

Business Card Advice: Putting Your Best Card Forward!

by Dan C. Rinnert

Your business card is very likely the first printed item you will hand to a prospective client or customer, so you want to ensure that it will properly represent you in terms of both appearance and content. While both are important, the information on your business card is of greater importance. After all, a fancy looking card isn't much use if it does not have your phone number or another method of contact.

The purpose of this article is to help you ensure that you include the proper information on your business card plus provide an overview of some of the types of cards that are available to help you decide which matches the appearance you want to convey to your potential customers.

Business Card Basics

Even though business cards are relatively common business tools, it is not uncommon for people to have difficulty determining what

information they should include on their business cards. In fact, some people will overlook and omit vital information from their business cards. A business card will not be a good investment if, for example, the people to whom you have given a card are unable to contact you!

Here is a review of the information that should be on your business card.



Company Name

Be sure to include your company name if you have one. Hard as it is to believe, some people do manage to forget to include a company name. Of course, if you don't have a company

name and are just using your personal name for your service, that's okay.

Your Name

Conversely, while some people will remember to put their company name on a card, they may forget to put their own name on it! Typically,

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people will want a contact person to ask for if they call your business, so it is important that you have a name on your card. Remember that people may receive many business cards and most will be prone to forget your name, so having your name on your card also serves as a reminder to them as for to whom they spoke. Naturally, if you don't have a company name, it is especially important not to forget to put your own name on your cards!

Your Title

A title is optional, but should be included if it would be of any significance to the recipient of your business card.

What You Do

If your business name or title doesn't convey what products or services you offer, you should include a line somewhere on your card that does! If people forget what you offer, why would they keep your business card? You may know what you do, but unless your company name is well known and recognized in a certain industry, people will be apt to forget what you do. And, if they don't remember what you do or what you offer, they very likely won't be calling you when they need the product or service you provide!

Your Phone Number

Be sure to include your phone number so that people will have a way to contact you. You may think that having an eMail address is sufficient, but many people will



prefer to make a call rather than send an eMail. And, what happens if your eMail is down? How will they contact you then? What happens if their mail doesn't make it to your mailbox because of miscellaneous delivery errors? It's always a good idea to include your phone number if you want to be sure people have a way to contact you.

Your Fax Number

If you expect people to be sending you faxes for any reason, you should include it on your business card as a matter of convenience for your customers and prospects. It'll save them time calling you for a fax number if they want to send you something, such as a request for a price. Some people may think that eMail has largely replaced faxes, but that is not true of everyone. At any rate, if you do maintain a fax number, you might as well make the most of it by including it on your cards. An added benefit is that your clients can use the method of contact that they prefer, whether it be phone, fax or eMail.

Your Address

Some people may be reluctant to place their address on their business cards, especially if running a business out of their home where they don't expect—or want—visitors. And, for some businesses, there may never be a reason for a customer to come to your office. Still, having an address lends some credibility to your operation. If you don't want to use your home address, get a post office box or get a box at a business that will give you a real street address rather than just a box number. Even if people won't be visiting you in person, you'll still want an address where



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they can send checks! While such information may be on your invoice, including it on your business card provides added convenience for your prospects and customers.

Your eMail Address

In this day and age, using eMail is quite popular. You should have one for your business (and you may want to use a separate eMail address for your business correspondence instead of using your personal eMail address) so that customers and prospects can contact you through it and not be lost in a shuffle of personal and business eMails.

Your Web Site Address

Likewise, most businesses these days have a website and you'll want to be sure to include its URL on your business card.

Your Logo

If you don't have a logo, you don't necessarily need one. But, if you do have a logo, be sure to include it on your business card. A business card is one of your identification marks, and you'll want to maintain consistency across your identity and promotional materials for branding and recognition purposes. So, be sure to include your logo if you have one.

These are the basics that should be included, as noted, as part of your business card. You want to make sure that the recipient of your card has all the information necessary to know who you are, what you do and how to get in touch with you. A business card that fails to do that is a bad investment!

With the important information taken care of, the next thing to determine is how to have your business cards printed.

Methods Used for Printing Business Cards

There are a variety of methods used for printing business cards. These include offset or digital printing, thermography and embossing.

An offset printed business card is flat; that is, the imprint on the card is flat, much like the print in a newspaper or most printed items you encounter on a daily basis. An offset printed card may be printed in a single color, multiple spot colors, or full color.

“Digital printing” is a broad term used to cover a variety of printing processes which incorporate modern computer technology into the printing process. Often, digital printed materials will be flat like offset printing. Some digital presses use inks like their offset printing press cousins, while others will solid, liquid or dry inks or toners. The look of the printed piece will vary with the actual digital process used. A business card produced on a digital press using oil-based inks will be indistinguishable from business card printed on an offset press. On the other hand, the imprint on a business card printed on a digital machine using dry ink or toner may have a shinier appearance than an offset printed piece.

A digital printing press can use spot color inks, while most digital duplicators or production copiers will reproduce colors using cyan, magenta, yellow and black inks. Either is fine for full color business cards but, if you need a specific Pantone ink color on your cards, a digital (or offset) printing press will be able to print with your specific color whereas a machine using cyan, magenta, yellow and black inks will need to simulate that Pantone color using CMYK.

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On a thermographed business card, the imprint is raised. Thermography (sometimes called raised or “puffy” printing) is a special printing process. Immediately after a card is imprinted, it is dusted with a special powder while the ink is still wet. This powder adheres to the wet ink. Heat is then applied to the cards to cause the powder to melt and “puff,” giving the imprint a raised impression. This is very similar to the embossing powders used by rubber stampers. However,

while some people may use “embossed” to mean “thermographed,” in the printing industry, the terms represent two entirely different processes.

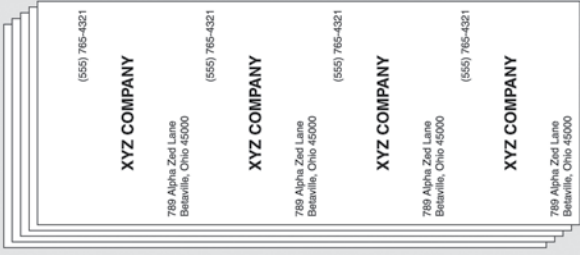
Foil stamping is another option for business cards and may be used in conjunction with spot or full color printing. Foil stamping, also known as “hot stamping,” is where a foil, usually metallic, is applied to the business card. Gold and silver are popular choices. While gold or silver inks could also be used, foil stamping typically provides a richer look with a more metallic appearance than the average metallic ink may provide. Of course, foils are not limited to metallics; other pigments, such as white or black, are also available.

Embossing is another range of options for business cards. Several techniques may be referred to as “embossing” by those outside the printing industry, but there are actually several variations of embossing of which the most popular will be mentioned here. The first is blind embossing. With a blind embossed image, the image is simply impressed into the page without any ink or foil. When used with a foil, this is known as foil embossing. Registered embossing is the term used to describe an embossed image that is registered with a printed image. For example, if a company logo is a blue square with a white circle (where white is the paper color) in the middle, a registered emboss would involve an embossing die that raises the blue-printed square while leaving the circle flat.

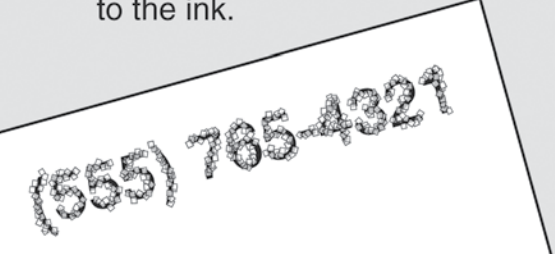
The die used to create an embossed image may be a single or multi-level die. A single level die creates an embossing where all of the embossed area is equal in depth. A multi-level die allows for an embossing with varying depths to create an even more multi-dimensional appearance. Additionally, there are different types of edging for the dies, such as rounded edges and beveled

The Process of Thermography

1 Business cards are printed.



2 While the ink is still wet, a special powder is applied, which adheres to the ink.



3 Heat is applied, causing the powder to expand, creating a raised or “puffy” appearance.

Since the powder application or heat may be uneven, the raised appearance may also be uneven.

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edges.

Alternatively, an image may be debossed; that is, rather than an image being raised on the card, it is instead depressed into the paper. Like embossing, there are variations such as blind debossing and foil debossing.

UV coatings are another popular option for business cards. This special coating is applied to a business card and then cured with UV lights. Most commonly, this is used to give a high gloss appearance, although it is also available in a matte finish. The UV coating can flood coat the card; that is, it will fully cover the surface of the business card. Spot coatings are also available, which can highlight details or otherwise enhance the logo or artwork used on the card.

Which method of printing is better is a matter of personal opinion, or the requirements of the specific look you want to achieve with your business cards. When using photographs, halftones or gradient screens, you will typically be better off using flat printing methods as thermography may produce undesirable results on some screened images. Of course, another option—although more expensive—is to use multiple printing methods to produce your business card. For example, you might wish to have the text on your business card “raised” using thermography, but have your photo imprinted flat.

Double-Sided Business Cards

While some people may have difficulty determining what information to put on their business card, others try to include so much information that they find it necessary to print on both sides of a card.

There are times when a two-sided business card can be effective, if used properly.

You might use an attention getting image on one side—something that highlights the product or service you are selling or just draws attention to your card—and place the vital information on the other side of the business card. In some cases, people might put their logo on one side to fill the card and put their information (and a smaller logo) on the other side. In this example, it is used as both branding and an attention-getter.

Some people will use the back of their business card as a line card to list the products or services they offer. They may also include logos from manufacturers whose products they carry.

When using double-sided business cards, the important thing is to keep all of your vital contact information on one side of the card. Many people will staple a business card into their Rolodex and never again see what’s on the back. Others may scan a card into their computer, but only scan and keep one side of the card. In any event, you don’t want to run into a situation where your name is on one side and the phone number is on the other side!

Also, if you put too much information on your double-sided business card, there won’t be any space for the recipient to write any kind of notes on your card, which is not an uncommon thing for people to do, especially if they have inquired about any of your products or services and want to write down prices or other information they want to save for later.

Design your double-sided business card carefully so you won’t run into such potential problems.

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Plain versus Glossy Business Cards

Opinions often vary on whether plain or glossy business cards are the way to go. Some people think that business cards on non-glossy paper stocks look more professional, while others feel that a glossy business card lends a more professional appeal. In that regard, the best choice is going to be a matter of personal opinion.

But, if you don't have an opinion one way or the other, here are a few considerations to bear in mind.

Appearance of Color

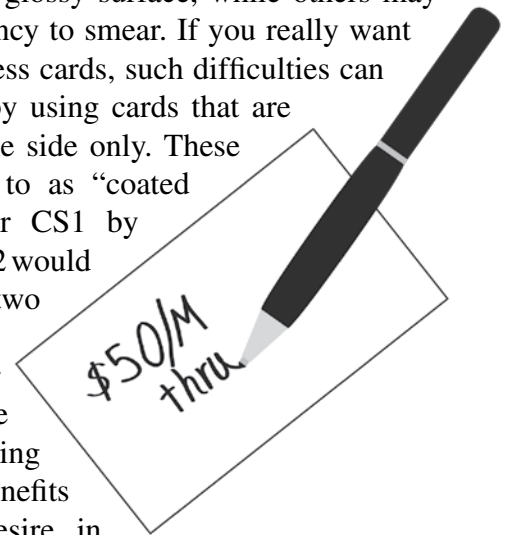
The same ink color will appear different depending on whether it is printed on glossy or non-glossy paper stock. In fact, most ink swatch books, such as the Pantone Matching System, will have different color samples for glossy and non-glossy paper stocks. If you will be working with a local printer, be sure to look at the right color swatches for the type of paper you are considering. If you're uncertain, you can ask to see how the same color will look on either kind of paper stock.

On a non-glossy paper stock, ink colors will appear slightly more subdued and perhaps even a little darker. Inks will soak into the paper stock more, which will affect the appearance of the ink color. Be also aware that the paper color will tend to show through the ink, so different paper colors will affect the appearance of the ink color. In some cases, a card can be first printed with white ink and then your ink color printed over top of that, which will allow for a more consistent ink color across different paper stocks. However, that method is rarely used and would be at additional expense.

On a glossy paper stock, ink colors will pop more, giving them a more vibrant appearance. The inks do not soak into the glossy papers so much as they do on non-glossy paper stocks. Essentially, they sit on top of the paper surface. Since the inks commonly used in printing have a semi-transparent appearance, the paper color shows through. In this case, the glossiness of the paper will reflect through and really allow the colors to shine.

Note Taking

It is not uncommon for people to use the back of a business card to write notes. They may write down the pricing for one of your products they are considering, for example. On a non-glossy paper stock, this is generally not a problem. However, on glossy paper stocks, handwriting notes may be difficult. Some ink pens may have difficulty writing on a glossy surface, while others may have a tendency to smear. If you really want glossy business cards, such difficulties can be avoided by using cards that are glossy on one side only. These are referred to as "coated one side" or CS1 by printers. (CS2 would be coated two sides.) The front of your card can be glossy, giving you the benefits you may desire in a glossy card, but the back will be non-glossy (uncoated), giving you the benefits (on the back side, at least) of a non-glossy business card. That way, your prospect shouldn't have any problems writing of the back of your card!



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Appearance of Photographs

If you plan on putting a photo on your business cards, the paper stock you choose will have a bearing on the printed appearance of the photo. On a glossy business card, a photo will appear sharp and bright, almost as if you were holding an actual glossy photograph in your hand. In fact, some photo business cards are produced in the same way as photographs. On the other hand, if you want a more subdued effect, a non-glossy paper stock may be the way to go for a softer appearance. Of course, you may want to ask your printer for a proof showing your image on both a glossy and a non-glossy stock so that you can decide which paper stock will work best for the look you are trying to achieve.

In the end, it will still come down to your own personal opinion as to which paper stock is the type you should use for your business cards. Bearing the above considerations in mind should help you in making your decision.

Rounded Corner Business Cards

To help your business card stand out from the crowd, you may wish to do something a little different, such as having rounded corners. Round corners on a business card will give it a special look that will stand out from the plethora of straight corner business cards that people typically receive.

Rounded corners can be achieved with either a die cut or a round corner cutting machine.

With a die cut, you may have a wider variety of options. Your business card printer may have a selection of dies in stock for you to choose from, or a die may be custom made for you. If you

choose a die the printer already has, that will save you some expense as custom made dies can be expensive.

With a round corner cutting machine, you may have a smaller range of choices. The printer will be limited to the curved blades that are available for the machine, and there may not be any options for having a custom blade made in most cases.

In any case, your options may be limited by availability. Many printers may not have either dies or round corner cutting machines, as there isn't generally a lot of demand for them. How often have you seen a business card with round corners? So, you may be limited (by both budget and options) as to the variety of rounded corners you can choose from. You might even be limited to one option.

Of course, having a variety of options isn't necessarily of high importance in this case. Since rounded corner business cards are so infrequently seen, your business card will stand out from the crowd, even if you only had one round corner choice!

Whatever type of business card you choose, always bear in mind that it will often be part of the first impression a prospective client or customer will have of you, so you'll want to make sure it projects the image you want to convey for yourself or your company. And, once again, don't forget the all-important contact information!

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