

Evolution of

Companies
look for ways
to maximize—or
escape—their identities.

You're nothing but a piece of garbage to some people. Well, not *you* exactly, but your business card. That wallet-size synopsis of you that you enthusiastically hand to your fellow businessperson often ends up not in his Rolodex but in the trash. You'd find this appalling . . . if you didn't do the same with countless cards you receive. Who among us hasn't taken a card, only to arrive home, glance at it (maybe), then toss it because we have no compelling reason to contact the person—and wait a minute, who was that person again? Oftentimes, we can't even put a face to a card, so why add it to our Rolodex?

Besides, many of us don't own Rolodexes. We have e-mails, cell phones, BlackBerrys to exchange information. Technology is killing the Rolodex.

Are business cards next?

Probably not. After all, you have to have *something* to give to people so they can contact you. Beyond that, the business card "has become so much more than an introduction or a method to hype your wares," according to *The Best of Business Card Design 8*, a compilation of extraordinary cards, some of which we highlight here. "Business cards tell a story; they open doors; they make a statement; they answer questions; they connect; they unlock and initiate conversation; they provide information and serve as an extension of one's self."

Can a tiny rectangle really wield that much power? Yes, says Diane Ratliff, a consultant and author of *Business Card Design: 63 Ideas to Help You Create Attention-Getting Business Cards*, who points out that "most people don't think of business cards as marketing tools. But they should.

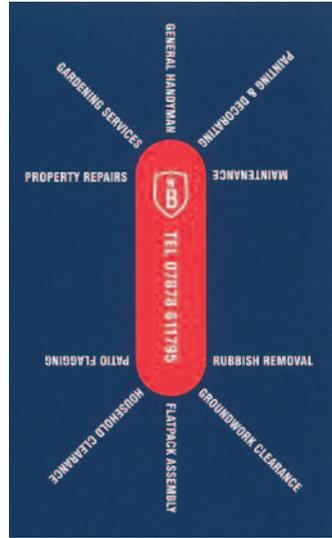
The following pages feature cards selected from *The Best of Business Card Design 8*. While all may boast a degree of creativity, are they actually effective marketing tools? We asked business-card collector and consultant Diane Ratliff, who rates the cards and explains what works, what doesn't, and why creativity is rarely enough to make a lasting impression.

the B-Card



Rating: 7

"This is a cool card that will get a lot of attention, but there are downsides to its unusual shape: It's hard to store and hard to scan. I can see someone assembling it and putting it on a desk, but after a week or two, the person will just throw it in the trash. As a networking type of card, where you might hand it out strictly at a trade show for someone to take immediate action, it's very creative. In the end, though, it lacks functionality."



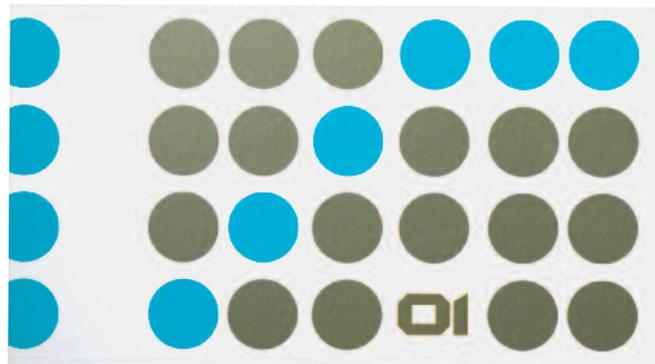
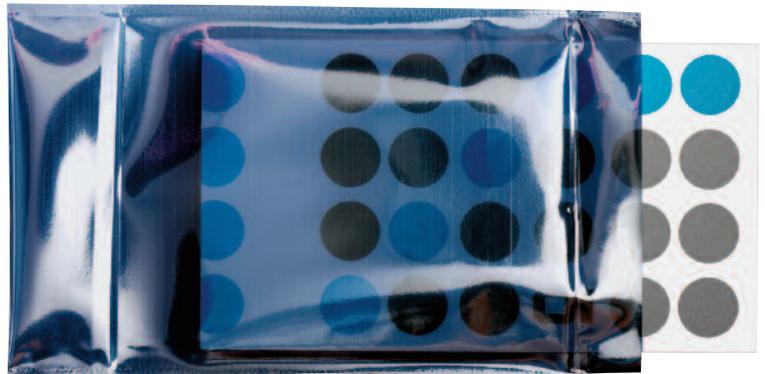
Rating: 10 "Pretty cool card! Usually, I like color on a card, but it doesn't matter in this case. It's memorable and stands out not just because it's plastic but because he added value to the card by using graphic-design elements that graphic designers use as part of their job. It shows he really knows something about his profession, so there's credibility, which trumps just being creative."



Rating: 7

"I like that it looks like a book. That's certainly creative and unusual, but my main problem is that there's no physical address or phone number. This is just a neat idea that missed the mark by not including important information, so there's a good chance someone would not keep the card."





Rating: 5

"This is definitely a creative execution, but if someone thinks the wrapper is cool, the person may not ever open it, so the card then loses its functionality. If a person *does* open it, the wrapper will likely be thrown away, in which case the card must stand on its own—and it doesn't. I don't even know the name of the company from looking at this, nor the full name of the person attached to it. Also, the text, which is too small, is too near the bottom of the card, so it would not be convenient to add to a Rolodex."





A good card should be an action-starter." It should entice its recipient to visit a website, call about a product, or speak to its original owner. Look at your business card and ask yourself: Would I want to talk to me?

You would if you were funny, unique, attractive—in short, the qualities we find most alluring on a date are the same facets that make business cards appealing. And we don't just like certain cards based on looks. Personality counts too. Sure, an interesting font, an unconventional color, or an offbeat shape might catch your eye, but it's the more personalized effects—a funny tagline, holes punched through the paper—that will help you form a better mental impression of and connection to a person or a company.

One easy way to personalize a card, Ratliff suggests, is to use both sides of it. "Why waste space?" she instructs. "Even if you write something as simple as 'Nice to meet you' or '10 percent off,' it gives people a reason to remember you." Just don't fill the card with too much data.

"I remember one card crammed with so much information that it was illegible," she says. "The card was trying to say everything the guy did—and it seemed like he did everything in the world. He would've been better off creating a different card for each of his services."

Adds Scott Allen, a social-networking consultant and author of *The Virtual Handshake*: "A business card is not a catalog or brochure. It's a fast branding opportunity."

While too much text is the number-one business-card mistake that printers cite, according to Ratliff, that isn't to say there aren't plenty of other errors to make. One might be printing the card to begin with. "A lot of people put so much effort into card design and how the card feels," Allen explains, "but if I had it my way, I'd never handle a

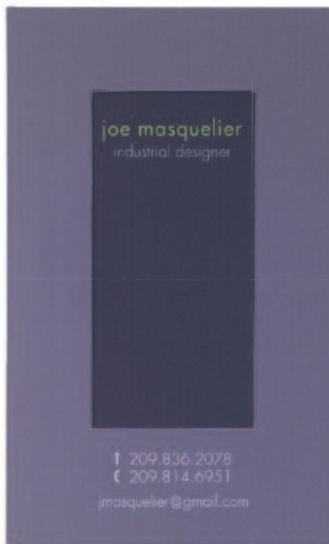
Rating: 3

"Is this a landscaping company? I think it is, but you can't be sure, which makes the card useless. I would guess this is a company dealing with gardens, but I'm still confused. Kudos for trying to think differently, but as a marketing tool, it doesn't work. Only 1 or 2 points above creating a standard card at Kinko's."



Rating: 7

"I assume this is a construction company, but once again, I'm not entirely sure. The card could relate to buildings or automobiles. Who knows? Unless this card is only given out at a trade show, people may not know. That said, I give it high marks for being uncomplicated and creative."



Rating: 6

"I can see someone playing or fiddling with the card, which is perfect since it's for industrial design. I'm pleased with the creativity; however, his Gmail address is a red flag. He's obviously taken care to craft an unusual card, but he can't spend ten bucks on a domain name to bolster his credibility? I wouldn't hire anybody with a Gmail address."