11 Bodacious Brochure Blunders Consulting Firms Make Commando Consulting

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Did you know that if you put one pot of boiling water and another pot of lukewarm water into your freezer at the same time, the boiling water will freeze first?

Apparently, this phenomenon has been known since the time of Aristotle, but no one has been able to explain the physics behind it. Actually, the U.K.’s Royal Society of Chemistry has recently put up a £1,000 prize for the first person who can explain it. No one has responded so far.

It’s equally mind-boggling to realise that the brochure of one consulting firm can far outperform the brochure of another consulting firm, and very often there is no logical explanation, especially because in many cases, simple-looking brochures run rings around flashy, glitzy and glamorous promotional eye-candy.

While I believe brochures are not the most important marketing tools in consulting firms’ lives, it’s important to have them because they can play a major role at later stages of the buying cycle. And although a brochure’s role is zero or negligible at the early stages of the buying cycle, it plays a major role later on.

Look at a brochure as the toilet in a house. It takes up only a tiny percentage of the houses total area, and you spend only a pretty short time there on a daily basis, but without a toilet, even the nicest house is pretty worthless. No one wants to live in a multi-million dollar home but pee outside at the end of the yard behind the blackberry bush. ... running the risk of peeing on their Blackberries.

So, with that in mind, in this literary masterpiece, we’re going to take a closer look at some typical brochure-related mistakes that boutique consulting firms and solo consultants make.

Mistake #1: Missing Elements

Many firms make their brochures far too sketchy. Vital pieces of information are either partially covered or are completely missing.

The main reason for that is the lack of fully understanding the buying process, and knowing what pieces of information buyers need at certain stages of the buying cycle.

Brochures go out at the late stage of the buying cycle, close to the decision-making point. By this time buyers are fully aware of their problems and the full magnitude of their problems’ consequences.

At this point what they need is some compelling information about the consulting firm that has stayed in touch with them and patiently educated them about their predicaments a and possible solutions.

Now buyers are ready to inspect firms’ bedside manners in order to choose the right one.

In a way, a brochure is the off-line version of the “About Us” page. Introduce your firm and the people who would work with the client if your firm were engaged.
I agree that you can’t provide endless amount of information in a brochure, but considering that the more information you provide, the more familiar your firm becomes in the reader’s eyes, it only makes sense to provide rather a bit more than a bit less.

**Mistake #2: Missing Personal Message**

Every brochure should have a message from the firm’s leader. As the firm’s leader, you should personally greet readers right on the first page of the brochure.

Instead what can you see on so many consulting websites. There is a president’s message on the first page. I have no idea what for, but many firms put it there, because they have never bothered to hire a copywriter who would tell them that all a president’s message does on the landing page is causing high bounce rate¹.

When people arrive at a website the last thing they are interested in is corporate chest-beating. It’s sad because that’s all they get. So, visitors get frustrated and bugger off of the website. But a nice personal message in your brochure sets the tone of the rest of the document. It’s the proverbial cover letter in a package. It tells readers how to “consume” your brochure and get the most out of reading it.

**Mistake #3: Missing Differentiation**

And this is more than a missing USP (Unique Selling Proposition).

Yes, you must have the USP, but you must have some other bits and bobs too. For instance, another USP (Unique Sales Persona), a UST (Unique Sales Title), a UCP (Unique Contrarian Position), a USA (Unique Sales Avatar), a UTP (Unique Technology Position), a UMN (Unique Meeting Name), just to mention a few differentiating factors.

At this late stage of the buying process, differentiation is the wasp’s nipples. Everything stands or falls on it.

If buyers can’t perceive your firm to be different from the others, then no matter how well you’ve educated buyers during the earlier stages of the buying process, nothing happens. They buy from your competitors. And that would be a disastrous way of ending an otherwise nice day.

**Mistake #4: Missing Guarantee**

Some people say it’s impossible to enquire new clients without testimonials. Maybe. I’ve never used them, so I can’t comment on that baby.

I don’t use testimonials because I don’t want my buyers to make decisions based on total strangers’ opinions.

But what you can’t miss from your brochure is a good, strong guarantee. And this is not a

¹ Bounce rate is the percentage of visits that go only one page before exiting a site.
guarantee for certain results. That would be unethical to offer. Economists can’t guarantee economic recovery. The weatherman can’t guarantee specific weather for specific days.
What you can guarantee is the quality of your services. This is when buyers make decisions and you have to put their minds at ease. The better you can pull this off, the better chance your firm has to be selected.

**Mistake #5: Dust Collector**

When starting out, many consultancies print truckloads of brochures. But then life fires at them point blank, and the good intention of distributing their brochures goes down the toilet. And now $20,000 worth of brochures are sitting in the basement or garage, collecting dust.
And this raises a question.
If at an earlier time it was justified to invest $20,000 because the notion was that the value of having those brochures is higher than $20,000, what is the logic in shoving them aside because there is no time to use them?
But if you don’t use them because you’re dissatisfied with its looks or its message, then just take them to your recycling box, and it’s over. You can move forward.

**Mistake #6: Excessive Focus On Looks**

Many consultancies make the mistake of making their brochures too picturesque at the expense of being informative.
Again, in my experience, the problem is that many consulting firms hire kick-arse graphics artists to design their brochures, but ask their receptionists to write some “filler text” to fill up the empty spaces.
After all, they’re only some filler words and anyone can write them.
Well, not exactly.
You can try it if you want to or you can rely on my experiments. You send out a picturesque brochure and a plain brochure with no images and kick-arse copy, and you will find that the plain brochure works better.
Granted, the picturesque brochure will dazzle more low-end buyers who fall for style, but high-end buyer who prefer substance are likely to go for the plain brochure with strong copy.
As we’ve talked about it in other newsletter issues, every piece of communication with your market is an obstacle. Recipients either qualify themselves for your services or disqualify themselves from them. Your communication materials, including brochures, set the quality of buyers that qualify themselves.
Overly picturesque brochures can qualify the “next bright shiny object” seeker type buyers and when they become your clients, they can wreak havoc on your sanity.

**Mistake #7: Missing Call To Action**

Let’s clarify it here and now that “Call us at [phone number]” or “Contact us for more information” are not calls to action. They are just grossly limping closing statements.

But when you invite readers to take action, specify what action you want them to take. Spell it out in great detail. Don’t rely on them to figure it out.

And once you’ve developed your call to action, map out what happens inside your firm when someone takes that action. What is the exact process from the brochure reader’s action all the way to the signed and approved purchase order and the collected down payment cheque?

**Mistake #8: Missing Photos**

Photos are important because they deepen your already established relationships with buyers. Buyers don’t really care about how you look, unless something is seriously off base, because they already know you through your communication pieces. But they feel better knowing how you look.

I recommend my clients to use two photos.

One is a professional photo along with their bios. The other is a personal photo long with the personal sections of their bios. I encourage clients to use an “On A Personal Note” section in their bios that portrays them as normal human beings with spouses, kids, pets and mortgages not just stiff-arsed professionals with starched collars, vein-blastingly tight ties and a blister-raising shoes.

**Mistake #9: Missing Educational Elements**

Many brochures are hard-core sales pitches. Yes, by now buyers are in the home stretch of the decision-making process, but they still want to learn something new and they still get turned off by hard-core sales tricks.

A brochure, just like any other promotional documents, is a blend of content and copy. Content educates and informs and copy advances readers in the buying process. Content without copy is waste of paper. Copy without content is hucksterism. You just have to find the correct ratio.

At this stage of the buying process, you need more copy and less content than in the earlier stages. But you need both.

**Mistake #10: Missing List Of Services**

Mistake 4: The brochure doesn’t contain a detailed list of services you offer. Prospects often look
at your service list to see if you provide what they need. If they don’t see what they want, they may assume you don’t provide that service and call another lawyer. Make sure you list all the services

**Mistake #11: Missing Response Code**

Every kind of promotional material must be coded, so when the response comes in, you know exactly what initiated the response.

Create a dedicated phone number, email and mailing address that you use on brochures only.

Since you do, at least I hope, direct response marketing, you expect response to your marketing pieces. With that in mind, it’s vital that you can track the performance of each marketing piece that you’ve ever put out to the market.

**There You Have It**

Or as the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II was fond of saying in the movie *Amadeus*...

“*Here we are and there you go.*”

There are probably more mistakes, but if you correct only these babies, your firm has a better chance to be selected in the future.

One more point has just come to mind. Stay away from self-designed, flimsy three-fold brochures. At the age of print on demand, you can have pretty spiffy brochures at a reasonable price.

Yes, price is always a factor, but before you get bogged down on price, consider the lifetime value that each client can bring you. If all your brochures bring you just one client, you win.

Think about it...

Before a peasant sows his corn, he has to calculate how much he wants to harvest. And if he wants to harvest more, he needs more seed corn. So, he has to sow today according to how much he wants to harvest in the future.

This brochure thing is the same. You have to have to invest according to your desired return.

**About The Author**
Since 1998, using battle-tested military principles and strategies, Organisational Provocateur, Tom "Bald Dog" Varjan has been working with boutique consultancies and solo consultants, both locally and globally, to improve personal and firm-wide performance, by helping them to sell their expertise for what it’s truly worth.

For a selection of consulting resources, including his practice management black paper, “The Dark Side Of Firm Management: Ten Deadly Management (Mal)Practices That Often Bring Consulting Firms to Incalculable Suffering or Even Agonising Death”, you can visit Tom’s website at http://www.di-squad.com.

Additional Knowledge Products to Build Your Consulting Firm

Here are some knowledge products on a broad range of areas as they apply to running a boutique consulting firms or solo consultancies. These products are sort of workbooks. They explain what is what, then walk you through the "how to..." part of the process. As you read the books, you do the exercises, and by the time you finish reading, all the relevant bits and bobs are in front of you on paper applied to your own unique situation.
I hope you find them valuable.

**Consulting Retainer Engagement Toolkit:** A comprehensive home study programme on the ins and outs of setting up consulting retainer engagements in which your clients receive great value and you are compensated for the value you bring to your clients' tables by making your brainpower available to your clients. For details see Consulting Retainer Engagement Toolkit.

**It's All About Your Value: Consultants' Guide to Setting, Raising and Safeguarding Fees:**
How to price consulting engagements based on buyers' perception of the value the consultant brings to the table regardless of time, materials and other retarded but commonly used factors. This booklet covers a step-by-step process of establishing the value of your contribution and how to get paid for that value. For details see It's All About Your Value.

**Mastering the Consulting Proposal Process:** For many consultants proposal writing is a "hope-and-pray" game. They sit down with prospects, chat for a while and then volunteer to "submit a proposal" without knowing the full specifications of the intended project. But some, usually false, buyers are just collecting free information for in-house implementation. A proposal, just like a marriage certificate, is a short document, but it is silly to offer it unless the other party has already made a commitment to go ahead. This e-book walks you through the maze of developing
your proposal and presenting it to buyers. Mastering the Proposal Process

**Dynamic Duo Mentor Programme:** If you're a solo consultant, my Dynamic Duo Mentor Programme may be a solution for you to have access to a second opinion on both strategic and tactical issues you’re about to put into action. For details see Dynamic Duo Mentor Programme.