Why is a brochure important to your business? When should you use a brochure? This article examines different brochure types and reasons for using a brochure, as well as basic design and copy guidelines in creating your brochure.

**Strengths of a Brochure**
- Control over what and how is said, including graphics.
- Control where your brochure is placed or who receives it.
- Brochures are flexible.
- Can be done yourself. Although it is a good investment to hire a professional as soon as you can.

**Weaknesses of a Brochure**
- Generally given to all qualified customers, so using it for mass audiences may be cost prohibitive.
- The brochures can quickly become outdated and money is wasted.
- Trying to match the competition can be expensive.

To begin creating a brochure for your business, you need a clear understanding of how you will use the finished product. There are two functions of brochures.

**The Two Types of Basic Brochure Design**

**Adventoria**
This brochure attracts attention and plays on the emotions of the customers. It compels people to pick it up and read it. It has an attention getting tagline or headline. It contains lots of white space and short bullets or points, rather than long paragraphs. Included is a call to action that asks the customer to make an order, a phone call, come on down, clip a coupon, mail a reply card or some other action that puts you and the customer in contact.

This brochure is the appetizer of your business.

**Informational**
This brochure is the main course. This is for the customer who has learned of your company and has requested more information. Unlike advertorial brochures, informational brochures can be crammed with information.

This style of brochure should not be used in display racks or laid out at a trade show booth. A potential customer who is unfamiliar with your business will not read a mountain of information just to see what you do.

If you can only afford to do one style of brochure at this point in your business, do the advertorial brochure and place in-depth information a customer may request in a folder or one-page flyer.

**Basic Brochure Design: Where to Start**
The basic bi-fold brochure is constructed by folding an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper twice to create three panels on each side. It is the brochure type most commonly used by small business because it can be mailed in a standard #10 envelope.

With rare exceptions, businesses should develop the copy first. You only have a small amount of space to tell your story. You can identify and select graphics and pictures that enhance your message later on. Write your copy from the customers’ point of view, not yours. What does the customer want/need to know?

When preparing your text, keep it short and sweet. The reader should be able to grasp the main points by simply glancing through the piece. If you bury your messages in a lot of heavy text, the reader may decide that it’s too much work to read your brochure and throw it away.
Speak directly to the customer. “We help you…” Use headings and subheadings to group ideas and help the reader focus on items that are of interest to him or her. Avoid industry jargon and acronyms. Use clear language that everyone can understand.

Microsoft Word allows you to create multiple columns for brochures under the format tab. Word allows you to create basic brochures and import pictures from saved sources. Professional design programs such as Adobe InDesign, Adobe Page-Maker or Quark XPress offer additional flexibility in creating your design and print the design at a printing service.

Specific Panel Design

Front Cover
Don’t just name your product on the front cover, or your logo. Instead, develop a theme that captures attention and interest. Use your theme as a headline for your front cover and repeat throughout the brochure. Include a customer benefit, clearly stated or implied, whenever possible.

Back Cover
Don’t put anything on the back cover other than contact information. This is the panel that people are least likely to read, so if you put an important message there, it will be lost.

Inside Front Panel - first panel you see when the brochure is opened
This is the most important panel. Use it to summarize why the customer should choose you. It is a good location for a glowing testimonial. Although this is the most important panel, write it last. If you craft the inside spread first, you will have a better idea of what you want to summarize on the inside front panel.

The inside front panel also is a great place for your phone number and/or web site address.

Inside Three Panels
When the brochure is fully open, there are three full panels to write a description of your business and what it does. Carry the brochure theme over into your inside panels.

Use images, subheads, captions and body copy that continue your front cover theme throughout the brochure.

Grab attention. Describe your top benefits. Present proof. Ask for the order.

Once the copy is completed work on making it shorter and more descriptive. If you or your designer has created a consistent visual look to your advertising with repeated images, graphics or colors, continue it in your brochure. The familiarity will be immediately recognizable to the reader.

How To Talk To Your Customers In Your Brochure

• Ask your employees to write the brochure copy. Or ask some of your better customers to help write it. You may be surprised at what you get.

• Try to eliminate as many decisions as possible in your text copy. Assume the customer will eventually buy the product or service. Don’t use the words, if and maybe.

• Never ask open-ended questions in a brochure. Questions should be phrased so the answer is “YES.”

• Businesses should list the many important features of their products. Customers will not care about any feature unless there is a benefit to them. A feature is what a product has. A benefit is what a product does. The more benefits the product has, the better.

• You want your brochure to sound and look professional. A good brochure reads like a conversation, not a manuscript.

Brochure No-No’s

• Do not use more than nine or ten lines of type per paragraph.

• Do not average more than two or three sentences per paragraph.

• Do not indent paragraphs that have a space between them.

• Do not start sentences with numbers.
• Do not put two spaces after periods if using a computer. Page layout and word processing programs put the proper spacing after periods automatically.
• Do not use underline or all capitals as a way to stress a point. Use bold or italics instead.
• Use italic and all capitals sparingly as they are hard for people to read.

How To Get Started
• Go to your local Chamber of Commerce, economic development office or a major hotel and look for a large rack of brochures. Stand back and look at the rack. Which brochures catch your eye? Which ones do you want to pick up? Is it because of the ink color, typeface, headline, paper color or visual design?
• Now, look again. Take out some of the brochures you didn’t select and ask the following:
  • Why didn’t you look at them?
  • Can you find something specific that made you skip right over them?
  • Was it the lack of an eye-catching graphic?
  • Was it a hard to read type-face?
  • Did the headline lack sales appeal? Was it a label instead of a call to action?
  • Was it because the design of the rack hid the real message?
  • Was it because it was printed on a blah color or paper?
  • Set up some basic ideas and blocks of text on a folded piece of 8 1/2 x 11 paper. Does your text flow well? Does the copy seem logical for those panel placements? What images/theme would benefit this copy and sell the brochure?
• If you decide to create the brochure yourself, begin laying it out in Microsoft Word in the column format or consult with a professional and present your ideas for your brochure design, which will then be completed in a design program.

* Reprinted with permission from the Ag Marketing Resource Center, Iowa State University Extension.