

SPECIAL MARKETING PROBLEMS (AND HOW TO SOLVE THEM)

This chapter discusses common problems encountered when planning and producing brochures, and suggests ways of handling them effectively.

The Product Keeps Changing

This is a major headache for high-tech and services companies. Their products and services are in a constant state of evolution, so any published material quickly goes out of date.

One solution is to wait until the product becomes relatively stable in design and function before publishing any literature on it. But that's a mistake. Without literature, your advertising and promotion campaign is crippled. The fact is that many consumers- and almost all business buyers- won't make a purchase without first receiving some type of printed material. Without a product brochure, you lose these sales.

A better alternative is to publish a temporary brochure as an interim solution. The company can get by with this small, inexpensively produced piece until it feels secure in spending the money for a real brochure.

The interim piece can be produced inexpensively in-house using a desktop publishing system, with the brochures printed in small quantities. This prevents obsolescence and eliminates being stuck with a stack of costly color brochures that are out of date and unusable.

If, for example, you envision a major product update in six to eight months, don't print more than a six-month supply. Normally, I recommend that you print more copies than you think you'll need, because of the small incremental cost addition as opposed to a short run. But if your brochure will be outdated soon, order fewer copies so there will be less waste.

If your brochure must be updated frequently or be customized to specific markets or even specific customers, and your print runs are very short (under 200 copies), you might want to store the copy and design in electronic format [...].

Several companies offer special papers and ready-made brochure templates. These templates are sheets of good-quality paper that are cut and folded in brochure format; you run the template blank through your laser printer, printing your text, then refold the template to make a finished brochure [...].

When you plan the brochure, create a layout that leaves room for changes and revisions. Leave extra white space on the page so you can add to the copy without redoing the page layout. Leave room to expand tables, charts, and lists that will grow in size as your product line expands. If the basic design of the product is set and only certain technical specifications will change, put these specifications in a separate table so you can update them without resetting the type for the entire text of the piece. Plan for change so the copy and layout can be updated without having to redesign the brochure from scratch.

The Product Doesn't Exist Yet

Yes, I've been asked many times to write copy for a product that hasn't been built or produced yet, or for a service that is still only in the conceptual stage.

Because of the long lead-time required to produce and implement an advertising campaign, many manufacturers start producing literature, ads and other material before the product is actually built. When a major manufacturer produced a brochure describing a new electronic filing system, the only such system in existence was the crude experimental model set up in the manufacturer's test lab. The exterior design of the equipment hadn't even been decided on.

The art studio will have difficulty creating a layout for nonexistent project. Why? Because they have to show the customer what the product looks like without letting on that it hasn't actually been built yet.

The artist has several ways of doing this.

One way is to use photographs of a prototype, a full-size, functioning, experimental version of the product. If the actual manufactured product will be a carbon copy of the prototype, you can use photos of the prototype to illustrate your brochure. Readers have no way of knowing that the machine they are looking at was the only one of its kind at the time. If the actual product will be different in appearance from the prototype, photos of the prototype should not be used. The product the readers see in the literature should look exactly like the one they buy.

The next best thing to a prototype is a mock-up. The mock-up is a model of the product; it looks exactly like the product, but is a fake, with no parts, wires or gears inside. Use mock-up photos only if the mock-up looks 100 percent authentic, a phony-looking mock-up photo is easy to spot.

But whether you show a prototype or a mock-up, try to include some sort of product photograph in any literature for a new product. Photos convince customers that the product is real, whereas new-product literature with only drawings gives the impression that the product doesn't really exist.

In some cases, you may not be able to photograph a prototype, model or product sample, and you will have to use artwork to depict the new product. Your illustrations should be as realistic as possible to create the illusion that the product is real. Use blueprints, engineering drawings, exploded diagrams, or a high-quality color illustration. Avoid rough sketches, line drawings, and abstract or stylized artwork that can give the literature a phony look.

The Product is Sold to Multiple Markets

Recently a company needed to produce a brochure on its new moisture analyzer, a machine that detects even the slightest bit of moisture in air, gas, liquids, or solids. But the problem was that the device was used in many different industries and for different applications: utilities, rubber plants, chemical plants, food processing, textiles, natural gas pipelines, tobacco curing. And each of these buyers bought moisture analyzers for different reasons.

If your product appeals to a variety of different prospects, and each group is motivated by different product benefits, you must ask the question: "Can a single brochure be effective in selling to all markets? Or do I need a separate piece of literature for each group of buyers?"

It depends. If, as in the case of the moisture analyzer, the product offers unique benefits to each market, you may want to create a series of folders, each highlighting how the product meets the needs of a particular group of buyers.

On the other hand, some products- light bulbs, for example- are bought for the same reasons regardless of the market (schools, industry, offices, consumers). So there's no need to create market-specific literature for a light bulb.

In some cases, the basic reason for buying the products is the same for all buyers, but you may want to highlight specific applications in each area. If that's the case, there's no need for separate brochures; instead, you can devote a page of your brochure to listing these applications by market.

Some products might be sold to different markets, but each market likes to believe the product is designed especially for it. The brokerage firm buys a business phone system for the same reason a manufacturer does: to communicate. But brokers think they are special, as most of us do. They want to buy a phone system specifically designed for brokerage houses.

Don't rush out and create a special brochure for this market just yet. There's a better way: You can create the impression that a brochure is aimed at a specific market by printing one basic brochure with different covers. For example, a different cover photo could be used with each version. The brokerage-house brochure shows a stockbroker in an office, surrounded by ticker tape and talking on the phone system. A different version, aimed at plant engineers, shows a hard-hat shop steward talking on the shop floor.

You can add to this differentiation with other techniques. The color of the cover, for example, might be different for each version – green for brokerage houses, blue for manufacturers, yellow for utilities. You could also print a line of copy on each cover to identify the specific market (e.g., “The communications tool for brokerage firms” or “The system that lets manufacturers communicate”).

The Product Is Sold to Multiple Buying Influences

Packaged goods- soap, shampoo, cereal, soda- are bought by one person: the consumer who uses them or buys them for the family. With other consumer products, you have to appeal to more than one customer. Toy advertisements, for example, must make the children want the toy as well as convince the parents that the toy is safe, educational, wholesome, and worthwhile.

When you sell products and services to business, the situation becomes even more complex. Business purchases are usually made by committee, not by individuals. For example, if you are selling a \$500,000 pollution-control system to a chemical plant, many people are involved in the purchase: the plant manager, the purchasing agent, the president of the firm, the pollution-control expert, and possibly others. The problem is that each of these people has a different level of interest in and understanding of your product. The purchasing agent is primarily concerned with cost. The plant manager is worried about installation and maintenance. The pollution-control expert will analyze whether your product can handle the requirements of removing chemicals and particulates from the air. And top management is more concerned with reputation and reliability of your firm.

If you want to influence a wide range of buyers, you have to take this into consideration in the planning of your literature. Some advertisers find it advantageous to create two or more levels of literature. The first brochure is more sales-oriented and is aimed at managers, purchasing agents, and others who want compelling reasons to buy your product but don't have the time or patience for the nitty-gritty. The second brochure is more detailed. It is aimed at operators, technicians, engineers, and other experts who hunger for complete knowledge. It gives them the numbers, figures, graphs, and curves that would not be of interest to less technically oriented buyers.

A more economical approach is to create a single piece of literature that is interesting and appealing to a broad audience. This takes some extra planning in the design and copywriting stages. The copy style, for example, must be readable enough to catch the interest of a busy manager, but it must not be so general or full of fluff that it turns off the technical reader. Highly technical material should be collected and displayed in a separate section of the brochure (such as the center fold or sidebar) so that technical readers can easily find it and executives can skip over it.

Creating a lot of different pieces of literature is expensive, so I recommend that you try to produce a single brochure that tells the whole story and appeals to all audiences. If your audience is so diverse that this approach is too cumbersome, then additional pieces of literature may be required. But before you commit yourself to a second or a third or a fourth piece of literature, ask yourself, “Is this really necessary? Or is there some way to say it all in my central brochure?” Cutting down on the number of pieces of literature you publish saves time and money. It also eliminates confusion and error when fulfilling inquiries.

The Sales Cycle Has Multiple Steps

The number of steps in the sales cycle is determined by counting how many times contact –in person or via promotion- between seller and buyer. In direct-mail fundraising, for example, the fund-

raiser sends a letter to you requesting donation. If you believe in the cause and are moved by the letter, you send your donation by mailing a check or a pledge card. The sale is made in one step.

But let's say you are in the market for a new car. There may be many steps between your initial interest and the final purchase. The first step is watching a car commercial on TV. The second step is visiting the dealer's showroom. The third step is studying the manufacturer's brochure on the car and thinking about it at home. The fourth step is going back to the showroom, negotiating a deal, and writing a check for the down payment.

Generally, the number of steps cycle when you plan your promotional literature. If the cycle has multiple steps, can one piece of literature be used to satisfy all requirements? Or will you need a separate piece of literature for every step: one brochure to respond to inquiries, a second to offer more detailed information, a third to be used by salespeople during sales calls, a fourth to close the sale?

The answer, naturally, depends on your particular product, customer, and selling methods. Only you, after a careful analysis of your situation, will know how many, and what type, of brochures you need.

When possible, make one piece do double or triple duty in your sales cycle. For example, many companies use a very brief, general brochure to respond to inquiries and a more comprehensive brochure for sales calls. But there's really no reason to make the inquiry piece so general; after all, the person requesting it has demonstrated an interest in your product. By adding more meat to the inquiry piece, you can create a brochure that can work in both environments.

Product Features Change Periodically

This is the case with automobiles, among other products. The 1994 Honda Accord is, after all, just a variation of the 1993 model. Yet the differences are significant enough that Honda annually produces new brochures to describe this year's models.

Of course, you are not Honda, and producing a brand new four-color brochure every 12 months may be a strain on your budget. What can you do? The first thing is to ask yourself whether you really need a new brochure in the first place. Perhaps the change is so insignificant that it doesn't need to be described in your literature. Or maybe it can be handled with some type of separate insert sheet or envelope stuffer. If not, you can still save money by recycling your old brochure rather than scrapping and starting from scratch. Some product changes, for example, are purely cosmetic: a new package, a new label, a new case or housing. What's inside remains the same. So you can keep your copy and layout. Just photograph the new product and substitute these new photos for the outdated ones in the brochure.

Yes, you'll have to change the printing plates, and printing a new batch of bulletins is costly. But it's not nearly as costly as setting new type, doing new page layouts, or writing entirely new copy.

Other changes, while substantial, do not change the essence of the product or your sales pitch. In these cases, there's no choice but to redo the brochure. But you can still save money by recycling as much of the old brochure as possible: cover design, photos, tables, charts, illustrations, even sections of type.

If your brochure need to be redone frequently, have it produced on a desktop publishing system using page-layout software so that the entire document – text, layout, graphics and visuals- can be stored [...] as an electronic file. [...]

The Brochure Can't Adequately Sell the Product

Print does have its limits. Try, for example, to write a paragraph describing the scent of a rose or the taste of a lobster, and you'll immediately see these limitations at work.

Don't be frustrated by this. Instead, try to understand what printed promotional literature can do and what it cannot do.

Let's say a TV manufacturer asks you to produce a brochure describing its new color TV. Your brochure can show pictures of the set and the screen. But what it can't do is demonstrate the product; a printed photo is a poor substitute for seeing the set in operation. This may frustrate you until you stop to consider that no one is going to order an expensive color TV sight unseen, anyway. People will go to the store and watch the TV; the brochure is just something they can take home and study at their leisure before making a purchasing decision.

By the way, advertisers are becoming more and more ingenious in overcoming the limitations of printed literature [...]

The Product or Service Can't Be Illustrated

How do you illustrate financial planning, free-lance writing, life insurance, career counseling, legal counsel, a seminar, or the preparation of income tax forms? There are many products and services that don't easily lend themselves to illustration. And there are two ways to overcome the problem.

The first is to hire a designer clever enough to come up with visual concepts for these hard-to-illustrate products. Even if you are unable to make any suggestions, don't worry. Just hand over all the background information and let the designer go to work. When the initial ideas are presented as thumbnail sketches, you can judge whether the artist has hit the target or missed the mark.

The second solution is simply to omit visuals and have an all-text brochure. There are many successful brochures that consist solely of words.

The Product is Ugly

You may be faced with the tough task of selling a product that is not designed and packaged as attractively as it could be: a book with an ugly cover; a computer with a plain, box-like terminal; a cosmetics set in an unattractive wrapper. What can you do? Here are some options:

Don't show the product. A book, for example, is bought more for its contents than for its cover. If you're writing a promotion to sell a poorly designed book by mail, don't show a picture of the cover in your flier. Although an unattractive cover may prevent people from buying a book, once they do make a purchase based on the book's contents and merits, they are highly unlikely to return it just because the cover isn't fancy. So, if your product is ugly, don't show it.

Use a sketch. A sketch, carefully executed, can accurately portray the product while making it appear less gruesome than it really is.

Redesign the product or the package. If the merchandise is really that hard to look at, maybe you should redesign the product or the package before you put it on the market.

[...]

You Can't Give Away Too Many Trade Secrets

Many organizations are afraid of being too specific in their literature because they don't want the competition to learn their trade secrets. But if your literature lacks facts and specifics, it becomes weak and ineffectual.

What can you do? My advice is to write the best, most fact-filled literature you can and not worry about the competition. Why? Because if your competitors want to learn more about your product, they will. (For example, they can, under a false identity buy your product, go to your dealership, or even pump your salespeople for information over the phone.) So there's no point in crippling your promotional literature by holding back the facts that can help the literature do its job of selling the product.

Don't, of course, publish trade secrets that are secret even to your customers. But you should publish a piece of information if it helps you make the sale. Remember, if it's something you'd say to a customer on confidence, it's something your competitors can learn if they really want to. So quit worrying about spilling the beans and concentrate on creating great promotional literature.

The Product Is New and Unproven

True, means exciting and able to attract new prospects. But it also indicates a product that is untested and unproven, one that has not demonstrated its ability to perform as advertised.

In the same way, many people are afraid to buy from new companies. They reason, "This new company is a small fledging enterprise competing among established giants. Its future is uncertain. If I buy the product and the company goes out of business in a year, I will be stuck with a product that no one will service or support."

You can see the problem that a new product poses to the brochure writer. Should you stress its newness, thereby generating excitement and interest but raising questions as to the product's reliability and performance? Or should you skirt the issue of newness, thereby eliminating the questions but also the opportunity to generate excitement?

My answer is this: Go all out in stressing the newness in your brochure. Splash the cover with words like Introducing, Announcing, and Now Available. Make a big to-do about the product being new and different. It will make your brochure and your product, stand out from the crowd.

Then, in your copy, you must take pains to offset the questions of reliability and proven performance that the aura of newness raises. Here are some ways to do it:

- Mention that although the product is new in United States, it has proven its performance for five years in Europe and other countries overseas.
- If the product is an industrial product adapted for consumer use, say so. Let's say you're selling a scaled-down version of an industrial paint-sprayer designed for home use. Explain that although the new version is being offered to the consumer market for the first time, it is based on a machine that has gained great favor among professional painters over a period of many years.
- Many products are first test-marketed on a small, local scale before being offered nationwide. If this is the case with your product, say so. Explain that hundreds of buyers in Kansas or Ohio or Florida have been delighted with the product and so you are making it available to people in all 50 states.
- Some products have been around for years but have never really been promoted. If yours is such a product, you can announce it as new. Then explain that although it is new in the sense of being marketed nationwide for the first time, it has delighted a limited but loyal group of customers for many years.
- Maybe your product really is brand new. Maybe it hasn't been sold to a single consumer. But it has been thoroughly tested in your laboratory and in the field. Highlight these test results in your copy to show that the product has proven its performance under rigorous conditions.

The Product is Going to Change Soon

And you know what these changes are. Should your literature describe the product as it is today or as it will be when the changes are made?

This is a tough one. Here are some guidelines to follow in such a situation:

Avoid using future-tense references. People become uncomfortable if they keep reading about features that "will be available" or are "soon to come". They expect a brochure to tell them about a

product as it really is new, not as the manufacturer dreams it will be. So your brochure should reflect reality.

Make an occasional promise. It's okay to talk about one or two forthcoming improvements or features, as long as you don't overdo it. The reader can accept a few promises if they are isolated and if the copy makes clear that they are planned improvements and not existing features. Just make sure 95 percent or more of your copy is grounded in the present.

Don't dream out loud. Talk about only those planned improvements that are on the drawing board and fast on their way to becoming reality. Give the reader a preview of next year's model, if you wish. But don't make your brochure a wish-list of all the conceivable features you'd like to add but may never get around to designing. People have a long memory when it comes to broken promises.

Don't discuss planned changes in the present tense. Some advertisers say, "Write about planned features and upcoming products as if they already exist. After all, by the time the brochure is published, they will be available for sale".

If you use this tactic, be absolutely certain that the product change will be made according to schedule. If anything goes wrong, and the changes discussed in the literature isn't made in the product, you will be stuck with a pile of brochures that contain misinformation.

Bly, R. W (1994) Special Marketing Problems (And How To Solve Them). *The Perfect Sales Piece: A Complete Do-It-Yourself Guide to Creating Brochures, Catalogs, Fliers, and Pamphlets*. Estados Unidos: Wiley & Sons.