



Is the Internet Making Your Hardcopy Marketing Brochure Obsolete? By Richard J. Hernández, CPCM

A New Reality. Attending trade shows and making face-to-face marketing calls can be a valuable way for minority- and women-owned businesses (M/WBEs) to meet companies that eventually results in getting a contract. However, the process of marketing your company to corporate and government buyers is changing due to the Internet. Buyers no longer want to (or have to) handle paper brochures. They want suppliers to enter their capabilities “profile” information on Internet-based forms. To be successful, M/WBE suppliers must adapt to this new reality or risk being left out.

The traditional marketing process started with a handshake and an exchange of business cards. Then the M/WBE usually handed over a hardcopy of their company’s marketing brochure. What happened after the trade show or office visit was the buyer having to manually file and/or enter the supplier brochures capabilities information into their M/WBE vendor database. This was a costly and time-consuming process.

Today, many buyers for large businesses politely decline hardcopy brochures. Instead, they refer prospective suppliers to their Web site to fill out an array of Web-based screens that capture profile information. This way, the records are automatically entered into a database that can be quickly filed, sorted, and searched. This also saves lots of time.

How to Cope. M/WBEs can use the information from their brochures as a starting point to help them complete Web-based profile screens for buying organizations. However, new strategies are required. Some recommendations are:

- **Electronic Brochure**. Many buyers will accept an electronic brochure when you register online at their site. This provides another way for your company to stand out from the competition.
- **Web Site**. Buyers expect suppliers to have a Web site, which they usually preview in advance of calling a supplier after a trade show. Your Web site should complement your brochure.
- **Key Words**. Buyers typically search for prospective suppliers using key words, usually related to a specific product and/or service. Making sure you enter the right key words or industry-specific terms in your online profile can make a big difference whether or not you get noticed. It’s also important to include differentiators, which should be in both your hardcopy brochure.
- **NAICS Codes**. Buyers also use North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes to search for suppliers. Be sure you know the correct code(s) for your company.
- **Certification Form**. Buyers need a copy of your M/WBE certification form. Sending it electronically and/or making it downloadable from your Web site makes it easy for them.
- **Online Directories**. Buyers use online directories to search for M/WBE suppliers such as PRO-Net (<http://pro-net.sba.gov>). Make sure your company is registered with the appropriate online directories for your industry.

- Follow-Up. Buyers are typically very busy people. It helps to remind them with a follow-up call and/or e-mail to make sure you connect with them.

Electronic brochures can save M/WBE money by reducing printing and postage expenses. They can also be sent via e-mail while you are speaking with a buyer which helps make your marketing message more successful.

Final Thoughts. M/WBEs will still need a paper-based marketing brochure for their company. A well-designed hardcopy brochure can help you get business. However, M/WBEs also need a strategy for translating their brochures information for Web-based registration forms and an electronic version of their brochure. For additional information on electronic marketing please see the “Free Tutorials” at the author’s Web site at: www.E-MBE.net

REFERENCE BOOK

You can order a copy of the book:

“**Small Business Website Development Guide – M/WBE Edition**” for \$20.00 (plus \$5.00 shipping)
To order call us at 630-440-9191. The book’s author is Richard J. Hernandez, CPCM.

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