

10 Graphic Design Tips for the Training Industry

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1. Save money, trees, and ink by going virtual.

Since a huge percentage of training needs are for high-tech employees, many of your prospects are very comfortable with “virtual” marketing. In the past ten years, email marketing, PDF documents, and web-based graphics have grown from small niche practices to a powerful set of tools that rival old-fashioned print advertising in effectiveness. They also win by a landslide in terms of production costs. Choose a design consultant who is proficient with these virtual tools – and if print marketing is appropriate for your situation, good consultants can easily and quickly adapt their work to either application.

2. Information-based graphic design performs better than many conventional graphic marketing tools in the training industry.

The training industry is focused on the transfer of knowledge and information, so it’s generally critical to communicate the substance of what’s being marketed in a very tangible way. Slick imagery, reliance on slogans and catch phrases, and marketing with little tangible content may be more glamorous or stimulating, but in this industry it’s ultimately less effective. For training professionals, a larger-than-life photograph of an attractive model holding a cold beverage just won’t do the job. Focus on simple, information-rich design.

3. Immeasurable value is gained by utilizing a designer with a thorough understanding of your products and services.

As described above, the training arena deals with knowledge and information transfer, and often the substance of that information is very complex. It’s worth the extra effort to find and select a graphic designer who is savvy enough to comprehend the nature of your business.

4. Web presence gets more important every day.

The medium of marketing is communication, and the medium of communication is information. The Web isn't called "the information superhighway" for nothing. In today's business arena, a solid web presence is as important to your organization's legitimacy as your business cards or brochures. Most industry leaders are very aware of this maxim. If you're not, learn fast. And if you are, make sure you act on this knowledge.

5. The best graphic designers don't just design.

The more marketing tools a consultant has in his or her skill set, the less of your own time you'll have to spend on the marketing effort. The best graphic designers understand that the "communication" is just as good as the "graphics". If you're lucky, you'll find a designer who can also proof your copy, clean up your writing, or even write your content for you. The best designers can also aid you with your web design, programming needs, and advise you on your overall marketing plan.

6. In the training industry, branding often receives less priority than it should. But there's good news.

The good news is that even when there isn't sufficient time or resources to engage in a dedicated branding effort (which is usually the case), a savvy graphic designer can quickly establish an overall vision for branding, and can bring your organization one step closer to that vision with every project. Thus, a consistent overall branding campaign is eventually realized using foresight and planning, not extra time and resources.

7. Harness the power of your logo and type.

Some years ago I was discussing branding with a client, when he said, "It's just a logo...it doesn't matter what it is, it could be anything. People don't pay any attention."

After my initial shock, I realized that with attitudes like this, my future in the marketing sector is secure. A company's corporate mark is a unique opportunity to communicate an instant sense of what you offer, how legitimate you are, and your overall business philosophy. Whether people pay conscious attention or not is beside the point – when they see your logo or logotype, some

sort of message will come across. The nature of that message is one of your most powerful corporate assets.

8. Make sure your sales tools are effective.

Any training leader knows that an effective sales team is critical. Getting the word out, capturing interest, fulfilling market demand, and converting the message to dollars is the way you stay in business. You maximize the effectiveness of this process if you take pains to ensure that your sales staff has access to well-designed collateral. Whether it's an extensive brochure, a small explanatory piece, or simply making sure your website's content is rich and informative, great attention should be given to making sure your sales activities and marketing materials interlock. An effective communication consultant should examine your company's sales model, understand it thoroughly, and design marketing collateral accordingly.

9. Training executives beware: Don't rely on graphic communication consultants or firms unless they possess strong project management skills.

There are many graphic designers out there with a lot of talent who can often generate very attractive visual work. Unfortunately, in the training industry a sophisticated marketing effort requires much more than just pretty graphics. You need someone who can perform timeframe projections, possesses effective interviewing skills, establish clear goals and requirements, have appropriate technical skills, and have the ability to manage vendors. If your designer doesn't understand the essence of your marketing problem, he often ends up simply generating attractive images that must be revised over and over at your explicit direction. This scenario results in great inefficiency during the design phase of your marketing projects...it takes more of your time than it should, and incurs further unnecessary costs when the designer bills you for a lot of unnecessary work. If you can find a consultant who offers comprehensive skills, you've found a truly valuable strategic marketing asset.

10. Decide on whether your company really needs a flagship brochure?

The answer here is, "Some do, and some don't." The wisdom in this response is this: make sure you take a good look at the pros and cons of a high-quality printed piece, and determine whether the benefits are appropriate for your organization. Too many training companies either neglect the need for a primary informational piece, or rush to develop a glossy brochure merely to self-validate. If your business model mandates a flagship brochure, then developing one is crucial. If

not, there's plenty of other things on which to spend your money. Your first priority is to understand your own company, then to thoroughly analyze your marketing needs.

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