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Fourteen Elements of a Good Brochure or Web Site



White Paper No. 1

The shortcut to trust and credibility™

Ever notice that some brochures are good resources for you while some make you wonder why they even bothered? A website, too, can be either exciting and informative or a real dud. While there are additional, interactive properties of web sites that don't apply to brochures, first let's take a look at the basic elements that are contained in both.

The Fourteen Elements

1. The words should work hard. So should the design.

There should be some meat on those bones. Designing a visually dramatic brochure that contains nothing but a few vague catch phrases may look nice, but it's not going to compel a serious buyer to consider using your company.

If a potential customer goes to all the trouble of reading your brochure or website, the least you can do is provide them with the information they need to strongly consider you. Your message should be clear and concise and have enough substance to compel a serious buyer to consider using your company. Otherwise they might as well be looking at a business card.

The design should work hard, too. While your company's message is the most important element of your marketing piece, it may never get read if it's not well-designed. A brochure or website is the first—and perhaps only—point of contact with your company, so it had better make a good impression. Good design will get you noticed, make it interesting to read, and help you be remembered.

1. **The words should work hard. So should the design.**
2. **A strong introduction**
3. **Services offered**
4. **Features and benefits**
5. **Background information**
6. **How you work**
7. **Client list**
8. **Testimonials**
9. **Photos**
10. **Fees and Terms**
11. **Your guarantee**
12. **Biographical information**
13. **Ask for the call**
14. **Contact Information**

2. A strong introduction

You have only a few sentences to convince the reader that they aren't wasting their time by continuing. So early on you need to give them an overview of what you're about and why they should read on.

3. Services offered

A lot of business owners are so familiar with their own company that they think everyone else understands what they do too.

Saying you're a machine shop, for example, doesn't tell the potential customer whether you can handle their job. Do you fabricate? Do you assemble? Do you finish? Do you offer precision work? Can you handle large jobs? Small jobs? Do you create prototypes? Do you offer engineering and design services?

Let's say someone with a design for a new style of computer chassis picks up your brochure or logs on your website. He wants to produce 20,000 pieces and needs them in 60 days. Will he be able to determine whether your company is right for his job? Better to give him a reason to call.

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4. Features and benefits

If a potential customer is holding three brochures—yours and that of two competitors—your brochure had better offer some compelling reasons for doing business with you. Are you the best? If so, can you make a convincing argument for it in your brochure? Are your prices the best? If so, how do you make this possible? Do you have efficiencies in your company that others don't? Is your quality superior? Is your service better? Why?

Empty claims are worthless. Simply saying you're professional, provide high quality at reasonable prices means little to a reader. Everyone says that. You need to back it up with convincing facts and a convincing image.

The design of your brochure and website should also speak of your professionalism and commitment to quality. A mediocre design might suggest—though not always—that you're not ready to invest in superior looking materials, that your standards of quality are not that high, or that you don't consider it worth spending the time to make it look as good as possible. Perhaps you can offer faster delivery because you have warehouses on both coasts. Or your company has specially streamlined production systems. Perhaps your quality is superior because you have the very newest, most precise equipment. That's more convincing. Is your company particularly good at difficult jobs or situations? Why? Identify your strengths—and talk about them. A brochure or website is no place to be bashful.

5. Background information

What do potential customers need to know about your company's history? Have you been in business longer than your competitors? Have you won awards? Have you received recognition in other ways? How have you helped other clients like them?

6. How you work

How would you describe your process? How do you complete a job from beginning to end? Do you have different divisions? Departments? How do you control quality? Who handles customer service? Do any of these processes differ from those of your competitors?

7. Client list

Have you performed work or sold products to many companies? Are they companies that others in the industry might recognize? Is it an impressive list? If I'm a producer of aerospace equipment and I need a part, it's important for me to learn that you've sold similar parts to others in my industry.

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8. Testimonials

Even more heartening than a list of clients is a list of satisfied clients. But how do you communicate that these clients are satisfied? With testimonials. Testimonials are powerful sales tools. We all like to know what a third party might think. If you say you have good quality, it's one thing. If someone says it about you, it's extremely convincing. Especially if it comes from someone I know or have heard of.

Testimonials involve some work. You usually have to approach your customers and ask them for the favor. But it's well worth the effort. And if you provide your customers with excellent quality and service, they'll probably be happy to help you.

9. Photos

Be sure to include photographs. If you're in the business of producing or re-selling products, of course you'll want to include pictures of them. If you use equipment in a service or manufacturing enterprise, be sure to show a sample of the machinery you use. If you use special equipment in your service or manufacturing company, you may want to show a sample of the machinery you use, if that's a selling point to your customers. For example, many machine shops don't have a wire EDM. If it's a competitive edge you possess, then show it. And showing it in use, with your staff, is more interesting visually than just showing the machine.

Photos with people in them add visual interest that can be captured in no other way. After all, the success of any business enterprise is based on relationships. So why not begin that relationship in your brochure—with a picture of yourself or your staff? That way you immediately make a personal connection—and put a “face” on your business.

10. Fees and Terms

People like to know how you handle the financial end of your business. If it's impractical to offer specific pricing, you should at least address how you approach pricing. By an hourly rate? By the job? Are your prices competitive? Why? Do you offer credit?

11. Your guarantee

If you offer a guarantee, it's important to say so. Explain the details of it so customers feel they can order from you with peace of mind.

12. Biographical information

Who are the key employees at your company and what do they bring to the table? After all, these people have impressed you enough for you to hire them. You should share their impressive credentials and experience with those you hope to serve.

If your background is impressive, be sure to include it. Written carefully, a list of accomplishments can be impressive without sounding braggy.

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13. Ask for the call

What does a reader of your brochure or website do when they are interested? Do they telephone you? Email? Send in a pre-paid postcard you've enclosed that instructs your sales department to contact them?

People are skittish about being bothered, or creating an obligation. If you offer free estimates, with no obligation, say so. If you offer free samples or free demonstrations, be sure to mention that.

14. Contact Information

While it may seem obvious, we have run across brochures and websites that neglect to include contact names, titles, addresses, phones and fax numbers, web or email addresses. Double-check to make sure your communication piece includes all of these, where applicable.

It's your image. Think about it carefully.

A well-designed, well-written brochure or website can be the most powerful tool in your business. It can attract new customers, give your company a recognizable presence within your industry, and let current customers know about recent changes or additions to your operations. The most effective brochures and websites contain many if not all of the above elements. Be sure to put them to work for you when designing your next marketing piece. After all, you are largely responsible for what clients think of you.