

HOW GOOD IS YOUR CORPORATE IMAGE?

words@amoreden 

When people hear the words 'corporate image' the majority think of graphics: logo design, packaging, brochures and web sites. But what about the words? Your customers' perception of your company is affected as much by your words as your visual image; poor grammar, punctuation and spelling mistakes can make even the most professional company appear amateurish.

Large companies have learnt this lesson and some actually have departments dedicated to checking and amending all outgoing letters to ensure they comply with corporate standards.

For smaller companies, however, this is both impractical and expensive. But why should that stop them? With just a little time and effort SMEs can appear equally professional and customer friendly.

Here are a few tips to help you improve your corporate image:

GETTING STARTED

- Assign one member of staff to the project of creating your letters portfolio
- Ask each department (or member of staff) to provide samples of the letters they write on a regular basis
- Draw up a list of all the letters you need (see over for suggestions)

BEFORE YOU PUT PEN TO PAPER

- Plan your letters before you start writing
 - What do you need to say?
 - What response do you want?
 - How will you obtain that response?
- Make a list of the key phrases that should be used in every letter
- Create a catch-phrase that reinforces your company's personality
- Remember that every letter should have an element of 'sales' in them
 - i.e. when acknowledging an order take the opportunity to sell another product or service

WRITING THE WORDS

- Keep each letter to one side of A4 paper - 4/5 paragraphs is plenty
- Use short and punchy paragraphs - average two sentences in each
- Start each paragraph with a different word
- Try not to use a descriptive word more than once in each paragraph
- DO NOT start with 'I am writing to you' - that is obvious!
- DO NOT close with 'do not hesitate to contact me' - if they want to, they will!
- Remember it is
 - Dear Sir or Madam with Yours faithfully
 - Dear (name) with Yours sincerely
 - Only use 'Regards' if you know the recipient well
- Generous spacing makes the letter look more professional
 - One space following a comma
 - Two spaces after a full stop
 - One blank line between paragraphs
- Use modern but not slang language
- Contractions of words such as 'don't' and 'can't' look sloppy so use 'do not' and 'can not' or 'cannot'
- Try not to use too many long words, it looks as though you swallowed a dictionary for breakfast and may not fit your company image
- Use your catch-phrase as part of the last paragraph
- Include address block for personalisation and spaces for dates / times and costs (where appropriate)
- Use common phrases and sentences in every letter to reinforce your image statement

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CHECKING THE WORDS

- Use the spell-checker on your PC
 - Remember that some are set to US versions - in the UK we use 's' not 'z'
- Read each letter carefully before showing it to anyone else
- If unsure of grammar, use the grammar checker on the PC
- Ask someone outside your company to read the letters
 - What impression do they get of your company?
 - Have you included all the relevant information?
 - Do the letters make sense?
 - Do the letters appear to come from the same company or several different ones?
- Use the spell-checker on your PC - AGAIN

SETTING UP YOUR LETTERS PORTFOLIO

- Save each letter as a template in your word processing software
- Print hard copies of each letter
- Place the copies in a file
- Label each letter to show when it should be used
- Give a copy of the portfolio to every member of staff

USING YOUR LETTERS PORTFOLIO

- Show each member of staff how they can access the letters
- Demonstrate how to personalise the letters with the name and address, dates and times etc
- Explain that they should not change the text of the letter in any way
- Impress upon them that they **MUST** use the spell-checker before they print EVERY letter (it is easy to make typing errors in names and addresses)

Alternatively, why not contact Judi Whiting of words@amoreden and ask her to put together a Letters 2 Go portfolio for your company. It will save you time and money and ensure that your company presents a consistent corporate image to your customers. Choose any combination from:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| ■ Mailshot | ■ Order completion |
| ■ Cold call follow-up | ■ Order follow-up |
| ■ Information request follow-up | ■ Non-order follow-up |
| ■ Confirmation of appointment | ■ Networking follow-up |
| ■ Meeting follow-up | ■ Invitation to show/ event / exhibition |
| ■ Order confirmation | ■ Company bespoke letter |

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