

Roof care brochures help maintain roofs and clients

he doctors are doing it. The dentists are doing it. And now, the roofing contractors are beginning to join in, too.

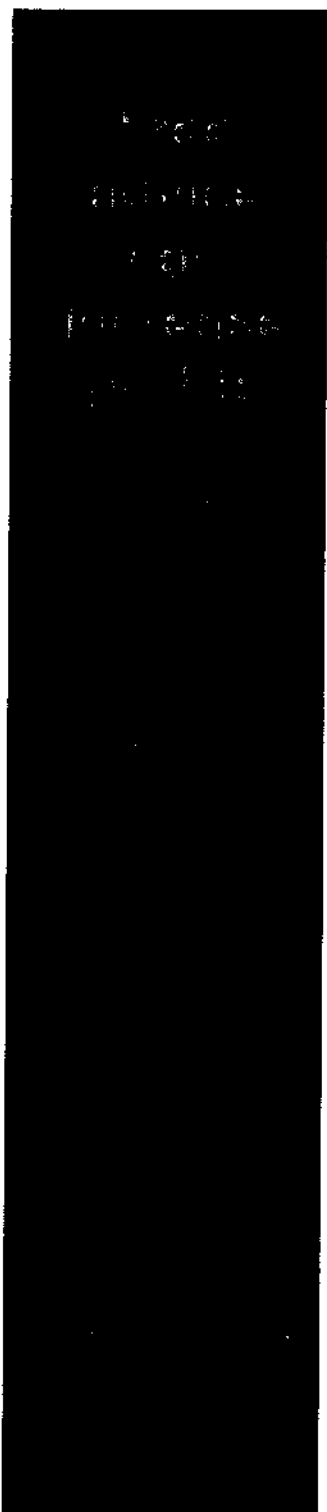
More and more professionals from many fields are making preventive care information available to their clients in brochures or newsletters. Whether they're providing tooth-brushing techniques or roof maintenance tips, these businesspeople are discovering that an attractive and well-planned preventive care publication can be a cost-effective and helpful way to market their services while gaining clients' and potential clients' trust.

Roofing contractors, like other professionals, are often accused of not telling their clients how to prevent costly problems. It's a common belief among customers that a product or service failure simply means another quick sale for the business owner. Before your clients come to that conclusion, you can let them know that you care as much as they do about a problem-free roof by presenting them with a maintenance brochure immediately after the roof is installed.

An owner's manual for a roof

A roof maintenance brochure serves the same purpose as an automobile owner's manual. It outlines the proper procedures that must be followed for owners to protect their investment, and it specifies who should perform these tasks and when they should be performed.

Putting together a publication like this requires much forethought and preparation. Before you begin, you must choose the brochure's style, content and design. Your most important decision, however, is the image of your company you want the brochure to convey. The image that you choose will dictate the style of the brochure's written content as well as its design.



Do you want the manual's readers to perceive your company as traditional? Approachable? Good ol' boys? Sophisticated? If you want your company to be thought of as approachable, you might write your brochure in a chatty style and use cartoons for graphics. A more sophisticated style might use very formal language, illustrated with a few subtle graphic elements or technical drawings and printed on a matted paper.

When you first contact a commercial printer, be prepared to give the sales representative a great deal of information about your project and your budget restrictions. To find the best and most economical way to do your job, the rep will need to know:

- what's being printed;
- the dimensions of the piece;
- the number being printed;
- the number of colors being used;
- the amount of preparation the boards will need (Will the material be camera-ready or will it need to be typeset and pasted up?);
- the weight, style and color of the paper;
- the number of photographs or halftones;
- the number of photos that will print all the way to the edge of the paper (bleed);
- the number of reversed type blocks (white type on a colored background);
- the manner in which you want the job to be packed and shipped; and
- the date you wish to receive the finished pieces.

*You want to stress
in your brochure
that actual repairs
should be made
by a roofing
professional.*

If you use a commercial printer, it probably won't be necessary for you to go to his or her shop. Usually, the rep will come to your office free of charge to bring samples of the shop's work, discuss the most economical way to print your project and give you a bid. You can evaluate the printer's quality by examining the samples for dust, uneven color, broken type, fuzziness and improper folding.

Paying the price

Most of the decisions we have discussed will affect the final price you can expect to pay for your brochures, making it difficult to give you any general guidelines. There are a couple of rules to keep in mind, however. One is that the more pieces you have printed, the less they will cost per piece. The other is that you will probably pay more for a union printer.

If you do decide to make the investment, you will be joining several other NRCA contractors who have found a maintenance brochure well worth the money.

Introduction sets the tone

The opening paragraph or section of your brochure should tell readers why they've been given the publication. Here's a couple of examples from NRCA members' brochures. The first is from Modern Roofing and Insulation Co., Pocatello, Idaho. It introduces Modern's maintenance program to the company's clients.

Commercial and industrial roof maintenance and repair problems are a continuing expense—they seem to persist even after a considerable amount of money has been spent to solve the problem.

Modern Roofing and Insulation Co.'s Preventive Maintenance Program (PMP) is a plan developed as a result of our experience in building and repairing roofs in the Northwest.

The maintenance brochure produced by George H. Duross, Inc., Philadelphia, Pa., takes a different tack, providing more general information about avoiding roof problems. Its introduction reflects the how-to style of the publication.

There is only one way to make intelligent decisions about roofing repair or replacement.

And that's to be informed . . . to prepare now . . . not when your roof is leaking, when your people and equipment are wet, your products ruined or your production line down.

If you wait until your roof fails, you will have little or no time to do intelligent planning . . . immediate correction of the problem becomes the overriding factor.

How can you prepare now? By asking questions. Lots of them. So that when the need arises, you will be better equipped to make intelligent decisions about roofing repair and replacement.

The write stuff

The information you choose to give your clients in the body of the brochure will depend on whether the publication is meant as your company's warranty or as a guide to taking care of roofs. Most of the information will outline the maintenance procedures and advice specific to your company's products and policies.

Regardless of the publication's specific content, however, the tone of the writing should continue to emphasize the image of your company you want to convey. There are also two topics you will probably want to include:

- preventing the crisis situation; and
- selecting a professional roofing contractor.

Although you want to stress in your brochure that actual repairs should be made by a roofing professional, there are some preventive maintenance procedures you can suggest to the reader. For instance, you might tell roof owners how to set up a roof file that includes the roof's and building's specifications, drawings and warranties as well as the name, address and phone number of the original roofing contractor and suppliers. Owners should also be told to save inspection reports, correspondence and observations made about their roofs and information about the membranes' composition, including the deck type, insulation and R-factor, membrane type, felt and bitumen type and number of plies. If owners can be convinced to keep such extensive files, both you and they will have as much information as possible to work from when it comes time to make repairs.

You might also explain in your maintenance brochure the importance of a well-kept roof log that lists everyone that has been up to the roof since its installation and the reasons for the visits. NRCA contractor member B. Jack Williams believes this is one of the most valuable pieces of advice you can give your clients. "One of the keys to roof longevity is the key to the roof hatch padlock," he says, "By knowing who's been on the roof, the owner will have some idea where the problem is located and how it was caused."

Recordkeeping isn't the only task a maintenance brochure can detail, however. It can also explain such simple maintenance projects as periodically inspecting the roof, cleaning drain bells, drains and gutters, and removing snow and leaves.

A maintenance manual can even make your job easier should leaks occur. If owners are advised to record the direction the wind is blowing as the roof leaks and how soon the leak starts after the rain begins or stops, this information will be available to your crew as they search for the leak's source.

Marketing professionalism

Information that helps prevent roof problems can be very useful, but an owner also needs to know how to select a contractor should problems occur. Providing your clients with this information will give you the perfect chance to market your own company's professionalism. By including a checklist of professional contractor characteristics in your maintenance brochure, you can help your clients determine which contractors are dependable, reputable firms and, it is hoped, steer them in your company's direction. Your brochure's checklist should advise owners to:

- Find out how many years the contractors they are considering have been in business, and select a company that has been around for 10 or more consecutive years.
- Get a client list and use it to obtain first-hand opinions of the contractors' work by asking questions such as: Did the contractor fulfill the terms of the contract? Was the work done well? Can the contractor be recommended?
- Check if the contractor is a member of the National Roofing Contractors Association. Although the Association doesn't certify contractors, it does supply members with education programs, updates on roofing technology and a forum to learn from others' experiences.

- Demand that the contractor supply a job estimate and copies of all warranties, contracts and maintenance programs, if applicable.
- Ask contractors how the project will be supervised, and select the contractor that will supply a project manager to review on-site progress at least once a day and answer the client's questions.
- Consider a contractor who can perform an energy audit.
- Visit the contractor's facilities to discover work habits.
- Select a contractor who can provide inspection and maintenance services.

Building an image

Because the look and feel of your brochure can communicate as much information as the words themselves, the publication's design must be planned as carefully as the copy was written. Several decisions you will make about your brochure will affect its design. For this reason, you and your designer must keep in mind the overall message you want your publication to communicate as you choose its format, paper, type, photographs, artwork and layout.

Your first consideration will be your publication's format—its shape, size and general style. You must choose a format that will contribute to the brochure's overall message, while staying within the limits of your budget and the talent of the person or persons producing the publication.

In order to choose the shape and size of the publication, you must decide where your clients will most likely be when they read it. A publication that is meant as a handy reference might need to be small enough to fit inside your clients' pockets. On the other hand, a publication that will be sent to your clients' offices may need to fit inside a Number 10 envelope.

On a roll

Paper should not be chosen haphazardly. Its brightness, color, texture and heft help create an overall impression of the brochure and your company. The brochure's ability to withstand constant handling will also depend on the durability of the paper used.

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Your choice of paper will directly affect your publication's bottom line as well. Paper costs can chew up 18 to 30 percent of your project's budget. And heavier paper will increase the overall weight of your publication and raise your postal costs if you plan to send your brochure through the mail. You can control paper costs somewhat by using the printer's house stock, which is usually less expensive. Buying paper in bulk can also lower its cost; you might want to use the same paper that is used in your other brochures, business cards or stationery.

Graphically speaking

Readability is an important factor to consider. Type should be sharp and clear, and printed in a color that contrasts considerably with the color of the paper. Black type on white paper or yellow paper is more readable than colored type on black paper. Your choice of paper surface will also affect readability. Heavily textured paper tends to absorb ink, making it difficult for the reader to distinguish the letters.

If you use photographs in your publication, be sure to choose clear shots that convey a message to the reader. By trimming extraneous elements out of the picture (cropping), you can shift attention to the parts of the photo you want emphasized or change the picture's shape to fit the layout.

For graphics on a tight budget, you might look into clip art—generic, camera-ready illustrations that can be cut from books and pasted onto your layout. If your designer does not already have a supply of these illustrations, or if you would like to have graphics on hand for reports, brochures, notices or in-house publications, Dynamic Graphics, Inc., 6000 N. Forest Park Drive, Peoria, Ill. 61614-3592 publishes a business, commerce and industry series with many usable drawings.

If you want custom-made illustrations for your brochure, but you don't want to spend a lot of money, try calling the art department of a nearby college or university. Aspiring artists are usually hungry for projects to add to their portfolios.

A full-color brochure can be beautiful but expensive. If your funds are limited, you may be able to print the brochure in only one or two colors. Photographs should always be printed in black. However, if your brochure is all type or type and illustrations, your choice of colors might be more flexible.

On press

The cost for typesetting and printing your brochure will be one of the project's largest expenditures. If you choose your own suppliers you'll probably spend less than if your designer contracts with them and marks up the price.

Computers can help lower your typesetting costs. Copy created with a word processing program and saved on a disk or some other magnetic medium can be entered directly into the typesetting machinery. If you telecommunicate your copy to the typesetter or give it to him on a disk, he won't have to capture the keystrokes again, saving him time and you money.

Once the copy is typeset it can be pasted onto boards or mechanicals and sent to the printer. There are two types of printers to choose from, instant printers and commercial printers. Your choice will depend on how well and how quickly you want the publication printed.

Most towns have instant printers. They are often inexpensive, fast and good for simple brochures. They can often complete jobs in one day or overnight. Usually the customer is responsible for delivering the boards and picking up the finished pieces. Quick printers also keep a supply of paper on hand. They can special order paper for you, but it's cheaper to use what they have in stock.

Although instant printers can produce a piece quickly and cheaply, the quality often suffers. Most instant printers use plastic printing plates, which can make your finished brochure look as if it was printed with a potato. For important jobs, it might be worth spending a little extra money for a printer who uses metal plates.

If you are considering an instant printer, show him or her the job you want printed along with a printed piece that can serve as a sample of the quality you're looking for. A reputable printer will let you know if the equipment can do the job.

Commercial printers usually produce a higher-quality product. Quite often they will have equipment available to handle your typesetting and paste-up as well. A commercial printer won't get your printed brochures back as quickly as an instant printer, however. Commercial printers usually need 10 working days to complete a job.