organize your Web site by simple, logical categories: About Us, Contact Us, Products/Services, Information/Resources and Upcoming Events/News are good navigation points to start with.

• **Nameplate materials.** These materials are what identify your business to readers immediately and include your business cards, business letterhead, your logo design, fax letterhead and advertisements. These should all have a similar look and feel and remain consistent. Changing your logo or business name randomly creates confusion in your customers and results in lost business.

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