

*A color brochure can help you sell more work and better work—and color copiers make short runs practical*

# Create an affordable, full-color brochure for your shop

by Dan Antonelli

One aspect of running your own shop that is often ignored is promoting your own services. We're all so busy trying to promote our clients' businesses that we can rarely set aside time to promote our own. I'd bet that if you asked most shop owners if they had a marketing brochure, most would say no (except for franchise owners, who usually get them from the franchiser). But most would probably say, "I really could use one."

Aside from time constraints, perhaps another reason for most shops not having any marketing materials is the relatively high cost of four-color printing. As with

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**An attractive brochure will generate more revenue for your shop.**

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most things, when you buy more, the unit cost drops. But most shops don't need 2,000 brochures sitting around, which may take years to use. And by that time, something has changed in your

brochure, whether it be an area code, a new web site, or whatever. Now those brochures are somewhat useless.

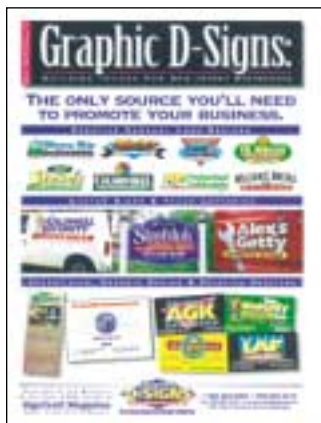
Having "been there and done that" with a relatively costly two-color brochure, I tried to think of a better way. I wanted something that wouldn't cost me a fortune, would allow me to print small quantities of full-color brochures, and would give me the flexibility of changing as often as I'd like without incurring huge press fees.

The answer came to me when a printer, whom I broker most of my clients' printing to, showed me a new color printer—a Canon Fiery color copier. The samples were amazing: brilliant color on glossy paper, all output from a disk. It's almost impossible to tell "real" offset color printing versus prints from this machine. I decided to use this new technology to showcase my work and still keep my shirt.

## Writing your brochure

Now that there's a practical way to print four-color brochures in short runs, let's talk about creating an effective brochure. First, think about the purpose and the overall thrust of your brochure and how you intend to use it. Who is your audience and what are you trying to sell them? Should your brochure focus on one aspect of your business that you wish to highlight or cover all of your services?

For my brochure, I needed to convey my company's "all in one"



Cover



Inside of brochure



Back cover

*This is my most recent brochure. It's a little busy, but I find in some respects, more is better. Get them to recognize your work! It is 11-by-17-in. overall, and folds to 8½-by-11 in. It can be folded in half again, then stamped and mailed.*

## A breakdown of design and printing costs

**Design:** A graphic artist would need approximately 10 hours to produce an 11-by-17-in. brochure like mine. Hourly rates are typically between \$35 and \$55, so the estimated cost for design would be \$350 to \$550. This would be a one-time fee, of course.

**Printing:** The following are the costs for 11-by-17-in. color copies printed on both sides on uncoated stock.

Qty	Total Cost	Cost Per Copy
100	\$ 398	\$ 3.98
300	\$ 810	\$ 2.70
500	\$1240	\$ 1.48

The most cost-effective way to print an 8½-by-11 tri-fold brochure—which is probably the most popular size for a brochure—is to print them two at a time on 11-by-17-in. paper. This is referred to as “two-up”. Each copy will then yield two brochures.

Qty Yielded	Total Cost	Cost Per Copy
200	\$ 398	\$ 1.99
600	\$ 810	\$ 1.35
1000	\$1240	\$ 1.24

**Offset printing:** At a certain quantity, color copies are no longer a cost-effective alternative to conventional offset printing. If you print only a few hundred at a time, you’ll be able to update your photos regularly, and color copies are a good alternative. If you need thousands of brochures at a time—say for a big mailing—use offset printing. For comparison, 2,000 copies of an 8½-by-11 tri-fold color brochure with six to eight photos (scanned at high-resolution) would cost about \$2,000 in my area. An 11-by-17 in. brochure with 10 to 12 photos would cost about \$2,650.—D.A.□

approach of promoting businesses with logo design, truck lettering and signage, graphic design, website, and printing services. If your shop has one true specialty, though, you’ll want to emphasize it more than your other services.

Give your reader real benefits for using your company’s products. Create a need for them, aside from merely explaining everything you do. Keep your copy relatively simple and sweet. Your color photos will really sell your prospects better than anything.

Make sure your grammar is

correct and ask a few other people (preferably outsiders who know nothing about sign making) to read it to make sure it makes sense. Obviously, bullets work well for lists of services, but try not to make an entire grocery list of every single thing you do. You should also mention any accolades or awards your shop may have received.

### Layout and design

Unless you have experience in page layout, I strongly advise hiring a professional graphic artist



Cover

Inside of brochure

Back cover

(above) This was the first brochure I did with a Fieri. The pictures turned out a little too dark, so on a subsequent run, I lightened the photos in Photoshop. You could run two of these on a color laser printer and get two per page using 11-by-17-in. stock, so the unit cost gets cut in half. It has a single fold and the finished size is 4-by-9-in.



Postcards like this are great for mailing to prospects. Finished size is 4¼-by-6. Four of these fit on an 11-by-17 sheet.



This is one of my early one-page fliers, printed on the color laser. I don’t use it much anymore, but it’s good for selling logos. Finished size is 8½-by-11 in.

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or small ad agency to assist you in developing your brochure. I worked in advertising as a graphic artist, designing brochures for over five years, so I did my own. But sign making and traditional graphic design are two very different skill sets. While it may sound blasphemous to suggest this, trust me, a good graphic artist will do a better job than you will. If you're trying to keep costs down, check with your local college and find

a graphic design student who might be willing to take on the project for a reduced fee to help bolster their own portfolio.

You'll need to have your brochure in a digital format which your printer can use. Most want your files done in popular desktop publishing software programs, such as QuarkXPress or Pagemaker. Don't even think about taking a disk to your printer with your brochure done in Microsoft Pub-

lisher! Most printers will also prefer that the file be Mac-based.

A good graphic artist can design your brochure to perform a number of functions, like doubling as self-mailing direct mail pieces, as mine does. He can advise you of size recommendations, depending on the number of photos you have and copy length. The size of my current brochure—11-by-17 folded to 8½-by-11—has worked best for me. I can also fold it in half, stick a stamp on it, and mail it as a direct mail piece. There's plenty of color on it to attract people and get them to open it.

### Choose your photos

One of the reasons for using a graphic artist is they can help you scan your photos, then retouch them as necessary for good output on the Fiery printer. Most will use programs like Adobe Photoshop to get the photos ready for good reproduction. If you are knowledgeable enough with Photoshop and color corrections, then you could scan your photos and provide them to the graphic artist. The maximum resolution of the Canon Fiery is 300 dpi. Make sure that the resolution is 300 dpi or more at the finished printed size. If you're not sure of the finished size, scan at a higher resolution. Remember that as you reduce the size of the photo, the resolution increases.

I find that, generally, the more pictures the better. I've had many new customers look at my brochure and say, "Oh, you did that truck? I've seen that around town." It really helps when your client recognizes work you've done—they obviously appreciated the quality enough to remember it. (Be sure to capitalize on these comments when you hear them. Remind them that they have probably seen thousands of other signs around town, yet that one attract-



Cover

Outside of brochure

Back cover

This is another of my brochures. It was cut from an 11-by-17-in. stock and folds to four 4-by-9-in. panels. The back cover serves as a mailer, also.



Inside of brochure

ed their eye enough that they can recall it. That's exactly what an effective sign should do.)

**Take your disk to the printer**

You've checked the laser proofs of your brochure and everything looks good. Time to get it printed! Have your graphic artist prepare a Zip disk for you with your brochure, fonts, and images. Have them make a note for the printer, indicating the application they used to create it, the platform, etc. Now you can find a printer.

Not all color copiers are Canon Fierys, so make sure the printer you choose has the real thing. Fiery is the name of a computer processing system that drives color

copiers via a PC or Mac. All Fierys are basically the same; it's the copiers that are driven by them that are different.

Ask for samples and check the quality. I've noticed a pretty wide range of copier quality. My printer (Todd Photoprint, New York, NY; 212-245-2440, 800-536-TODD) has a Canon Fiery. It does an amazing job on my brochures. It can print both sides on an 80-lb. coated or uncoated two-sided stock.

Coated stock is considerably more expensive so it isn't cost-effective to use. The uncoated stock works well, and lets the pictures almost look as if they're varnished because they'll print glossy. The colors are much sharp-

er on a coated stock. Stores such as Kinko's, Office Max, and Staples often have Fiery copiers, too. I've found the prices to vary, and some will negotiate the prices if you have a decent quantity.

Before committing to having a quantity printed, ask to see a sample of your brochure before it's run. This gives you a chance to make sure all the fonts are displaying correctly (i.e., not bitmapping), and check the colors. After the brochures are printed, you'll have to fold them yourself.

**Updating your brochure**

Since your brochure is already typeset, it's easy to exchange photos with new ones or alter the copy



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slightly. Depending on how extensive your changes are, you can have your original designer make the changes, or you can have the printer make the changes for you. Again, ask to see a proof before the job is run.

### **Using your brochure**

Now that you have your brochure, you'll be able to send it out when you get those "do you have something I can look at" calls. For me, it saves a lot of time and also helps eliminate the potential clients who aren't willing to pay for quality or who just want bang-out simple stuff.

When they see high-end,

creative work featured in your brochure, they'll know that's what your company specializes in. It also means instant credibility for your company and the services you provide. This makes it a little easier to nudge your prices up a bit, because your clients realize your company is a more professional operation.

One last note: Brochures will help you sell more work—and better work. The cost associated with producing a brochure won't even come close to the amount of revenue a good one can generate. Once people see an attractive brochure full of nice work, they're usually already sold. It's a response

you'll never get with a Yellow Pages ad—and we all know what they cost.□



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## **Writing brochure copy that people will read**

As sign makers, most of us don't have to write "sell copy" for brochures and ads. It's an art all its own. Here are a few points that may help you as you tackle this writing project:

### **Think about your reader.**

Take a minute and consider the busy business person who will be looking over your brochure. Focus on that person as you write and edit your copy.

**Talk benefits.** It's tempting to talk about your shop and your capabilities, but you'll connect better with your prospects if you talk about how your expertise will benefit them and their business. It's fine that your shop is equipped with a state-of-the-art computer-driven router—but the benefit to your customers is that you can produce their dimensional signs faster and more accurately

than ever. A benefit usually has "you" in it, as in "You'll take advantage of our 30 years of sign-making expertise" rather than stating a fact like "We've been making signs for 30 years."

### **Address their needs and**

**wants.** Few people really want to buy a sign, yet almost everyone wants to increase their sales, improve their image, or guide and direct their customers. They want to save money, get a product that lasts, and want the sign-buying process to go as quickly and easily as possible. Explain how you can help solve their sign problems.

### **Consider what you want**

**them to do.** Now they've seen your great-looking signs and heard the benefits of having your shop do their work. Your copy should encourage them to do something today to contact you—

that it's easy and you're ready to help them.

**Personalize it.** Keep the tone of the copy friendly and personal. You might want to consider a photo of the staff or one of you with a brief bio that explains your background and experience. Write as if you were telling a friend what you could do for their business.

**Edit ruthlessly.** As sign makers, we know how excessive copy can kill a layout and reduce the likelihood that a sign will be read. The same is true of your brochure. Business people are busy—especially the successful ones you want to work with. Go back over your text. Slash every non-essential sentence; cut every excess word. It hurts, but you'll be glad you did. The less there is, the more likely that it will be read.□