

4 Tips to Save Money on Your Next Graphics/ Marketing Project

As a small business owner myself, I totally identify with not only wanting to get the most bang for my buck but HAVING to come up with creative ways to get the most bang for my buck. It really shouldn't matter how deep your pockets are, smart business owners and executive leaders should always seek to guard their budgets—without sacrificing quality or excellence, of course.

Speaking of budgets...today's economy is forcing everyone to keep a close eye on the bottom line, while still executing with excellence, effectiveness and education. Regardless of the budget you have for a particular project, I'd like to offer four money-saving tips to lower your investment on your next marketing/ graphic design project.

1. Plan ahead.

The old adage, "Time is Money," couldn't be more true in this industry. To alleviate rush charges from graphic designers, printers and/or delivery services, it's best to plan ahead as best you can, working from a realistic timeline. To do this, determine the date you need your materials in hand and work backwards from that date. I highly recommend that you make your first contact to a creative/graphic design firm or printer three to four weeks ahead of your due date. The sooner you begin working with your creative partner, the better.

Here's a sample project timeline: You need to have a full-color brochure in-hand on Wednesday, February 23 for an important meeting on Friday, February 25.

Printing turnaround time varies depending on the complexity of your job but let's just say you allot 7 – 10 business days for printing. That means the printer should have your files by Wednesday, February 9.

Next, you should allow 5 – 7 business days for the graphic design and editing process. Now if you subtract those days, it's Monday, January 31. By this date, you

should have already begun working with the creative firm.

Note: This timeline does not include any shipping/delivery time, therefore, depending on the location of the printer, additional time may need to be backed out of this timeline.

Now let's translate this to dollars and cents. Here's an example:

With the ideal timeline followed above, a customer needs to get (5,000) 8.5" x 11" full-color brochures designed and printed. The total cost for this project is \$2,000.

Another customer goes to this creative firm two weeks before she needs the same brochure. She will probably incur rush charges from the firm (because they must put other projects to the side to complete her job and get it to the printer), rush charges from the printer (they too must put her project on press ahead of others' projects), and more than likely, express charges for overnight delivery or courier services. This same job, with all things being equal except the shortened timeline, now costs \$2,600. That's \$600 more for the same job. You see, TIME IS MONEY.

Of course in the real world, you may not have the luxury to plan so far in advance for every project. However, when you do have the opportunity to do so, this example proves you can potentially save yourself a pretty penny.

2. Order a realistic quantity of your product in your original order.

It goes without saying that you want to be careful not to order too much of a product. However, the opportunity to spend more on a project increases when you don't order enough, and have to place a second order for additional product.

The difference between ordering 500 business cards and 1000 business cards is approximately \$10 – \$15 (for standard business cards). If you order 500 and then realize you need an additional 500, you'll

pay for the original order twice versus spending the nominal amount in the original order.

3. Combine two or more pieces to make one multi-functional piece.

Here's a simple example of an opportunity to create a multi-functional piece: You need a company marketing brochure and a coordinating custom-designed envelope into which you can insert the brochure.

Consider having the return address and mailing label built into your brochure to create a self-mailer—thus eliminating the need for an envelope. In this example, the printer is only printing one piece instead of two pieces.

Whenever you have a multi-piece project, always ask your designer or printer if they have any cost-saving ideas or tips for your project. By the way, this discussion needs to happen BEFORE the project is designed.

4. Proofread your documents thoroughly BEFORE going to print.

This is a big one, ladies and gents. In my experience, this is the most common area to rack up unexpected charges. Be sure to do all of your editing BEFORE your project goes to the printer. When a project is at the printer, there is a very detailed process that takes place to convert your graphic files to press proofs. Press proofs are provided for you (or the creative firm) to ensure graphics, fonts, folds, cuts, etc. are exactly as intended. This is NOT the time to look for spelling mistakes, to fix grammatical errors, etc. If that needs to be done, the printer will have to go through that very detailed process again and yep, you guessed it, time equals money. Most of the time, you will incur additional charges over and above the printing estimate you received at the start of the project. Depending on the change(s) and the project complexity, I've seen these charges add up to as much as \$350.

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If you must make changes, that's understandable. Always inquire about the additional costs to make your changes and evaluate whether or not your changes are worth the additional expense.

Apply these tips immediately.

Whether it's through careful planning, less color, using multi-functional pieces, or careful proofreading to avoid unexpected expenses, you're sure to save money immediately if you apply these tips. Challenge yourself and/or your graphic designer to explore various options to create quality communications. Never let a budget—or lack thereof—keep you from creating effective business communications and marketing materials. Too much is riding on them.

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