

DEVELOPING TANGIBLE REPRESENTATIONS OF YOUR SERVICE

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The first tangible representation of your service is your promotional material, including your business card. These will stay with the person long after you are gone, especially as usually you don't have a "sample" of the actual service that potential customers can keep and inspect. In thinking about the message that you want your marketing materials to convey, keep in mind that what matters to customers is the benefit that they will derive from your service. You will want to build on your "*benefits*" message and provide examples to support this message, such as:

- Adaptations of your service to different markets or client groups
- Specialized applications of your service
- Difficult circumstances under which you performed successfully
- Examples of previous experience with foreign clients

Business Card

Your most important marketing tool is your business card. It is what others will keep to remember you by and, even more importantly, it represents the quality of your service to a potential client. Take out your business card and look at it as if you were seeing it for the first time. What impression does it make on you? Does it look professional? Is the address information clear and complete? Do you have electronic access information, such as your e-mail address and homepage URL, so that you seem accessible?

When potential customers look at your business card, they will make unconscious assumptions about factors like whether or not you are willing to invest the resources to do a good job (based on whether or not the card looks professionally designed and typeset), whether you are well qualified (based on the presence or absence of credentials), whether you are knowledgeable about international markets (based on the presence or absence of your country in your address), whether you will be easy to contact (based on the presence or absence of electronic addresses), and so on.

Another factor that you will need to think about is the matter of accommodating other languages. One practical approach is to use the back side of the card for the language of the market you are targeting. To maintain your professional image, though, you will want to have that side of the card properly printed with your logo. Make sure that your business card is professional and worldclass.

Capabilities Brochures

You also want to be sure that your initial "first impression" in terms of other promotional materials is as positive as possible. If you use hardcopy materials, how well does your promotional material represent you?

- *World-class design*
Do your brochures demonstrate to the customer that you are a first-rate service provider? Are they crisp? Clean? Glossy? Accurate? Inviting? Environmentally acceptable? Culturally appropriate? If not, you need to build in time to hire a graphic design firm to help you develop appropriate, sophisticated materials.
- *Recommendations from former customers*
Do your brochures provide records of past performance? Former client lists? Testimonials from customers? If not, can you develop any additional “pieces” or inserts with such information? Don’t forget to include recommendations from government clients.
- *Other supporting materials*
Have you mentioned any awards for excellence? certifications? well-known clients or partners? association involvements?
- *Media coverage copy*
Has your firm been covered in a newspaper or magazine article? If so, have you reproduced copies or excerpts for inclusion in your brochure?

If all of your business is by referral, you may not need anything more than a business card. But, particularly in new markets, people usually feel more comfortable if they have a promotional package to review

Website

The rapid growth of the Internet is providing service firms with the opportunity to become visible and credible to a global market. In fact, few firms can afford *not* to have a web presence. You need to make sure that it is not simply a “brochure” site – i.e., a static replication of your hardcopy brochures. Also make sure that it is “linked” to relevant international sites in order to increase your website traffic and also to your referral sources. Remember, the accuracy and functioning of your website will be read by potential clients as a proxy for the quality of service that your firm provides.