All about Leaflet Design

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Leaflets are a type of open letter or postcard, designed to be handed out to people, either by hand, by post, inserted in local newspapers for distribution, left in venues, shops, restaurants, cafes, libraries… ANYWHERE where they will catch a person's eye.

Why produce a leaflet?

A leaflet gives you a chance to put across your argument and to draw attention to your organization, cause or event. A leaflet also gives you the space to present your ideas clearly and with graphical impact. Furthermore as people can take your leaflet home with them, it means they have more time to absorb to your message and to keep a visual reminder of it. Indeed, once distributed, the leaflet may end up being read by many more people that the person it was handed to, widening its impact still further.

Designing a leaflet - the basics

Leaflets are for delivering useful, reusable information. The size and shape of the leaflet is a major factor in its success. A leaflet that people can't fit easily into a pocket or a bag will be thrown away. Take a piece of paper out of your printer. It should be A4. Now fold it in half, that's known as A5, now fold it in half again, that's what A6 looks like. Leaflets are normally created from a single sheet of paper, folded in half (to A5) or in three (to A6). Most leaflets start life as sheets of A4 paper - your design should also start there. Leaflets may seem suitable for audiences who don't read much or well. However, well-written material will always enable people to make more informed judgments quickly. Don't cram it with text. People won't read it. Instead aim for clarity, strong argument and quality.

Designing a leaflet - step by step

When designing a leaflet, you are expressing yourself not only with words but also with pictures and graphics. How you present these pictures and graphics will also contribute to the way readers perceive their importance.

There are four clear tasks in the design of a leaflet.

1. Decide what you want to say

You must be clear in mind about the point you want to make. Though you have lots of space in a leaflet you still want it to be clear and persuasive. If the leaflet is being produced by a group, you should discuss this overall concept together.

2. Text editing

Someone needs to write the text or choose bits of other people's text that are particularly effective and put these together to make up the text for your leaflet. Remember, your text must be

a) Persuasive,

b) Interesting to read, and

c) Catchy and memorable. Format your text to make it punchy. Use short paragraphs and mark them with headings. Use bullet-pointed lists which are easy to read. You can pull out single lines and highlight them in a different font size or color to make a strong point.

3. Picture design

Make sure your pictures help to get your message across. Commonly you may choose to use

a) Pictures from official sources such as NGOs,

b) Pictures that you drew or created yourself,

c) Pictures taken with a digital camera,

d) Pictures downloaded from the internet, or

e) Powerful graphics such as graphs. Make sure you have permission to reuse these pictures for your leaflet, though.

4. Layout design

The layout of your leaflet needs to be thought out very carefully. Work out with the rest of the group what text and pictures you will have. Using a piece of plain paper sketch out:

* Where blocks of text will go

* Where headings will go

* Where pictures will go

* How big the various bits will be Try to think of colors for the text and background, too.

5. Make a booklet

Imagine an A5 leaflet. Effectively it has a front and back cover and a two page spread inside. The front cover lends itself to a single, powerful statement and a hard-hitting graphic to support the leaflet's title. These should be gripping enough to make anyone want to read on. On page two you can set out the problem: for instance, the situation against which you are campaigning. On page three, right opposite, you can explain what you are trying to do about the situation on page two - and how, when and where.

Finally, on the back cover, tell us about yourself and your organization. Don't forget to include contact details for people who want to know more or want to get involved. If you are working in association with another organization, be sure to mention them. See if you can add their logo to your flyer. Their support will add authority to your efforts.

6. PCs and printing

You will need to type and design your leaflet on a computer. For typing and formatting text, you will need a word processing program such as MS Word. Later versions of this program will also handle basic graphics. More experienced computer users may prefer to use specialist graphics programs such as Quarkxpress or Adobe Photoshop for the design process. If you do not have a computer yourself, or do not have a friend or colleague who will lend you theirs, head for your local library where you can get internet access and a PC to use for free. Though it is possible to print off your leaflets on a computer, it will be a long and laborious process. Furthermore your computer's printer may not handle graphics and colors well.

Your best bet will always be to give the job to a professional. Any small printer will print, cut and fold your leaflets and may even help you with design. There will be a charge for this service so get a couple of quotations from different printers. Remember too that a quotation is just that. See if you can get these prices reduced if you supply your own artwork, order a smaller (or larger print run) or reduce the weight of the paper you are printing on. They may even offer you a discount if they agree with your cause.

7. A word about printing

Finally be aware of the following:

* All printers will cut your leaflet to size, so you must leave a "bleed margin". This is a space of 2mm around the edge of your design which can be lost in the cutting. Don't run any text into this space.

* If the quality of an image is too low, its corners will "pixel ate" and go jagged. Your images should be saved as 300 dpi and preferably stored as JPG or TIF files.
* If you paper is too thin, heavy colors from one side of the paper will leak through to the other.

Did this guide help? Do you have other things you need to know? Do you have some tips we could add? Let us know.

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