

Marketing Collateral Material – It's More Strategic Than You Think

Tips & Hints for Creating Collateral that Works

Not all businesses require marketing collateral, but most do, in one way or another. Your marketing collateral (printed materials used to share information about your business, products or services) can be a significant component of how your business is perceived by prospects and customers. You can be instantly judged by how professional (or not) your materials look. This is why it is important to plan carefully, and to engage the right type of talent and vendors to help make your business communicate the best message for your brand.

There are many formats for presenting your business via collateral material, including: brochures, flyers, one sheets / fact sheets, electronic PDF documents downloadable from your web site, direct mail pieces, and other communications pieces that are produced “in house” by your staff. All of your company's printed pieces should be in tune with your overall marketing message and company brand.

Here are some questions to answer when you are in the planning phase for creating marketing materials for your company.

- **Strategic Need / Goals of the Marketing Piece**

There are many reasons for having collateral material developed, but clearly identifying why you need the marketing piece developed and what goals it should achieve will ensure your money is well spent.

- Why do you need to develop a marketing piece in the first place?
 - Will it help you better explain why your product is different?
 - Will it help you create credibility for your business?
 - Does your sales team need a tool for explaining how the product or service works? Or maybe they need a “leave behind piece” so that their contact can help influence a decisionmaker?
 - Are you trying to break through the clutter and raise awareness of your company's offerings?
- Who is the intended audience (or audiences) for the collateral? This will impact everything from the messages you create, how technical or simple your copy will be written, which benefits you will emphasize, to the images used in the design.

Once you understand the goals of the piece, everything you do should keep those goals in mind.

- **Key Messages and Written Text**

Some of these questions will depend on what kind of collateral piece you are creating and what the goals of the piece are, but they are good questions to consider in general.

- What are the key messages you need to convey in order to meet the goals of the marketing piece?
- How can you best organize the messages so that readers can easily understand it? (Are there ways to categorize the information that would make it easier to read?)
- Have you backed up your key messages with testimonials from customers/partners or a list of impressive customers/partners or even industry awards that may give your company credibility?
- Is the information accurate?
- Are the words and sentences simple and clearly written?
- Are they written in the “language” your target audience understands?
- Have you had a good writer proof read it for grammar?
- Does it catch the reader’s attention?
- Have you provided too much information leaving no reason at all for the prospect to contact you? (Important if this is a sales tool.)
- Have you written too much text for a marketing piece to be read easily? (A marketing piece is typically not an end-all, be-all to any question a prospect or customer ever had about your product or company.)
- What is the implied tone of the message? Is the tone appropriate for the audience? Does it reflect the desired brand of your company?
- Does it communicate the benefits of your product or of doing business with your company? (The benefits your target audience cares about most?)
- Does it help differentiate you from your competition?
- Is there a call to action for the reader?
- Does it tell the reader how to contact you?
- Do you provide information about connecting with your company’s web site or social media?

When preparing your written communications, think creatively. Use the language that your target audience and/or customers and prospects expect to read. (Which means you need to understand their language.) Remember to express what distinguishes your business from your competitors. Highlight the benefits (not features) your company offers—and make sure they are the benefits your customers/prospects care about most.

- **Design and Layout**

Once you’ve decided on your collateral material’s goal and developed the written message, then you can decide what format is best for presenting it. Or, if you’ve already developed a piece, you can make the following considerations when evaluating its effectiveness.

- The amount of text (or copy) will dictate the layout and format of the piece.
- Is the material visually compelling and appealing?
- Does it invite the reader to open it or read further?
- Do the design and layout components complement the message?
- Does the layout need to be innovative in order to keep with your brand and achieve the goal of the piece?

- Use a serif font for body copy. Studies have shown that body copy set in a serif typeface is easier to read and therefore more effective than copy set in sans serif typefaces (those without the little tails). Limit your use of sans serif type to headlines and subheads.
- As you lay out the piece, consider the below formatting components. For instance, it is important to leave enough white space so that readers will actually be able to easily read the content. And a font size that is large enough for your intended audience to effectively read is also important.

Considerations for formatting / design and layout include:

- balance
- white (or empty) space
- font types
- colors
- paper stock (weight, texture, color)
- paper size
- graphics/charts
- illustrations
- photography

The old adage that a picture is worth a thousand words is still true today. Product photos, graphs, illustrations or other design elements can help you visually communicate your message and your brand fairly quickly.

- **Managing the Marketing Collateral Project**
 - Have you kept the specific marketing goal in mind for the collateral piece?
 - Have you kept the intended target/ audience in mind?
 - Does the design cost and printing cost adhere to your budget?
 - What is the production schedule?
 - Is the timing appropriate?
 - Does it complement your other marketing materials?
 - How and when will you distribute collateral pieces?
 - If you're planning to mail collateral, does it comply with post office mailing requirements?
 - If you're planning to mail the collateral, will it fit into your envelopes? How much will it cost to mail it?

With the right amount of thoughtful planning (and many times, talented assistance from experienced vendors) your marketing collateral should carry out your company's brand and serve as an effective tool in your marketing arsenal.

Contact the EDC at 319-369-4955 or jheskje@edcinc.org if you have any questions.