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Harness the Power of Collateral Materials by Andrea Norman

When I first heard the words “collateral materials,” I was a pharmaceutical representative selling cardiac medications. It sounded like such a strange term, especially since I was occasionally addressing collateral arteries. Collateral arteries are arteries that sprout and grow as primary arteries are becoming blocked by cholesterol and plaque deposits. So, collateral to me sounded pretty serious and seemed to indicate problems. And still, when people say “collateral material” many people look quizzically at the terminology. More people know the term “collateral damage” than “collateral material.”

So, first, what is collateral material? Collateral material is any written material (typically published material) that supports the sales or business development process. It can include brochures, project sheets, pictures of projects, mailing pieces, and postcards. Taking our earlier analogy a little further, collateral materials done well help to support, sustain or even take the place of some business development efforts.

Many companies take their collateral materials very seriously. Pharmaceutical companies have regular periodic changes in their marketing literature to promote the marketing focus of the period. The literature includes materials to leave behind at the doctor’s offices, pharmacies, or hospitals. Literature may include 4-color shiny brochures or “white papers” on medical research.

Architecture and engineers firms don’t take their materials seriously. Or, they do once and then they use those same collateral materials for years...occasionally pausing to update with new projects. I have worked in the technology, pharmaceutical, and accounting industries. The A/E industry is far behind in their commitment to collateral materials. Typically, the project sheets and building descriptions are dry, dry, dry. They don’t include people, quotes from people or benefits to prospective clients.

Powerful collateral materials should convince, educate, promote, and inform. They should be the collateral arteries that support you when your primary arteries (business development efforts) are clogged. I review many, many engineers’, contractors’ and architects’ marketing materials and I could take most of them, remove the name of the company and swap it with another and no one would ever question whether it is right. NOT GOOD! So, how do you create marketing materials that are effective?

Make a plan. Decide the purpose of your collateral material you are creating. You might have some materials that are created to educate. Others’ purpose is to convince. Another brochure or postcard may be to remind. Once you decide your purpose ensure that the message/s are clear to your prospective audience. Who exactly is your audience? Are they prospective clients, existing clients, vendors, and employees? You may even want to request one of your targeted audiences to read it prior to finalizing it. Once an interior designer friend of mine was going to place an ad with her picture as the focus of the ad. As soon as I saw it I knew it did not compel or convince her targeted audience, buyers of



interior design services, to hire her. I was candid in my assessment before she placed the ad but she was firm in her decision to place it as it appeared. Afterwards, I asked her about the results. Unfortunately, she only received telephone calls from men who wanted to date her. Not the results she wanted!

Next question. What message do you want to convey both in prose and graphically about your business? Do you want to strengthen your existing brand? Or brand a new project area, division or offering? Ensure your written and graphic “statements” convey the desired message. Typically, architecture and engineering firms have tired and predictable graphics of buildings, master plans and other projects. One local construction firm is routinely using unexpected and warm images that have clients sitting up and taking notice. A good graphic design firm who understands your purpose and goals will deliver graphics that makes clear your message to your chosen audience.

Once you have answered all the questions and created the collateral materials, maximize them. Use them on your website, use postcards in your brochure to update with your latest projects. Purchase extra mailings to insert into client folders. When articles appear about your firm, purchase reprints and include them in the same folders. A brochure, folder or “packet” can include project sheets, cover letter, reprints, extra mailings, or any other relevant information that the client will appreciate. Remember, just like proposals, put together packages from the clients’ perspectives. Include information that is of interest and use to them. But make sure what you deliver is the message you want them to read and remember!

Do not be afraid to be different and exciting, quiet and contemplative, or anything in between. Remember, your goal is to be remembered and to have your prospects or clients take your chosen message away from the piece you have worked so diligently to produce. Step away from the standard and try something new that will support the coronary arteries of your business!