THE DONALD COOPER CORPORATION

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Is your business card an 'actionable marketing document'?

Over the years I've been asked to judge several Business Card Competitions and what I've discovered is that many business cards completely miss the mark when it comes to accomplishing the very purpose for which they were created! So, here are a few thoughts on how to create a much more effective business card.

Our objective is simple…to create a business card that is **an actionable marketing document.** A card that clearly communicates who you are and what you do in a way that creates confidence and gets you more business.

Some people argue that business cards are an archaic waste of money and trees in this electronic, Smart Phone toting age…and they're wrong. If for no other reason, you give out business cards in order to get the other person's card. *"Give a card to get a card".* We did that with baseball or hockey cards when we were kids. To get a Mickey Mantle card you had to give up your Roger Maris card. Give a card and get a card, and it still works like that today with business cards.

If you ask people for their card in today's cynical world, they may think that you're going to use it to pursue them endlessly. But, if when you meet someone, you respectfully hand them your card they will, most often, automatically take out theirs and offer it to you. Then, if it makes sense, you can use the information on their card to gently and responsibly follow up with them, if you have a product or service that will be helpful.

Sadly, most business cards are *not* actionable marketing documents. They're mediocre and ineffective. So, let's look at the basic elements of an effective card to see how yours might be improved. Take out your business card right now and check it out as you read on…

A) <u>Your Message</u>:
To be an actionable marketing document, your card should communicate…

- The name of your business, your name and your title or position,

- What you do and for whom you do it (your target customers), if you serve a specific niche market,

- How you do it wonderfully or differently…and,

- How to contact you.

More than 80% of the cards I see leave out some of this critical information. Many of them offer no clue as to what the company actually does. Even if you're with a Division of a large and famous company, it's still important to make it clear which Division you're with and specifically what it does.

Include your job title! This one is controversial…but it shouldn't be. People want to know who you are and what your position is. Trust me, they want to know. Lot's of folks tell me that titles aren't important or that *"everyone in our company is equal"* so they leave this important information off their card…and it's a big mistake! Everybody in your company is **not** equal…get over it! People want to know if they're dealing with a sales person, a marketing VP, or the CEO.

The President of a large graphic design company, with whom I was co-judging a Business Card Competition a few years ago, lists his title on his card as "Chief Oyster Shucker". This is cute, but he's not in the oyster business, so it's just nuts! And, he was judging other people's business cards, for Pete's sake!

The *"for whom you do it and how you do it wonderfully or differently"* part can be communicated through a slogan, positioning statement or even a well thought out company name. For example, if your business name is 'Speedy Muffler King', 'Cheap Liquor' or '10 Minute Manicure', you've already communicated a lot of information, whereas a name like 'International Digital Enterprises' probably needs some clarification.

That's where your logo, company slogan or positioning statement comes in. Properly done, they should help clarify what you do and how you do it wonderfully...so they should be included.

If you're a member of an important Industry Association, their logo should be on your card. This makes you an "insider". If you have an earned degree that's relevant to what you do or, if you've won an important industry or company award, include that. If you've been in business for 150 years, add that. These things all create confidence and make a connection.

Make sure that your address, phone, e-mail and website info are all included and big enough to be read by people over 50. Include your area code with your phone number and, if you do business internationally, also include your country code. Make it easy for people to find you, and do business with you.

You'd also be amazed at how many cards I get that have no address on them. These are often folks who operate home-based businesses and they're so ashamed that they leave off their address. Big mistake! If I do business with someone and they screw up, I want to know where to find them and, if they don't give me their address, I think that they're actually planning to screw up and they're trying to hide. Every time I hear on the radio that the police are looking for some murder suspect, it seems that these people usually reside at "no fixed address". Don't be a "no fixed address". It looks suspicious.

Some folks in sales and service positions (especially real estate agents) have their picture on their cards to make a more personal and memorable connection...and it seems to work. Management and executive cards, on the other hand, almost never have photos. If you're going to use a photo, do us all a favor and pick one that was taken in the last 20 years, so that we don't get such a big shock when we actually meet you!

How on earth do you get all this information on a business card? Here's a tip**…"Don't waste half your card!"** Use both sides. The front of my card states who I am and how to reach me and the back states exactly what I do, including our most requested titles and the logo of the Global Speaker's Federation, to which I belong.

Use the back of your card to list, in point form, some of the ways that you can be helpful, or the industries that you serve. Instead of bullet points, use little check boxes ☐ and folks will mentally check off all the ways that you can help them.

People who disagree with me on this say, *"But I leave the back of my card blank for people to write on."* But if *you* write on the back what they need to know to do business with you, they don't have to write anything. And, trust me, if you put a little thought into it, you can write better stuff about you than they can.

Technology now allows us to print a Quick Response (QR) Code on our business cards that, when scanned by a smart phone, will link to your website or a short video about you, your product or service. This is very cool and very effective. If your printer doesn't know about this, change printers.

B) The design of your card:

Have your business cards, logo, letterhead, fax cover page (yes, some people are still using faxes) and any other promotional material all professionally and congruently designed by an experienced graphic designer. They are all part of your brand communication and getting them right doesn't have to cost a fortune. Ask friends who have great looking "stuff" who they used. Most printers have graphic designers on staff, or know where to find them. **Note:** The nice girl behind the photocopy counter at Staples is NOT a graphic designer!

Two more design "goofs" to avoid are…
a) Type font that's so small that no one can read it…and,
b) Printing in colors that don't stand out against the background.

Right now, I'm looking at two cards that have black type on a dark blue background and light grey type on a light blue background. They're simply illegible. To make it even worse, they're both printed in a very small font size. Don't let graphic designers talk you into a card design that can't be easily read.

Grossly oversized or tiny little business cards may be cute, but mostly they don't work. My cards are $1/16^{th}$ of an inch bigger in each direction than the standard card size to subtly make impact and create a little more space for my message…but they still fit into standard card storage systems.

C) The Card Stock:

Choose the best, heaviest card stock available, with a nice soft sheen to it. If your printer offers only the standard flimsy card stock, find another printer. It's your reputation that's at stake. The extra cost is worth it. If you buy 1,000 business cards for $30, printed on crappy embossed paper, you didn't save 50 bucks…you just wasted $30. Let's be blunt here. When you hand someone one of those awful thin cards with bad printing, what you're saying is, *"Here's a cheap piece of crap to remember me by!"*

So, there you have it…the simple A, B, C's of creating a better business card that's an actionable marketing document. A card that effectively communicates who you are and what you do…and gets you more business.

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