

# InfoTrak

Information for Better Decisions

## Protecting Brand Integrity in Marketing Collateral

In today's global marketplace, consumers literally have a world of choice. An estimated 30,000 new consumer products were launched in North America alone last year, with countless others originating abroad. The ones that are most successful in this highly competitive environment either already have, or quickly develop, strong brand identities.

"Consumers relate to a business through its use of branding," writes Oracle Corporation's Deborah Athens in her article, *Returning to Brand Relevance*. (Visit the American Marketing Association website at [www.marketingpower.com](http://www.marketingpower.com) to read this article.) Studies show that a strong brand identity encourages customers to buy more, pay more and recommend the brand to their friends. For that reason, says Athens, "businesses are taking a closer look at...what is becoming their most important asset."

In their book, *Brand Leadership*, David Aaker (professor emeritus of marketing at UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business and Vice Chairman of Prophet Brand Strategy) and Erich Joachimsthaler (CEO of The Brand Leadership Company), quantify the importance of branding to the bottom line. After studying hundreds of U.S. and European companies, Aaker and Joachimsthaler found that those with the largest gains in brand equity also enjoy the best stock returns — an average of 30 percent among companies in their sample — as well as better ROI. In contrast, firms with the largest losses in brand equity have lower, or even negative stock returns — an average of -10 percent in their sample. Given that correlation, it's safe to say that maintaining brand integrity and consistency has never been more critical.

### Collateral Chaos

But, when it comes to marketing collateral, maintaining brand control can be a difficult task, for several reasons. For one thing, marketers often need multiple versions of a particular piece of collateral, to address, for example, the diverse demographics of the modern marketplace, as well as to tailor offers to different industries, regions or affinity groups. Today's consumers expect messaging honed to their interests and concerns and prefer them to be personalized, as well.

*"Products are made in the factory but brands are made in the mind." (Walter Landor, founder of Landor Associates and pioneering brand expert)*

*“The art of marketing is the art of brand building. If you are not a brand, you are a commodity. Then price is everything, and the low-cost producer is the only winner.”*  
(Philip Kotler in Strategic Marketing for Educational Institutions.)

They quickly tune out or dispose of anything that doesn't speak to their particular needs.

Another issue is collateral production time. Each product introduction, iteration or improvement requires new or revised support materials. If those materials aren't available when the product rolls out, the sales force may use outdated material or — worse — create their own interim collateral. This kind of uncontrolled communication can weaken public perception of a brand.

Even without time pressures, the process of conceiving, creating, publishing and distributing collateral is rife with potential for brand dilution. Typically, dozens of people — both staff and vendor personnel — are involved. Text files and graphics replicated on multiple computer hard drives can become subtly altered, confused with earlier versions or simply lost in the clutter.

Given these conditions, how can you be sure you have the right copy and graphics — the approved versions — before you go to print? And, if you need to produce several versions of one piece, how do you manage the needs of different audiences without distorting or diluting your brand image?

The solution may be as close as your fulfillment company, *if your vendor offers electronic collateral customization capabilities.*

## Customization and Control

Electronic customization systems can give marketers the best of both worlds. They enable authorized users to tailor materials to address demographic, industry and regional differences, but only within preapproved parameters.

Each piece of customizable collateral — whether it's a brochure, flyer, newsletter or direct mail piece — starts with a digital design template. To that basic framework, users quickly and easily can add messages aimed at a specific target audience and graphics that complement the message or speak to the recipient's business, lifestyle or location.

Users can also personalize the piece with the name of their customer or prospect, plus their own contact information. Built-in business rules determine which text and graphics can be used together and for which audiences. The completed piece is then displayed in PDF (portable document format) for online proofing. When users are satisfied with the look and content, they can electronically order the quantity they want for printing and distribution by the fulfillment vendor. Alternatively, they can download the file to their computer for desktop printing or electronic distribution.

But relevancy and fast turnaround are not the only benefits of a customization solution. Brand integrity and — equally important for some industries, like pharmaceuticals, insurance and finance — legal compliance are ensured because the variable messages and graphics are preapproved by your company. The fulfillment vendor stores these preapproved items within a digital 'library,' which is accessible to authorized users through their normal web-based fulfillment interface. The items within the library can be 'locked down' so that users can add them to a template, but cannot change the content. This safeguard gives users, such as your sales force, the flexibility to build collateral that truly speaks to a target audience, but prevents renegade marketing. Your valuable brand asset is maintained.

Electronic customization can bring a new level of organization and control to the often chaotic process of collateral creation. It simplifies management by providing a single central library for copy, photographs, logos and more.

The end result is collateral that's relevant, personal and immediate and that:

- Improves response rates.
- Reduces time to market.
- Maximizes your collateral budget, by reducing storage and disposal costs for physical inventory.
- Enhances productivity.
- And protects your company's brand assets.

*Companies with the largest gains in brand equity also enjoy the best stock returns — an average of 30 percent in one study. In contrast, firms with the largest losses in brand equity have lower, or even negative stock returns.*

## In Conclusion

Success in business depends largely on the desirability of the product or service itself. But the timeliness and relevance of marketing campaigns also play an important role. Working with a fulfillment company that offers advanced customization, production and delivery capabilities, along with tight controls and real-time reporting, can give marketers a leg up on their competition.

Comac helps companies reduce time to market, streamline business processes, increase response rates and improve ROI. To learn more about Comac's online customization capabilities and other targeted fulfillment and communications solutions, call Comac at 1-866-COMAC4U, or visit our web site at [www.comac.com](http://www.comac.com).



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