

The Toughest Part of Your Job

Designing Your Business Card

By Tim Cork

As a networking and career coach, I've spent years helping small business owners, including franchisees, convey their brand messages clearly and memorably. There's no better way to achieve this than with an effective business card. However, developing an ideal business card can be challenging, even for franchisees in large franchise systems. The reason may surprise you.

The fact is, while you'll need business cards to run your franchise, you can't expect your franchisor to provide them for you. Many do not even provide general guidelines on how to design and print cards of your own. However, you don't need your franchisor's help to create an effective, economical business card for yourself. All you do need is a goal—and a little guidance.

Networking

Business cards are first and foremost networking tools. In networking with potential customers, business associates or suppliers, you'll be more successful if you consider what is important to the other person. Therefore, enter each conversation with an attitude of giving (whether that amounts to advice, information or personal and professional support). When you give someone your business card, they'll have access to these things from now on. They will know your name and title, the franchise system you represent, your phone and fax numbers, e-mail and physical addresses, and perhaps your franchisor's website, as well.

However a well-designed card offers more than contact information. It will also convey a first impression that benefits you. A good card should tell someone you are trustworthy, professional, comforting, confident, genuine and warm. Your business card becomes your first—perhaps best—means of self-promotion, and if it works well, you'll never have to remind that contact who you are.

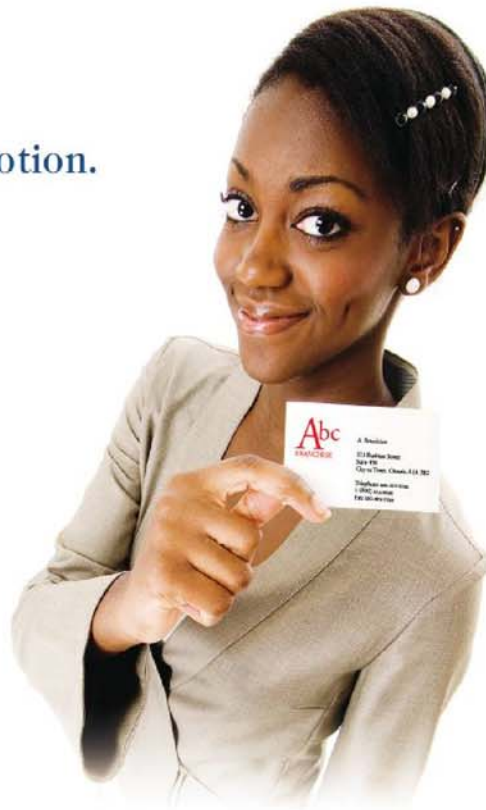


Your business card is your first—perhaps best—means of self-promotion.

Now that you know what a good business card must do, it's time to create one best suited to your needs. Remember, though: as a franchisee, you are never just representing yourself. You are also representing a brand, and it is crucial your brand's name and logo be a part of your card. While this may limit your creativity, it also makes your card instantly memorable; after all, who forgets a famous brand? That's why it's famous.

Finding your look... and feel

The more of a person's senses you can involve in the design of your card, the more of information he or she is likely to retain. People retain about 10 per cent of what they see or hear. If you can 'juice' the senses to include a third element—touch, for example—retention level rises substantially. How might a unique feel set your card apart from the rest? Texture is just one of the design elements you can start thinking about.



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Customized shapes can make your business card stand out. However, printing them can be costly.

Shape, size and texture

An unusual looking business card sticks in peoples' memories and can promote you as a creative, innovative, clever or fun person. Today's printers can produce simple custom cards with cropped or rounded corners, or even holes in the paper stock. Some franchisees get much more elaborate, handing out business cards shaped like the products they sell. One of my favourite business cards belongs to the head of a large, quick-service restaurant (QSR) franchise. It's in the shape of a 'Big Mac' (you can probably guess the brand from that). This card has a simple but distinctive look, referencing a very famous product. It is also a clever promotional tool—if you take one of these cards to any of the franchisor's locations, you can exchange it for a free sandwich. I doubt anyone who has been given this card has ever forgotten it, or the man who gave it to them. I certainly haven't.

Standard business cards are rectangular; approximately 51 x 76 mm (2 x 3 in.). Smaller cards will definitely stand out, but they can be more easily lost and may not fit in a Rolodex or wallet sleeve. Reduced space may also make readability a problem. Oversized cards are certainly readable, but may be even more awkward to store.

Pay equal attention to the texture and weight of the paper stock used for your cards. Flimsy, light-coloured stock looks cheap and crumples easily. Besides, it is surprisingly inexpensive to print full-colour, glossy cards that look far more professional. The only downside to a glossy texture is that it can be difficult to write on.

Braille is used on some cards for the blind. This is helpful if you have a diverse customer base;

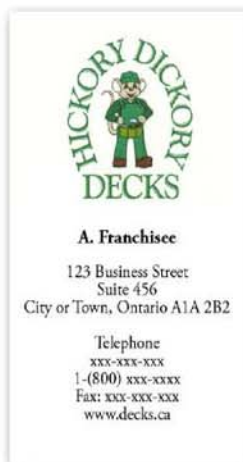
it also shows you care. If you are promoting to a wide range of target audiences, consider using more than one card, using different shapes, textures and styles to market yourself most effectively. However, customized shapes, sizes and textures do not come cheap, so make sure your creative vision is worth the expenditure.

Colour

Colour is a great way to make your business card stand out. However, not every colour will convey the message you are looking for. For example, if you sell children's products or games, you may want to use bright primary colours (blue, red and yellow) to convey a sense of fun. If you operate an accounting or legal-services franchise, traditional colours like grey, beige or blue may be better. Gold, silver and platinum are also good choices for these types of franchises—they are regal colours that imply wealth and opulence (you'll notice a lot of banks use gold in their business cards). Today's focus on the environment has made green a very popular choice, but green also signifies money, so pay attention to your message. For more on colour and meaning, see 'Colour Counts for Cards,' on page 50.

Avoid selecting colours that clash with or distort your franchisor's logo. This should be easy, as widely recognized logos rarely have more than two colours. These logos work because they keep things simple—don't ruin the effect by distracting the eye with many other hues.

Also be wary of colour combinations your contacts will likely associate with something else. If your franchisor's logo is red, don't add green to your card, unless you sell Christmas supplies. An orange logo



Though quite typical in shape and size, this card is memorable for its vertically oriented text.



By emphasizing the franchise's blue and orange colours, this M&M Meat Shops card increases visibility and promotes its brand at the same time.

A business card must convey information clearly. This card keeps things simple, with well-spaced, legible font against a white background.



looks sleek against a black background, but everyone will think of Halloween when they see it. Placing your red and white franchise logo on a blue background may confuse some people, especially if you're '100% Canadian owned.' Naturally, you don't want to add any colours that make your franchise logo resemble another brand.

Wording

Your colour scheme keeps things simple; make sure your text is simple, too. Start by keeping your brand message brief. Slogans of more than seven words make your card look congested and are rarely read (although if your franchisor requires it, you have little choice).

Whatever you print must be legible. Most business card fonts range in size from 10- to 12-point for names and titles to 8- to 10-point for e-mail addresses, phone numbers and other contact information. Print-style fonts are usually easier to read than 'script-style' (although some businesses, such as formal wear retailers, may prefer the latter). As with smaller cards, a smaller font can be difficult to read, especially for the elderly.

Make sure to consider how your chosen font colour stands out against the card itself. Light colours on a black background are hard to read, as are close font/background colour combinations, such as red and orange. Some franchisees find that embossed fonts help create a more professional image that looks and feels better.

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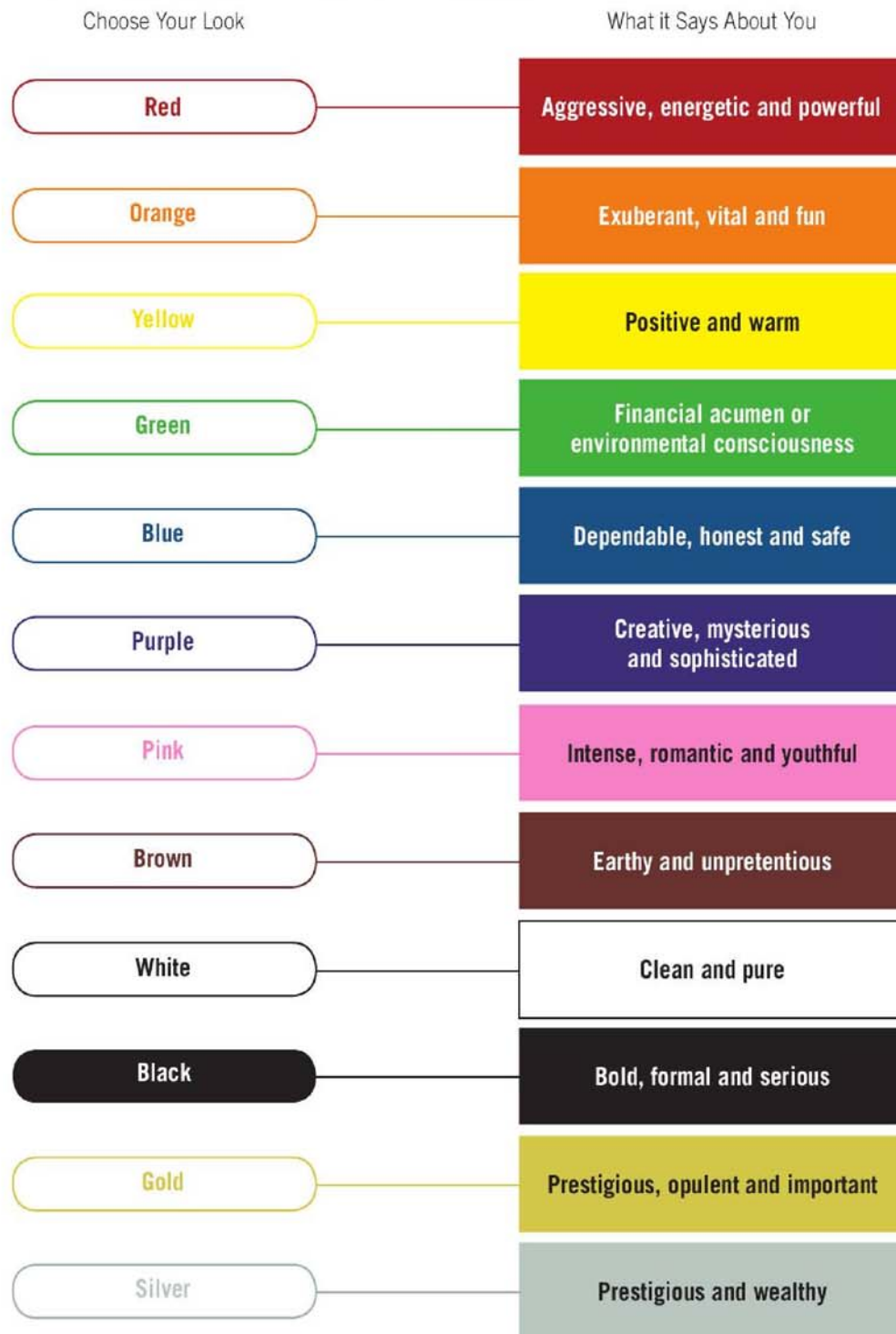
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Colour Counts for Cards

We're all shades of grey, but a colourful business card makes the biggest splash. What image do you want to project?



The back of the card

When you leave the back of your card blank, your contact has valuable space upon which to write notes. 'Capturing the moment' of these interactions is often key to networking; this gives your contact a chance to record quick observations or interesting details that will make you that much more memorable.

Ink does not show up well on coloured backgrounds and pens often cannot write on glossy finishes. If you want space on your card for written notes, consider a white background with an uncoated texture.

The back of your business card can serve other uses, too. It can depict a small map to your location, convey a tip of interest to your customers or even deliver your mission statement.

Face facts

Adding your photo to your business card can be a great way to build professional relationships, especially if you are working in an industry like real estate, where the 'personal touch' is critical. Drawings or caricatures of you can also help you remain memorable. You can also add a picture or image representing your product or service, or a benefit your business provides—this may communicate your business better than words ever could.

Photos and images should not take up too much space on your card. They must be big enough to be distinguishable, but no more than 25 per cent of one side. Don't forget to smile!

Printing your cards

With your dream design in-hand, it's time to speak with someone who can make it a reality. Any Canadian city (and a lot of small towns) will have print shops that can provide cards in large numbers. However, while almost any print shop can produce basic business cards, you should stick to those that employ a designer onsite. Your proposed card is, after all, a work of art, and a designer can provide you with valuable feedback before any serious money is spent.

If possible, arrive at the print shop with a basic illustration of how you'd like your card to look. You should also have a high-resolution, digital copy of your franchise



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Your business card can be your first step to great new relationships.

logo, which can be easily obtained from your franchisor. Give these items to a sales associate and ask him or her to pass them along to the designer for review.

The designer will work to match your logo or other pre-set design elements with an ideal colour. He or she can also make you aware of certain statements or designs that can't be reproduced on a card; for example, franchised real estate agents accredited by the Canadian Real Estate Association (CREA) must depict its seal of approval in a particular way. You might not be aware of the subtleties, but the designer will be.

Timing

Once your order is made, it can take between two and five business days to receive your batch of cards. More complex designs take longer to complete.

Volume

The size of your order will depend on how you plan to use the cards. Some franchisees are involved with sales and marketing on a daily basis; these individuals can distribute 500 cards in a month. Other franchisees are more hands-off; if you spend most of your days in the office, 500 cards could last you two years.

Cost

An average order of 1,000 full-colour business cards will cost a minimum of \$80. Special colouring choices, embossed lettering and other

enhancements can push the price as high as \$500 to \$700, though such prices are rare. If a print shop quotes you prices this high, re-evaluate your proposed design.

Your helping hand

So now you know what cards you need and how to print them. It's time to make the most of them.

Carry lots of cards with you wherever you go; you never know when the opportunity may arise to make a new business contact or a potential customer. Make it a habit to hand out a few cards to people you meet so they can pass them on, especially when attending a networking event. It wouldn't look too professional to write your personal contact information on a blank piece of paper (or the back of someone else's card). Believe it or not, this happens all the time.

No matter how proud you are of your business cards, always ask people's permission before offering them one. While you're at it, ask if they would like a few of your cards to pass them on—most people will appreciate your initiative. To better motivate them to help you, offer to distribute some of their cards, too.

Networking is not complicated; it's simply connecting with people. A unique, memorable and well made card, combined with your personal charm and professional manner, will present a powerful image to those you need to impress. Whether you own 100 franchises or just one location, you'll always be the face of your brand. **fe**



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