



Business Cards: Do You Still Need One?

THE INTERNET MAY SEEM TO PROVIDE ALL THE MARKETING TOOLS YOU NEED, BUT THERE'S STILL A NEED FOR OLD-FASHIONED BUSINESS CARDS. LET'S CONSIDER WHY AND THEN LOOK AT HOW TO CREATE A GOOD ONE. NOT ONE LIKE THIS.

The internet isn't everywhere we go and you may meet a potential client at a neighborhood gathering; maybe at your synagogue, church, or mosque; perhaps at a school event. Maybe even a chance meeting in an elevator or a doctor's office. So it's good to always have a little stack of business cards.

Yes, they're low tech and many people will just transcribe the information from them to a contact program on their computer and then toss the card away, but at least they'll be able to transcribe the information – something they can't do if they don't have one of your cards.

Business cards aren't expensive and you might be able to create a decent card without the help of a designer. Those who work for large companies have the benefit of a professionally designed logo and the cards will be created under the watchful eyes of a marketing communications department. If yours is a smaller company, some of these tasks may fall to you.

If you paid a designer to create a logo for you, be sure to use the logo consistently. Don't change its color. Don't stretch it or compress it. Avoid placing text or some other graphic element too close to the logo. These are all things that the marketing communications department would watch for you if you had one.

But maybe you need to make your own logo. It can be a graphic element (Apple's apple, for example) or letters (IBM's stylized letters), or a combination (YouTube, MasterCard, and Burger King are examples). If you're going to create your own logo, it's safer to stick with words unless you have some innate design ability.

Let's look first at a design that has some problems. What's wrong with this card? Well, what isn't wrong with this card might be a better question. Let's count just the major problems.

- The name of the business is in a difficult to read typeface with a drop shadow, which makes it even worse.
- The owner's name and title have been stretched to (almost) match the name of the business.
- The clip art is ancient, low resolution, and extracted from a larger image — some of which remains in the bottom corners.
- The contact information is in a typeface that's even worse than Comic Sans, includes two phone numbers (which should someone choose?), and misspells the website URL.
- If you want people to call Roberta, print cards for her. The typeface used is difficult to read and the box has a rule color that's not associated with any other color on the card.
- Speaking of colors, there are far too many of them and they appear to have been selected haphazardly.
- The laundry list of cat stuff is in a typeface that looks like it came from a wedding invitation. Who can read that tiny light green type?
- The list mentions services for dogs and chipmunks, so maybe Harald needs to have a subsidiary company.

Let's see what can be done to fix this mess. The process starts with a question.



What Is a Business Card?

BEAR IN MIND THAT A BUSINESS CARD IS NOT A BOOK, A WEBSITE, OR A BROCHURE.

Limit what's on the card to your name, title, a logo, business name, contact information, and maybe a slogan. More is not better. Spell your name the way you want to be known. I'm William, but my card says Bill. Your title should describe what you do. If you're the owner of a photo studio, you can use the term owner or president, but you should also include photographer.

Business cards are 3½ inches by 2 inches, so don't create a double-size card because you think it will stand out. Don't create a round card or a card with rounded edges. This is not the place to be clever.

And don't print your own unless you run a print shop. Homemade stationery looks like homemade stationery. There are plenty of on-line services that can produce professional-looking cards from the design you provide or create on their site.

Use your own logo. UPS could have used a generic antique bit of clip art depicting Mercury, the messenger. Would anyone have taken the company seriously? The on-line printing services I mentioned usually offer these stock logos. They are best avoided. Use your own text-only logo or pay a designer to create one.

The typeface and colors you select should be readable. Text that's too large looks amateurish and text that's too small can't be read. Ask yourself what Microsoft or Google or General Mills would do. Designs that are understated are almost always better than designs that try to shout.

Colors should be significant. In other words, there should be a clear reason for using more than one color. When you create a logo, be sure to note the color (not just blue, but the RGB, CMYK, or Pantone color numbers) and then use that color consistently. Don't add another color because you think it will make your card stand out. This is also true for typefaces. Business cards, stationery, and websites should use no more than three typefaces.

Keep related information together. You've probably seen cards with a name in the left corner, a job title in the right corner, the company name centered vertically and horizontally, an address in the lower left corner, and phone numbers in the lower right corner. This is not how people use information.

You may have multiple phone numbers and multiple email addresses. Pick one of each for the business card. If you have a direct line or a special email address that always receives prompt attention, omit that from the card and then use the information in a memorable way: When you meet someone you want to do business with, make a point of writing that special phone number or email address on the back of the card and explain that it's the best way to contact you.

Readability is essential! Some colors work well together; others don't. Light yellow text on white doesn't work. Neither does light brown text on beige or dark gray on black. Don't try to be trendy; just stick with dark, saturated colors for text on a light, desaturated background.

Fixing Bad Design

LET'S SEE WHAT WE CAN DO TO FIX THE CARD FROM THE CAT GUY.

One need not be a designer to understand the basics: Use only one or two colors, just a few typefaces, don't include useless information (like an unexplained phone number), and make everything as simple as possible. Here's an attempt to follow those guidelines.

The high-resolution clip art is large and adds some drama to the card. The owner's name is now at the top of the card, with no embellishments. The business name is large and readable. The contact information no longer has a second phone number, the website URL is correctly spelled, and the laundry list has been replaced by a simple line of text that explains what the business does.

The card is no longer a laughable mess.



Is This Design Perfect?

IN A WORD, NO. IF YOU WOULD PREFER A LONGER EXPLANATION: HELL NO!

This is probably not the business card that a knowledgeable designer would create. And yet it manages to avoid being ugly while including the information that most people will need and it does so in a way that's readable.

Although this design certainly won't win any awards, it also won't cause prospective clients to question the owner's professionalism.

If hiring a designer is out of the question, sometimes the absence of ugliness is all that's needed.

PS: If you live in New York City, don't bother trying to find Harald's Cats because you won't succeed. The Tischman Building at 666 Fifth Avenue stops at the 41st floor, so getting to the 75th floor will be difficult. Sorry. **Ω**

Cell Phone to the Rescue

MY NETWORK CONNECTION VANISHED ABOUT 10:30 ON THE MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 15. AT THE TIME, I WAS CONNECTED TO A CLIENT'S NETWORK. THE FIRST STEP WAS TO FIND OUT WHAT HAD GONE WRONG.

I thought it was the client's network because attempt to connect to resources on that network failed. I was able to connect to resources not on the client's network, but that was a false lead.

The root cause of the problem (spoiler alert) was my internet service provider's nameservers. Service was intermittent during my testing, which is why some connections worked and others failed.

Research quickly revealed that the problem was not with the client's network.

A Pocket-Size Recovery Option

MY CELL PHONE CAN TURN ITSELF INTO A WI-FI HOTSPOT, SO I ENABLED THAT FEATURE, CONNECTED TO IT, AND WAS BACK IN SERVICE WITH THE CLIENT — ALTHOUGH WITH A 30MBPS CONNECTION INSTEAD OF 80MBPS.

After 4 hours of using the cell phone Wi-Fi, I started looking for a workaround. WOW still wasn't able to provide an ETA.

The problem, as I noted in the spoiler alert, was Wide Open West's nameservers, but not entirely. Because I know that WOW's nameservers aren't entirely reliable, my router points to the OpenDNS nameservers. They also were also not responding.

Google also provides a free nameserver service and when I pointed the router there, standard service was restored.

IP Numbers to Remember

Google's nameservers are useful. Some people use them all the time, but I keep them as a good backup alternative.

The IP addresses are 8.8.8.8 and 8.8.4.4.

Once my connection had working nameservers again, everything was restored to full speed; but in the interim, it was certainly nice to have access via my cell phone even if it wasn't as fast as I'd like.

Keep your cell phone in mind when other connections fail. **Ω**