

Build Your Brochure: Preparation



Creating a brochure may at first seem like a daunting challenge, but thorough preparation can focus your ideas, clarify your vision, set your direction, and give you the momentum you need to bring the project to completion. Here are four important questions to ask yourself:

What do I want the brochure to accomplish? – Identify objectives.

A brochure is a marketing document aimed at arousing interest in a product, service, or program. Beyond that, you can also use it to achieve specific objectives. So what are yours? Are you introducing your organization? Do you want to make people more aware of a specific product or service you offer? What new information do you want readers to come away with? Remember, a brochure is only a brief introduction, but you can use it to direct readers to a more complete source of information, such as a Web site. Knowing exactly what you're trying to achieve will not only help you develop a strong message, but will also inform the design of the piece you're creating.

Who will read the brochure? – Know your audience.

Knowing to whom you're speaking will make a significant impact on your brochure's tone, content, and design. Information and language aimed at fellow professionals, for example, will be quite different from content written for the general public or for other organizations with whom you would like to work collaboratively. If you find you're addressing several very distinct audiences, consider developing a separate brochure for each rather than trying to make one size fit all. Decide exactly which groups you hope will read your brochure, and think about their backgrounds, values, interests, and influences. Think about how they perceive your program: Do they know anything about you, or are you introducing yourself? Do they have misperceptions you'd like to correct? Has your program evolved away from an older model? Answering questions such as these will go a long way toward determining what your brochure needs to say.

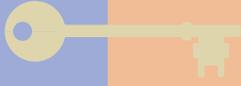
What do I want to say? – Create a strong message.

A message is a statement that describes an organization's point of view on a particular subject. A clear, focused message can serve as a strong foundation for your brochure. Think about your objectives and audiences. What single action do you want your audience to take, and what can you say to convince them to take it? If you're introducing them to your organization, program, or service for the first time, you'll need to let them know, in a very limited space, all the basics. So before you begin writing, ask these essential questions about your organization:

- What precisely is our program, service, or product?
- What benefits does it offer the brochure's audience?
- What is the one thing we want the audience to do?
- What evidence can we share that will support our message and convince the audience to take action?

Is a brochure what I need? – Consider all options.

Although a brochure is a great way to attract interest, showcase your services, and let your audience know what you're all about, it's not necessarily the right vehicle for every message. For example, if you're trying to explain the solution to a particular problem, a white paper might be a more appropriate way to go. If you're simply announcing the start of a new service, product, or program, a press release would do the job. If your message requires a lot of explanation, a Webinar, or even a Web site, might be your best bet.



Build Your Brochure: Keys to Success

Now that you've settled on your objectives, audience, and message—the building blocks of your content—it's time to think about the look and feel of your brochure. Here is what to consider:

1. Format: This includes structure, size, and materials. Most (but not all) brochures will start with one of three paper sizes: 8.5" x 11" (letter), 8.5" x 14" (legal), or 11" X 17" (tabloid). The size will depend, in large part, upon the fold you use. Here are some common folds:

- Tri-fold (letter fold). The most common format. Paper folds into thirds; right side folds under left. Great for revealing a step by step process.
- Fan fold (z-fold, accordion fold). Paper folds into thirds, right side under center and left over center. Great for large images and maps.
- Double fold. Paper folds in half, then in half again. Dramatic presentation, with each spread opening to twice the size of the previous one.
- Double gate fold. Paper folds into quarters. Right quarter folds over adjacent quarter, and left quarter does likewise. The resulting spread then folds closed, like a book. Benefits are similar to the tri-fold's.
- Bi-fold. Paper folds in half. Renders a wider page; can combine multiple sheets into booklets (stapled at the center); inside cover panels can include "pockets" for inserts. Inserts can contain customized or frequently updated information about your program or organization.

Paper stock is also important. Heavier stock will give a "weightier" feel to your message, but it's generally more expensive. Flimsy paper can make your message seem unimportant. As to finish, high gloss paper gives sharp, crisp color to photos, while matte color photos can look grainy. Matte, on the other hand, does better with black and white photos, and because it doesn't give off glare, generally leaves a more professional impression.

2. Cover. The front cover should display a catchy line or title that previews the main message and lures the reader to read on. It should also display a picture that implies the brochure's message. If you're introducing a nursing organization, for example, a photo with a smiling nurse and patient might work well. Remember that photos don't have to stay within one panel. You may have an interesting picture that starts on the front panel, wraps around the back, and ends on the inside right fold.

3. Contrast. Be sure to choose text colors that contrast sharply with their background. Putting black on dark blue, for example, is a bad idea. So is putting light yellow on white. Also, be careful to choose a font size that is clear and readable.

4. Headlines. Use headlines to divide your text into short, manageable sections. Make sure each headline states a key part of your message.

5. Call to action. A call to action is asking your reader to do something specific—make a donation, contact you by email or phone, go to a Web site, etc. State your call to action clearly at any obvious place in the brochure and perhaps again on the back cover.

6. Professional help. Getting help from a professional designer can be extremely valuable and time-saving, and is more likely to result in the brochure you want. You can either leave the entire design to the designer or work collaboratively, if you would like to have a hand in the process.