



6 Fatal Mistakes Businesses Make When Preparing Brochures

...And How You Can Avoid Them

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Introduction

Someone recently told me, “Rena, don’t waste your time and money on a business brochure...they’re dead. The web’s the place to be instead.”

I firmly disagree. And since you’re reading this special report, you must be planning to produce a brochure for your company as well.

I do leverage the power of the web, and hopefully you do, too. It’s an excellent medium that lets you connect with prospects from every corner of the globe, and to educate interested people about the products or services you offer.

However, I want to provide my clients the option of using the web—or not. Many busy executives would rather receive a print piece in the mail that they can take with them and read at their leisure. Not only that, reading on the web can be tiresome, and images often don’t come across as crisp and as clear.

There are other benefits to a print brochure as well, including:

Increased credibility. After all, anyone can be on the web. And anyone can produce business cards and stationary at home. So the perception remains in most people’s minds that it takes a “real” business to produce a brochure.

Increased likelihood of retention. Prospects will likely tuck your brochure away for later, even if they don’t need you now. Especially if your brochure looks attractive, and if they sent away for the materials to begin with.

Since you’ve decided to expend resources to develop a corporate brochure, it makes sense to avoid common fatal mistakes that many businesses make so your piece will stand out, create a professional image for your company, and help you win your next customer.



Mistake #1 – Having One Piece That Tries To Be Everything to Everyone

True story.

One of my corporate clients was an international firm with offices worldwide, and they served other organizations around the world.

This company did everything in their particular field. And I mean everything. They even performed services outside of their field...just because they could, I suppose. Perhaps they did an “extra” for one of their clients one time, and decided to add that “extra” to their list of services. From the size of the list, I’d say they’ve done lots of “extras” over the years.

The problem began when they told me they wanted a corporate brochure that covered every service—and I mean every service—they performed.

I tried to explain that if we did, we’d be able to do nothing more than say, “Here are the services we offer. If you need anything, give us a call.”

I explained that they, and their potential clients, might be better served if they created a folder-type brochure. As part of the folder, they could include corporate information, and then create individual fact sheets on each service they offered. This would allow them to put together an informative package for each potential client, customized based on services the client might need.

Thankfully, they agreed, and I began my research.

During the research phase, I discovered that there existed distinct industry divisions for one of their particular service lines.

So I asked, “Which industries do you specialize in related to this service? Is there one area you’re more suited for?”

Their reply? “We specialize in EVERY industry!” (Emphasis *theirs*, not mine.)

What’s wrong with that picture? Everything.

First of all, that fact sheet wound up being a generalized version of that particular service line, which spoke to everyone—and therefore to no one at all.

I couldn’t target the copy to any particular reader. I couldn’t target the copy to any particular industry. So instead of a brochure that specifically addressed the problems and pains of say, auto industry executives, I wound up with a brochure that tried to address the problems and pains of executives in general. Medical industry executives. Cosmetic industry executives. High tech industry executives. Auto industry executives.



Was it effective? I doubt it. I'm not proud of that piece, but I could not convince them otherwise.

Avoid that problem by trying not to be everything to everyone. Instead, target your copy to one niche market. If you serve many markets, create a folder-style brochure with individual fact sheets.

And if one of your service or product lines has a distinct industry division, create separate pieces that address each different audience.

Then, you'll have copy that speaks to the reader, and that specifically addresses their industry pains and problems.

Mistake #2 – Focusing on Aesthetics Versus Content

Sure you want your brochure to be attractive. With suitable graphical elements and stylistic features.

But don't sacrifice content for appearances' sake.

The same client I mentioned before suffered from this mistake too, when they agreed with me in theory, but vetoed additional copy in the end.

I explained that people really do like to read, and that you do them a great service if you take the time to educate them about the problem or pain that they're facing.

Not only does it instill confidence in you as a solution provider, but by taking the time to "talk" to the reader, it gives them a feeling of what it will be like if they decide to forge a relationship with you.

Think about it. Suppose you need to hire a printer to print your new corporate brochures. You make a few calls, and get the following packages in the mail:

1. Envelope, which contains a business card, formal price quote, and a scribbled note that says, "Give me a call."
2. Envelope, which contains a business card, formal price quote, a full-color 8.5 x 11 inch sheet describing the variety of papers you can choose from and the advantages and disadvantages of each, an insert that details their printing process and explains why that process will give you exceptional quality, as well as sample brochures created for past clients.

Which printer would you most likely choose?

Many of the full-color corporate brochures you see today are designed and produced by people who do not need—or use—your product or service. Instead, they're designed by graphic artists who revel in creating a professionally attractive piece, and are sorely lacking in content.



Avoid this mistake yourself by making your brochure content-rich. Give your clients enough information to help them make a buying decision. Make your brochure meaty, so that people who read it feel like they've learned something, and so they feel comfortable that your company has the expertise to solve their problems.

Mistake #3 – Writing in Self-Aggrandizing Corporate-ese

The best way to define the self-aggrandizing corporate-ese that permeates 92% of all corporate brochures today is to show you a sample. I've changed the company's name to save myself from possible legal action, and to save the company from embarrassment:

Incorporated nearly 40 years ago, XYZ is one of the longest established, independent, privately owned (xyz) companies. XYZ offers a comprehensive portfolio of services designed to protect and enhance today's international business community. The company has built a reputation based on the delivery of a high quality service which is discreet, thorough and extremely successful.

XZY act for some of the most pre-eminent companies in the world and operates on every continent. When working with clients a very close relationship is maintained which ensures the best understanding of their particular requirements.

I kid you not. Those two paragraphs are taken directly from a corporate brochure sitting right here in front of me. Grammar and punctuation mistakes included (XYZ acts, not act. Can you find the punctuation error? Don't worry—it's my job to catch problems like that anyway).

Did reading their material make you want to jump up and call them right away?

Let's dissect their prose, so you can avoid making the same fatal mistake in your corporate brochure.

First problem: Using the passive voice. I'm not going to explain grammar rules here, but I'm going to show you how big a difference the active voice makes.

Passive sentence: *When working with clients, a very close relationship is maintained....*

Let's change it to the active voice, which is much livelier, and see what happens:

We maintain a very close relationship when working with clients....



Read through your brochure copy. Whenever you see “is verbed,” chances are you can rewrite the sentence for a better sound and flow.

Second problem: Writing as if they’re telling a disinterested party what they do, rather than telling a potential customer. How to correct it? Write directly TO the customer.

Instead of: *We maintain a very close relationship with clients which ensures the best understanding of their particular requirements,*

Say, *We maintain a very close relationship with you, which ensures that we understand your particular requirements.*

Write your copy as if you’re talking person to person. Make it conversational rather than a treatise. After all, if they decide to hire you, they’ll be working with a real human being.

Third problem: Talking about the company in the third person. If you resolve the previous two problems, you’ll naturally resolve this one.

Instead of: *The company has built a reputation based on the delivery of a high quality service which is discreet, thorough and extremely successful,*

Say: *We have built a reputation....*

Fourth problem: Writing with over-used words and phrases that mean nothing, and that no one believes.

Instead of: *...the delivery of a high quality service,*

Define what you mean by high quality. The phrase is ubiquitous, and since everyone says it, no one believes it.

For example, perhaps high quality means that your reports are 99.7% accurate, and that you return all phone calls within two hours. Or, perhaps in your industry, high quality means error-free. Be specific. If you want to say you provide a high quality product or service, by all means do so. But tell your prospects what you mean by high quality.

And in doing so, your brochure will stand out from your competitors’, and you’ll avoid another fatal mistake.



Mistake #4 – Not Trying to Generate A Response

I, personally, believe this is the most fatal mistake of all. You can create an absolutely beautiful brochure, rich with informational content that speaks directly to the reader.

But that's all.

It doesn't tell the reader what to do next.

It doesn't ask them to call, or to email you, or to pull out your checkbook and order.

So they finish reading your piece. Put it down. And pick up the next one. Without a response mechanism or request, reading your brochure becomes like reading a magazine article.

Don't let your brochure go to waste. Turn it into a direct response piece by asking the prospect to take the next step towards buying.

Perhaps they need to tear off an attached postcard and send for an evaluation version of your product. Or, maybe the next step in your sales process is to arrange a no-obligation, in-person consultation.

Whatever it is, ask them to do it, overtly and distinctly.

Mistake #5 – Not Including Contact Information

This may seem obvious to you, but I can't count how many brochures I've seen that lack any contact information at all.

No phone number. No address. No website.

Why make your customer work harder to do business with you? Why take the chance that they won't look you up in the phone book, or on a search engine?

Include all of your contact information on each piece you send with the brochure as well.

One client I know said their prospects regularly forward relevant pieces of their package to various people in various departments who might be interested in one of their many services.

If your contact information is on each piece, everyone will know how to reach you. Quickly. And easily.



Mistake #6 – Leaving Too Much Blank Space

Most brochures have one or two blank panels or pages, either inside the cover or on the back of the piece.

Why leave them blank?

Use extra white space to make additional sales statements, or to give potential customers more information of value.

For example, if I had extra white space on my brochure, I could prepare a list of commonly misspelled or misused words for business executives. Or, how about a list of online resources that will help makes their jobs, and their lives, easier?

Whatever your industry, whatever you sell, you can certainly uncover some facts or bits of information to share with potential clients.

Not only does this add to the value of your piece, which may be saved as a reference, but also, it exhibits your expertise and specialized knowledge.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, there are many more than 6 fatal mistakes you can make when developing your business brochure.

But by following the guidelines presented above, you'll be well on your way to a brochure that moves people to action, outshines your competitors', and becomes a valuable resource that your prospects will save.

If you'd like help developing information-rich content for your business brochure, please get in touch today. And if you need a turnkey solution, you'll be pleased to know that I've developed working relationships with experienced graphic designers and printers.

You may call me at 727-302-0232, Monday – Friday, from 9:00 am until 4:00 pm, Eastern Standard Time. Or, email me at service@ineedcopy.com, or visit my website at www.ineedcopy.com.

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I'm Renae Gregoire, President of The Write Idea, a Tampa, Florida-based commercial freelance writing firm committed to helping businesses like yours communicate your message to your target audience(s) in the most clear and professionally persuasive way possible. My credits include professional web content, brochures, newsletters, sales pieces and more for large and small companies in the Tampa Bay area and around the globe. Call or email me today to learn how I can help with your next communications project.