PUBLISHING CATALOG ON A DISK OR CD-ROM

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PUBLISHING CATALOG ON A DISK OR CD-ROM

If you're involved in any type of business where you sell products or services, you should know that you need to sell more than one product to be successful. Of course, there have been exceptions, like the Pet Rock, but those are few and far between. You see, if you only sell one product, you need to find those prospective customers that want that one product. Add a second product, and you've opened the door to customers who want it, but not your first product. Add a third, and you have more prospects, and so on.

You can present your products or services through separate ads or flyers, but it's really more efficient and professional to have a CATALOG. That way, your customer can see all you have to offer in one place, instead of one ad here, another there.

Having a catalog will increase the orders you receive, since your customers have more choices and you can show them everything in one mailing.

If you're thinking of putting together even an eight page catalog, call your local printer and ask for a price. Get a quote on 1,000, since you'll want to have enough. My best printer would charge $150, which would be 15 cents per catalog. Then, you have the mailing cost, which would be 52 cents. You're now up to 67 cents per catalog. Add in the cost of getting the name to send the catalog to, and you could be over a dollar per catalog. That means over $1,000 to print and send out all your catalogs!

Worse news to come... you won't get rich from an eight page catalog. If you really intend on making it in your own business, you'd better offer at least 20 related products or services (or a combination). That way, you can hit a specific group of people and have a good chance of getting a decent return. But if an eight page catalog would cost over $1,000 to print and mail, think about a 20 page catalog! Printing alone would be $375 or more!

You can reduce your printing and postage costs significantly by having your catalog printed on a web press on newsprint. The only problem with that is, you need to print a higher quantity to make it worthwhile. Figure on at least 10,000.   There's an easier, less expensive way to do this... PUT YOUR CATALOG ON A DISK or CD-ROM.

A 5 1/4" 360K IBM-compatible disk will hold around a 70 page catalog, if you do it right! 70 PAGES!!! The higher storage disks will, of course, hold more! Your customer will receive your disk catalog, put it into their computer, and will be able to view full descriptions of your products and services on their screen. They'll even be able to print out an order form!

Right away, let's look at costs. For a 360K 5 1/4" disk catalog, the disk
will cost 10 cents. Look at Computer Shopper for disk sources that run
clearance sale on low-density disk. Although with today's computers a 360K
5 1/4" disk may seem like a dinosaur, at 10 Cents, the bargain may still
serve its purpose.

One cost that was not figured in is storage. If you have a lot of catalogsprinted (especially if you had 10,000 or more newsprint catalogs), you're
going to have to put them somewhere. With a disk catalog, you can copy them
as you need them. No need to have 1,000 made up in advance, unless you
really want to!

Also, keep in mind the storage capacity of the disk. If you wanted a 68 page
printed catalog, whew, it would break you, unless you have pretty deep
pockets. A dime will get you one on disk.

Finally, consider this... you have 10,000 of your fantastic catalog printed.
You start mailing them. All of a sudden, you discover you have to change the
price of one of your products. Or, the source for a product dries up.
Or, you want to add a new product or service. TOO BAD! You're stuck with
the catalogs the way they are. With a disk catalog, NO PROBLEM! You make
the change on your master copy, and all subsequent catalogs are instantly
up-to-date.

See the advantages? You can sell your products just as well with a disk
catalog as with a printed one. In fact, people will keep your catalog around longer, due to it's
uniqueness (disk catalogs are
just starting to be used).
So, how can you get your own high-powered order-pulling disk catalog?
Well, two ways... you can make one yourself, or you can have an expert
put one together for you, saving you the time and effort. I'll explain
how it's done, and then you can make the choice.

First, you need to write your product/service descriptions. Use any word
processor that can save documents as "ASCII" files. These are plain text
files that can be written and read by most word processors, or directly from
DOS (by typing "TYPE (ASCII filename)"). You'll want to apply all the
principles of successful marketing copy writing in your descriptions.
Center them around the benefits the customer will receive from your product
or service. Don't list features, list how the customer's life will be
better because of the features. Don't worry about length, you have plenty
of room on your disk! Also, you aren't constrained by how many words will
fit on the page, because your catalog will be viewed on the screen, and will
only be printed if the customer desires to do so. Save each of your
descriptions as a separate ASCII file.

After you have your descriptions typed and saved, you can assemble your
catalog on disk. You will need some sort of program to let your customers
choose which product they want to read about, and to display and print it.

The best programs I have found, which I use on my disk catalog (and on this report disk) are "MooMenu" (a menuing program) and "See" (a text file viewing and printing program). These programs are public domain (they are free to copy and use), and they work together extremely well. Another option is to use the program "Writer's Dream," a shareware program designed for producing books on disk. I'll use the MooMenu and See programs for the example to follow.

First, you need to make a menu of your products and services. This is the "table of contents" the reader uses. With MooMenu, you construct your menu with your word processor. For each menu selection, you start with a letter, then the name. For example, "A. The Super Widget." Then, on the next line, you would type an execution command that would dir
ect your text viewer program to display the appropriate text file. For example, "SEE WIDGET.TXT". This command will not appear
 on screen with the menu. Do this for all your catalog items. You will have plenty of room on your screen, so you should plan
out an attractive heading that shows the name of your catalog, the issue or date information, and your business name and address
.

Now, create your order form in the same fashion. Type it on the screen in your word processor and save it as an ASCII file. Don't forget to put your name and address, as well as any ordering and shipping information you'll need from your customer, on the form.

If you have more products or services than will fit on a single screen, you will need to create a second sub-menu that will be called from your first menu. For example, your second menu screen might be called "MENU2.MOO". You would put a selection on your menu, such as "More Products & Services". The next menu command line you'd type would be "MOO MENU2.MOO". The MOO at the start of that command tells the MooMenu program that you want it to display a new menu. The second menu functions like the first.

The customer inserts the disk, types "go" and presses return (like you did, with this disk). The menu then appears. The reader can either press the letter corresponding to the item they wish to read, or they can move the onscreen cursor with the arrow keys to the item they are interested in. If they would like to print the description, they can press "p" while the description is loaded and it will print. To leave the description and return to the menu, they would press the escape key. It's fairly simple and requires little or no instructions to the reader.

Assembling your catalog on disk doesn't require a bunch of glue, cutting, pasting, typesetting, printing, or any other of the hard-work jobs that traditional publishing requires. All you have to do is copy your description files onto a disk, as well as your menu file(s), an dyour menuing and display ing/printing programs. I'm able to fit the MooMenu and See programs on a 360K disk and still have room for around 70 pages of text, so you shouldn't

run into any space limitations. Then, produce a label for the disk, either from a professional printer or a laser or dot matrix printer (I do mine on a laser printer and they come out beautifully!). That's it!

You've now reached the production/distribution stage. Copy your disks, label them, and send them out! Here are some money-saving ideas that will help your cash flow:

+ Try with all your might to keep your shipping weight under one ounce. It's easy to do that with a 5 1/4" disk, as the disk, sleeve, a cardboard stiffener (a 5" x 5" square of stiff cardboard that protects the disk) and a lightweight envelope weigh just a hair under one ounce, in general. Shop around for the right envelope. I use 6" x 9" white 24# catalog envelopes. 3 1/2" disks will automatically cost 52 cents to mail, due to their weight.

+ Don't use disk mailers. They're heavy and expensive. You can send your disk in a regular envelope if you use a cardboard stiffener. Mark on the outside of the envelope in the largest print possible, "HAND CANCEL ONLY - DISK ENCLOSED - DO NOT BEND!" I feed my envelopes through my laser printer, which prints my return address and the hand canceling phrase in large white on black letters along the bottom of the envelope. I've only had one damaged disk the whole time I've been doing this! See, it's cheaper in the long run to send another out, than to spend five times as much on the mailer itself, and at least twice the postage, on every single disk mailed.

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