

PRINTtips

Designing Effective Business Cards

Quick – name the single marketing item most widely used by businesses of all sizes. Did you answer *business cards*? With business cards, we first begin to make an impression on the people who will eventually be our customers. Our business cards establish an image for our organization and us and provide information about how we may be contacted. And all this is presented in a familiar form that is easy to store and retrieve.

If this makes a business card sound like a wonderful marketing tool, that's because it is! By using some creativity and a bit of unconventional thinking, you can proudly present a business card that both stands out and really markets you and your company.

The first decision: size

A standard American business card measures 3.5 x 2 inches. This size fits conveniently into business card holders, protecting the cards before they are given out, and can be stored easily by the recipient in a business card binder or rotary file. Although using a non-standard size may tempt

you as a way to present a memorable business card, do remember that your ultimate goal is to have the recipient store and later retrieve your business card. A standard size that can be stored in a standard fashion will accomplish this objective best.

The second decision: information to include

Since the ultimate purpose of a business card is to provide information about who you are and how you may be contacted, the basic information to include on your business card is the name and address of your company, your name and title, your phone and FAX numbers and your e-mail address. You may also wish to include aids to help others remember your name, such as a phonetic spelling or a nickname in parentheses. When important for image, consider adding your professional or academic designations and affiliations.

In today's world of wireless communications, you may find that your company's toll-free phone number, your direct phone line, your cell phone



number, your pager number and your home phone number may not all fit on the business card. Be prepared to decide which of these options are most likely to lead to success for the person who wants to contact you, and omit the others.

The third decision: a logo

The word *logo* is a shortened version of *logotype*, which originally meant an identifying symbol created from type. Today a logo can be created using art elements such as clip art, typefaces, photos, symbols, silhouettes, shapes and outlines, or a logo can be designed from scratch. But regardless of the method used to create the logo, there are a few basic rules that govern logo design.

The purpose of a logo is to visually convey attributes of the business.

These might include what the business does or what characteristics it has. A painting business, for example, could use a paint bucket and brush to demonstrate its trade, while a bank might select strong, bold type to convey security and stability.

Developing a logo begins with deciding what words best convey the attributes of the business, then selecting visual images that evoke the words. This may take a brainstorming session or two, especially if you want to avoid ideas being used by others or visual images that have become dated or stale. If you have a word list but are short on visual images, call us. We will be happy to have you look through our clip art library or stock photography collection.

The fourth decision: design

Good design communicates an idea and equally considers function and form. Good design is visually striking and conveys an impression. Good design separates your business card from others and provides a *wow* factor as you hand your card to another person.

In *The Non-Designer's Design Book*, Robin Williams describes the four basic principles of design:

Proximity, the grouping of like elements;

Alignment, the visual connection of all elements;

Repetition, the repeated use of visual elements; and

Contrast, a marked difference between elements

When designing a business card, the most important elements are proximity, alignment and contrast. Using the principle of proximity means that related items appear physically close to each other, giving the reader a visual clue about the organization of the business card. Thus, information related to the company (address, toll free phone line, FAX, web address) should be grouped and proximate, while information about the individual (direct phone line, e-mail address) should be grouped and not in close proximity to the company information.

Following the principle of alignment, nothing is placed on the business card arbitrarily, and every item has a visual connection with something else.

Alignment is what unifies elements that are physically separated (following the principle of proximity) and creates organization. Alignment can be achieved by building the design on a grid.

Contrast adds visual interest to a business card and also creates organizational hierarchy. But for contrast to be effective, it must be definite. Two elements that are only a bit different don't contrast, they conflict. True contrast is bold and obvious - a thin line with a thick line; large type with small type; a script font with a bold san serif; light and dark ink colors.

The fifth decision: color

Introduce color into your business card with paper, ink or both. The psychology of color is a topic in itself; here is a brief summary:

Warm colors (red, orange, yellow, brown) evoke danger, power, passion, strength, blood and war. When used as an accent, warm colors can stimulate people to make quick decisions.

Cool colors (green, blue, purple) signify nature, life, new growth, energy, faith, money, royalty, richness, power and sensitivity. Blue is deemed therapeutic to the mind and body.

The color white connotes purity, clarity and cleanliness.

Notice that all the colors are associated with words. Use this information to select colors that elicit the emotional response consistent with the visual image of your logo. The combination of logo, design and color will create the truly unique business card you desire.

words

a vocabulary of the graphic arts

Baseline: A virtual line on which text, exclusive of ascenders and descenders, is set.

Bleed: In a layout, any image area that extends beyond the trim line.

Body type: The type used for the main text of a document. For business cards, body type size is usually between 7 and 10 points.

Character count: The total number of typeface characters in a line.

Close registration: In printing, the precise alignment of two or more images.

Design grid: A virtual framework upon which a layout is placed.

Dingbats: Small, ornamental characters used as design elements. A dingbat consisting of a stylized flower or leaf may also be called a printer's mark or printer's flower.

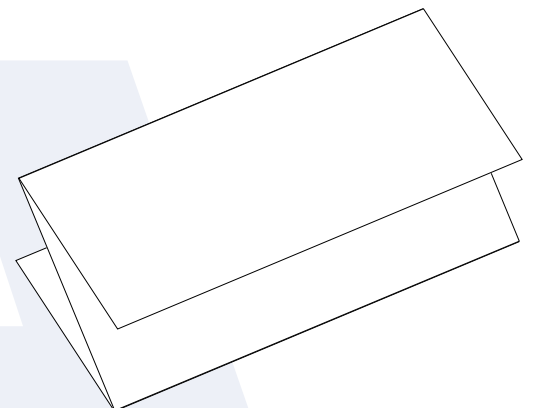
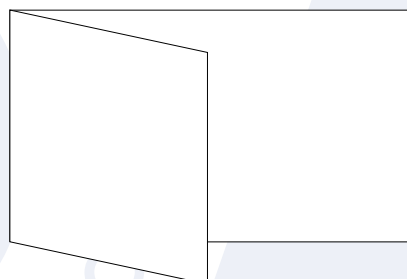
Icon: A visual image that suggests its meaning.

Rule: A line of selected thickness. May be drawn horizontally or vertically.

White space: Any area not occupied by text or graphics. White space can be used as a design element.

Q. *I have a lot of information to include on my business card. How can I make it all fit and still use the standard size?*

A. The back of a business card is often overlooked as a place to display information. Secondary contact information such as cell phone, pager and home phone number are good candidates for the back of a card, as is company web site. Also, consider a business card that folds to standard size. Several styles are illustrated below.



Turn your business card into a great marketing tool and enhance the likelihood that it will be kept by printing something of value on the back. Here are some possibilities:

Information: Use the back of your business card to provide reference or other information of interest such as a calendar, a size chart, weights and measures or emergency phone numbers.

Invitation: On the back of an organization's business card, print the meeting time and place and an invitation to attend the next meeting.

Appointment: Physicians, dentists and other professionals can use the back of the business card to record the patient's next appointment.

Notes: Include lines to accommodate note-taking on the back of the

business card. Use the space to record things you want the prospect to remember - an additional phone number, a referral, the item number of a product you sell.

To demonstrate the three design principles most applicable to business cards, we have reproduced three versions of the same information. Notice how each successive application of a principle organizes the card and improves the design.

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Design Principle: Proximity

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Design Principle: Alignment

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Design Principle: Contrast