

How to Design Rack Cards That Sell Your Hotel

"INNstuff.com offers free copy writing, free design, free photo enhancement and great low prices on all rack cards."

The rack card is every hotel's best friend. One simple and inexpensive 4" x 9" rack card can tell your hotel's great story in both pictures and words. Even better, because it is so economical, a rack card can be distributed to many prospective guests without breaking the bank. Finally, rack cards fit into a standard number 10 envelope for easy mailing and, because they're printed on thick, glossy paper, that stands up nice and straight in a display rack.

The rack card concept is great, but how can you make your card stand out from the competition? Here are a few design ideas.

If you are a branded (flag) hotel, your national brand has very strict design guidelines. Their templates for rack cards include headings, type style and size and picture placement. It is very important to adhere to these templates for these reasons.

- Your brand has spent millions of dollars to develop a corporate identity. This is how the public recognizes your hotel brand. By taking the things that are special about your hotel property and placing them in a nationally recognized format, you increase your acceptance and readership.
- Rack cards and other materials that are not designed to brand identity design specifications can cost you points in a quality control inspection.
- Using templates for rack cards decreases your costs, because no new design is necessary.

Independent hotels are not restricted by brand specifications and templates for rack cards are not required, but your hotel rack cards are not the place to let your design person run wild.

Notice the branded rack cards. The front side emphasizes two things -- the hotel name and location, and pictures showcasing the property. The front cover of every rack card design is designed to make a simple sale. It's job is to create a great first impression and motivate people to read the copy on the back!

Let's look at some ways to make that sale. Branded or independent, the name of the hotel property needs to be in a prominent place on the rack card. The city and state is slightly smaller, but close by and easy to read. Save the street address for the back. The type style should be an easy to read serif font with your hotel name and location in bold.

Now that the readers have matched your hotel to an area that is part of their travel plans, the real sale begins. Here is where good pictures will make or break your hotel rack card. Pictures create a visual image of your hotel in the reader's mind. Your job is to design a hotel rack card that creates a positive and welcoming image. A great way to do this is to put people in your hotel

rack card pictures. One of my favorites is a picture of a guest checking in to a hotel. The smiling front desk representative makes this a perfect welcome picture. Now, what pictures should be used for your rack card? Simply, the ones that show your hotel in the best possible way and will attract the type of guest that best matches your hotel property demographics. If you want to sell your swimming pool, use a picture of a happy family enjoying the pool rather than a sterile picture of an empty pool. How about a smiling waitress serving a meal in the restaurant?

"Heads in beds" is the hotel mantra. Show your hotel guest room, but design your hotel rack card to include one or more of these scenarios.

A business person working on a lap top computer (sell your Internet connect). How about a happy couple or family enjoying the hotel room. Other options are a person savoring a cup of coffee and the complimentary paper or include a unique piece of furniture like a business class desk or armoire. If the hotel exterior is important, try to include a guest getting out of a car, with luggage, ready to check in. Select pictures that best emphasize the hotel's positives and strengths. To see some examples of pictures that sell, visit our photo enhancement section.

OK, nice idea, you say, but where do I get these great hotel photos? The best way is to have a professional photographer who has experience in taking hotel pictures. The value photographers bring is their ability to correctly light their subject. It's not easy. I've worked with good photographers who can take an hour or so to correctly light a shot. If a photographer doesn't have proper lighting equipment, find someone else. A good professional photographer is not free, but well worth the expense.

If a professional is too costly for your rack card budget, you can do it for free. Consider taking the pictures yourself or find an associate with some photographic expertise. The new digital cameras take great pictures and today's software programs can enhance lighting and sharpness and even take the yellow lines out of your parking lot. If you do this, make sure your rack card printer will enhance your photos, for free, to make sure they look great on your rack card. If they won't enhance or crop the pictures you submit, find someone else. This is not the place to save money on your hotel rack card project.

Now that you have your photos, what is the best way to present them on your rack card? Crop the photographs. It is critical to emphasize the most important element in the picture.

Too many rack card photographs have lots of sky, parking lot, rugs and walls. Cropping eliminates those peripheral items and focuses attention on the main element that will sell your hotel property. Good design is critical to every successful hotel rack card

Use software to enhance the picture quality. Today's programs can correct poor lighting, correct colors and even make a few changes to the actual picture. In just a few minutes, a photo can be changed from unacceptable to wow! If you can't do this yourself, and most hoteliers can't, make sure to find a printer that has expertise in this area and won't charge you an arm or a leg to do the work. This should be a free service.

One last tip. If you are using a digital camera, be sure to set your file size as high as possible. Photographs consist of dots. The more dots, the larger the file. A picture that looks great on your computer monitor may not be very sharp on a rack card because printed pictures need over three times as many dots than computer monitors. All your pictures should have a file size of at least two megabytes. One last thought. Make sure to turn off the date and time stamp on your camera before taking any pictures for your rack card.

Now that your pictures are selling your hotel property, let's turn the rack card over and talk about copy. The back of a rack card is not the place for creative writing. The reader simply wants to read about what your hotel offers. Keep it simple, but write with the guest in mind. Ask yourself two questions. What does the potential guest want to know about your hotel? Write down the answers. Then ask, what's in it for your potential guest to stay at your hotel? The answers to these two questions become your initial copy.

Organize your copy into categories with those that best feature your hotel at or near the top. Categories can be: Location, Accommodations, Special Amenities, Banquets & Meetings, Recreational Facilities, Business Class Services, Shopping, Colleges & Universities, Area Businesses & Attractions, Special Plans.

Write your copy in short, benefit filled phrases with bullets separating the phrases. Space is always tight so perfect sentence structure is helpful, but not required. Once you have written your copy, edit it once and then set it aside. The next day, read it again and make your final edits. It's amazing how much a good night's sleep improves copy. Again, if writing copy is not your cup of tea, find a printer who can. Don't be afraid to edit and change the copy once you actually see it. We change copy for our clients an average of five times per project. Finally, those rack card changes should be free.

A few final notes. Include easy to read and good directions that a stranger could easily follow. Add any logos that would enhance your credibility or prestige. Make sure to have complete address information, including a reservation number (toll free, if possible) at the bottom. Include your web site address. Every hotel should have a web site, even it is a simple one or two page basic site.

If you have followed these steps, you are ready to print a rack card that sells. [Click here](#) to read our article on how to select a rack card printer.

INNstuff.com offers free copy writing services, free design, free photo enhancement and great low prices on all rack cards. Visit our [Rack Card Page](#) to find out more.

If you have any questions about an upcoming rack card project, give us a call at 800-459-4588 or send us an e-mail.

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