

BUSINESS CARDS: A JOB SEARCH TOOL

Prepared by the Career Transition Center staff

Purpose

Business cards serve several purposes. They don't just provide contact information, although their primary purpose is to allow the recipient to contact the giver with ease. *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* Ms. Mentor says that a well-designed business card proves that the giver is "responsible and reachable." A business card is also an invitation for contact in the future. In "Don't Leave Home Without It," Kari Larson calls a business card "an invitation to a relationship, and relationships yield business." According to marketing expert Diana Ratliff, you are marketing yourself in a job search and your business card "should be an integral part of your marketing arsenal." You can't carry your resume everywhere, but you can carry your business cards.

Impression

Your business card is part of your professional image. Your business card gives the recipient a sense of who you are and what services or products you provide. Aleigh Acerni of *The Charleston Regional Business Journal* says your business card "speaks for you when you are not present."

What impression do you want to project with your card? You want your card to reflect your professionalism, your confidence and ability, and your good taste. You don't want your card to lead recipients to believe that you are disinterested, unorganized, and tacky. Avoid fluorescent colors and stupid slogans. Don't use cards with old or incorrect information. Never cross out wrong information and pencil in the correct information. Order new cards!

Design

A well-designed business card should have a positive visual impact. The fonts, paper, and color should be balanced in a compatible style. Coordinate the style and graphics on your card with your or your company's publications (including internet) in order to build company recognition. Use similar "signature files" and "virtual cards" on your e-mail messages as well.

The card can be set up horizontally or vertically, according to your own tastes and style. The most common format is horizontal as that is the easiest to file in a rolodex.

Cards can be printed on both sides. If you are working in an environment where another language is spoken, one side of your card can be in English and the other side can offer the same information in the other language. Depending on your business, you could also offer useful information on the other side – your business hours, a metric conversion chart, a calendar of special business events, etc.

Whatever you want printed on your business card, keep the text to a minimum, including only the essential information. The card should not appear cluttered, it should look simple and elegant. Most importantly, it must be legible. The font must be easy to read -- even by the bifocal bunch! If yours is a company card, then the company name should be the first thing the recipient notices. If it is your personal card, then your name should stand out first. The font for your name and/or the

company's name should be size 12 to 14. The remainder of the information should be printed in font size 9 to 11. Be sure the font color is easy to read against background color.

Keep your design and colors conservative and simple – no flowers and cute pictures. “Unless you're in an artsy field, such as theater or painting, Ms. Mentor advises against peculiar colors, weird wording, or hard-to-read flourishes.” The logo should be the largest element on the card and it should be eye-catching. According to the *smallbusinesstown.com* website, the logo is the most memorable part of a business card. A very few writers on business etiquette advise a photograph on the card for folks with gender mysterious names.

White card stock is always good choice for a business card, but another color may help it stand out. Use heavy paper stock so the card doesn't get bent easily in pockets and briefcases. Avoid unusual shapes that are hard to file and easy to lose. Stick with the standard 2 x 3.5 inches (89mm x 51mm). Be careful about using cards you have made on your home computer. These cards are often made on easily bendable stock and show the perforations around their edges.

Text

The text on your card should definitely include:

- your name,
- your company name (if applicable),
- and your telephone number.

Other options include:

- Title
- Education and/or other qualifications
- Company logo
- Company slogan
- Cellular telephone (if you don't want anyone to call you on it, then don't include it!)
- Facsimile number
- E-mail address
- URL
- Toll free telephone number
- Address (not everyone is comfortable with e-mail)
- Summary list of products and/or services
- White space for handwritten product information or appointments

If you have more than one business, have more than one card and keep them in different sides of your card case so you can find the one you need easily.

Networking Cards

Nowadays, some career coaches and counselors encourage their clients to use “networking” cards which are the same size as a standard business card and include the job seeker's job objective, unique selling proposition, critical career information, and/or qualifications summary. Key qualifications can be printed on back of card to make it a mini-resume. Focus on 3 to 4 key accomplishments or qualifications; not on past jobs, titles, or duties

As with all job search topics, opinions differ. Mac Sadoris, Senior Career Counselor & Executive Coach in State Department's Career Development Resource Center correctly states that, “The common glue of effective networking is not a card but shared interests and expertise. If you don't

have that, no card is going to add to building an interaction. Only your personal skills in communication will work.”

On the “pro” side of this issue is CTC Counselor Berri Wells Wilmore: “I think the cards are a great idea. The reader gets a snapshot of the candidate in a format that is easily stored and retrieved.” Another CTC Counselor, Dr. Jeanette Kreiser states, “they would be helpful, in that they offer an easy way to get your name out and remembered. I often find that I have collected cards at an event and then can’t remember much about the person or why I have the card.” Career & Life Coach Tanya Bodzin likes the idea of a networking card, but suggests limiting the information to a skill set.

On the “con” side is CTC Counselor, Terri Williams, who states, “this is NOT the way that civilized folks connect. It kind of reminds me of the title of a book I use, Can I Fax You a Thank You Note? and the answer is no!” Counselor Robert Minor cautions that networking cards may make the job searcher appear a little desperate. Counselors Fred Hecklinger and Soonhoon Ahn also recommend traditional business cards with contact information only.

Practice

Always carry a good supply of business cards with you. Come especially well prepared for networking events, conferences, and job fairs. It is a good idea to carry your cards in a case so the cards stay clean and unbent. The case should be leather or silver -- anything but plastic!

Keep your cards where you can access them easily. You shouldn’t have to search or dig for them. (Remember those receptions at the Ambassador’s residence when you had to give and receive business cards and shake hands while juggling a beverage and a plate of food?)

Exchange cards openly and directly. Don’t leave your card in someone’s chair or plate like those irritating vendors who put flyers under your windshield wipers in parking lots. Present it personally.

Hand your card to the recipient with the writing facing them so that they can read it immediately without having to turn it around. If your card is printed on both sides, present the side with your name on it first. If your card is printed in English on one side and a foreign language on the other, present the side with the recipient’s language on it.

Presentation

Ms. Mentor says, “the art of card giving is a delicate dance.” Here are some basic steps to the dance.

A business card can facilitate introductions or be a parting gesture. Some say to introduce yourself with the card; others say to give card at end of conversation or whenever you’ve established a reason for further contact. Some say it’s rude to give someone your card unless they request it, but opinions differ on that, too. Do make the presentation of your card an act of respect. Don’t just toss it at the recipient. Ask “May I give you my card?” Whatever you do, don’t pass your cards out to everyone like a blackjack dealer because people will think the cards (read you!) are less valuable. On the other hand, don’t appear stingy with them.

When you go to appointments, you should leave a card with the secretary of the person you are seeing in case s/he is making the next contact for the boss. In a meeting, give out your card at the beginning of the meeting. You can also include a business card with a business letter.

Many business etiquette gurus say that a person of higher rank must ask you for your card. The Etiquette International website explains it like this, “Before you cry foul, think how often you’ve encountered senior executives from major corporations who ‘just ran out of cards’ or ‘forgot to bring them’? Do you really think these people became captains of industry by not having business cards? The truth is that they don’t want to give you a card because they know you’ll harangue their secretaries for weeks trying to get through to them.”

If you are with a group of people and you don’t want to give your card to all of them, wait until you are alone with the person you want to give the card to or give a card to everyone in the group. If you give your card to only one person in the group, you will be snubbing the others. Be sure to give your card to anyone who wants to send you something by mail or e-mail. Never present your card to someone during a meal.

In a social setting, the general rule is to give your business card only if requested. You can also ask permission to contact the person at work or send him/her a note with your card enclosed after the social event. Never attach a business card to flowers sent to a co-worker who is sick, just had a baby, for death in the family, etc.

If someone asks you for a card and you have run out, don’t ask them for one of theirs in order to write your information on the back of it. Write your information on a piece of paper, then mail them a card later.

Receipt

Ask for someone else’s card if you want to contact him/her later. Always receive the card with respect; don’t just glance at it, then shove into your pocket. When receiving a card, handle the card by its edges, thank the giver, and read the text on the card thoroughly. Pronounce the person’s name to allow them a chance to correct your pronunciation, if necessary. To show your interest, you could also make a comment about a positive experience you have had with their company. If seated, keep card on table in front of you for easy reference. Don’t write any reminders on the card until you are away from the giver (unless, of course, they tell you to do so).

Some business etiquette gurus advise you to send a follow-up e-mail to everyone who has given you a card. Use your own judgment as to whether that is appropriate. You can send your regards, your thanks, and a nonchalant reminder of you and your work.

Miscellaneous Notes on Business Cards

Develop a reliable card “storage” system for networking events. For instance, you can designate one jacket pocket for your own cards and the other pocket for cards received. At a networking event, never discard cards you don’t want at the event, wait until you get home to throw them away. How would you feel if you found your own card discarded on the buffet table?

Many people write reminders on business cards – often a memory jogging description of person or the event and date where you met them. It is always a good idea to wait until you get home to do that! If it falls out of your pocket, you don’t want anyone to see “skinny blonde yuppie hockey player who knew my roommate at Harvard” or “frizzy redheaded environmental activist” written on the card!!

BUSINESS CARDS FOR THE UNEMPLOYED JOB SEEKER

The text on your card should definitely include:

- Your name,
- Your telephone number
- E-mail address
- Cellular telephone (if you don't want to receive calls in the middle of traffic, then don't include it!)
- Facsimile number (if you have one)

Other options include:

- Education and/or other qualifications (e.g., PhD. or J.D.)
- URL / website (if you have one)
- Address (not everyone is comfortable with e-mail!)

Nowadays, some career coaches and counselors encourage their clients to use "networking" cards which are the same size as a standard business card and include the job seeker's job objective, critical career information, and/or qualifications summary. These key qualifications could be printed on the back of card to make it a mini-resume. We took a quick and very informal poll of approximately 8 JSP Counselors last year and only 1 had recommended this type of card to their clients. Most of them were not enthusiastic about the idea and one even declared it "tacky!"

While involved in a job search, always carry a good supply of business cards with you everywhere. Come especially well prepared for networking events or conferences. Keep your cards where you can access them easily. You shouldn't have to search or dig for them. Remember those receptions when you had to give and receive business cards while juggling a non-alcoholic beverage and a plate of canapés?