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A blog offering "how to" marketing tips for professional service firms and the professionals in them from Barbara Walters Price

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Top Ten Ways to Waste Money on Business Cards

By Barbara Walters Price

When designing business cards, providers of professional services (attorneys, CPAs, engineers, architects, etc.) sometimes become enamored by the newest design schemes and forget the core function of the business card - which is to convey basic information about your firm (name/logo/tagline) and you (title and contact information).

Your business card should enhance your brand and be welcomed by your target market which is relatively easy to accomplish. However, many people needlessly waste money on business cards - money that could be put to better use in other areas of your marketing and business development. As such, here is my list of "Top Ten Ways to Waste Money on Business Cards". See if you recognize yourself or your firm:

1. **Use a black or dark background on the front AND back of your business card.** This is form over function and it is a pet peeve of mine. Dark backgrounds on both sides indicate that you don't care if you are making it hard for me, your client, prospect, or referral source to take notes on the business card (as so many of us do) and possibly take follow up action after meeting you. If this is the message I get from you, I'm not that interested in doing business with you.
2. **Print your firm's mission statement on the back of your business card.** This takes up valuable room and, really, who cares? We know that your firm's mission is to provide exceptional service, a quality work product, treat the client like a king/queen ... yada, yada, yada. Unless your mission statement is short, unique, and compelling (which they never are), don't waste the space and incur the extra cost for the reverse-side printing.
3. **Use folded cards.** The fold-over flap might be a nice design element, but again, who cares? I'm looking for basic information designed well. It doesn't communicate anything to me (but maybe I'm too cynical) if you have a fold-over flap other than you're paying too much for your business cards.
4. **Use your business cards as your brochure.** I, along with a group of CEOs, heard a presentation by a consultant/professional speaker on the topic of unleashing the power of your mind. One of her points concerned business cards and how little time we pay attention to them when handed one. She went on to say that her business card, which was accordion-folded and contained 8 panels (front and back), solved that problem because of its design. Her "business card" contained a brief bio, info about her books, her speaking topics, and everything except the name of her dog. I thought, how interesting and how utterly useless. It was TOO full of information, TOO crowded, and a bit TOO cheesy. It was viewed as unprofessional by the market she was targeting. While her presentation was interesting and well-delivered, I and the CEOs in the room were polite but in 100% agreement that this "business card" would likely head straight to File 13.
5. **Use a confusing design.** If I have to struggle to find your name and e-mail address, then the design is flawed. Good design enhances. Bad design frustrates. Pick your designer carefully. The design should be focused on the recipient, not you.

6. **Print your business cards at home or at your office.** Simply said, business cards are cheap. Have them professionally printed. Those printed at home or at your office look the part and you are pegged as bush-league before you even open your mouth.
7. **Use hard to read fonts.** As I get older, I appreciate a clean and easily readable design. Serif fonts, especially those that attempt to mimic cursive writing, are almost unreadable. Do yourself and those that receive your business card a favor and use a sans serif font in a type size that your parents can read.
8. **Use glossy paper stock on the front AND back.** To facilitate note-taking on the back of the card, use glossy only on the front of the business card.
9. **Use cheap paper stock.** Again, business cards are cheap but don't get crazy by choosing a cheap, light weight paper stock. While this choice of paper stock might not be a big deal in isolation, when this card is part of a stack of business cards I have collected from a conference, it's obvious. The subtle message is "I'm too cheap to invest in a proper business card" which is not the message you want to convey.
10. **Use heavy weight paper stock.** We've all been given business cards that are printed on stock so heavy that the card won't bend. Why?

And a bonus:

11. **Put your picture on your business card.** Unless you are a real estate agent, 'nuff said.

If you have any other "waste of money" ideas or pet peeves or if you think I'm way off base, let me know.