

BUSINESS

# The 30-second first impression

Give your business a creative edge



Linda Graceffo loves helping people give their promotional material a creative, professional look.

PHOTO BY KAREN MCKINNON

**“**The first 30 seconds are critical for anyone in business... that’s when lasting first impressions are made.”

You’ve barely finished reading that and one more sentence when the text disappears from the Sparkling Graphics & Design website. That’s just how fast 30 seconds is – and how much time a business person has to make that vital first impression.

OK, so you’re dressed and groomed appropriately but what else can you do to persuade someone to send their business your way? A professional and original business card clearly states “this person is intriguing and knows what they’re doing.”

“When a business is starting out, especially if it is a self-employed person, they often use homemade busi-

ness cards,” says Linda Graceffo of Sparkling Graphics & Design. “They may present themselves very well but when they go to shake someone’s hand and offer a business card with a perforated edge, it does reflect on their business. It really can make a difference to have a professionally designed and printed business card.”

To prove her point, Graceffo has samples in her office of before and after cards. The difference is amazing, even if she has simply reworked the information that was on the original business card.

As a way to get to know her clients, Graceffo offers a free 30-minute consultation. Then, if it’s a business card they’re after, she’ll work up two or three concepts for them to go over. “I don’t use any templates,” she

says. “All work is original and creative. Once we have something to work with, then the client and I pull it apart and put it back together again until we have exactly what they want.”

According to Graceffo, obtaining a first – or new – business card is also a good time to consider a logo and branding. “Branding is a formal way to market a theme,” Graceffo explains. “It can involve a combination of a logo, coloured text, a style of text or graphics. The best logos, like Nike’s tick mark, are simple and easy to remember.”

“Although not every business will use a logo or branding, going that route does pull the whole business look together.” *Continued on page 20*  
Graceffo con-

*Continued from page 19* tinues. “And once a logo and brand are selected, they should be put on everything including letterhead, website, even the business vehicle.”

While branding for a business like Starbucks can cost big bucks, Graceffo states that even a small business can make use of the concept without spending a fortune. “It’s a form of recognition,” she says. “And studies show that over time people will recognize a logo or brand and begin to feel comfortable with it. And that means there’s a good chance they will use your services as they will feel like they already know you.”

Graceffo launched Sparkling Graphics & Design the fall of 2003 and specializes in custom graphic design for print and web. She works on a variety of promotional material such as business and rack cards, catalogues, posters and logos, as well as designing and maintaining websites.

She also creates CD covers, Christmas cards, invitations and calendars. For several years she has designed memory and year books for schools and has designed book covers. She especially enjoys restoring old photographs or combining photographs to create collages or special memory books for people and their families.

And bimonthly she publishes *The Scoop on Pets*, an informative and sometimes humorous newsletter for pet lovers

in the Campbell River and the Comox Valley areas.

“I really enjoy creating a finished product,” Graceffo says. “It’s very satisfying.”

She admits that she went through numerous professions before finding her niche. “I started out as a hairdresser, then married into a commercial fishing job,” she says. “Later I took an administrative office management course and worked in administration for a couple of years. Eventually I began to think about starting my own business.”

Initially, Graceffo worked out of her home. “The Comox Valley Home Based Business Association (CVHBB) was really helpful,” she notes. “There is a lot of support and information there.” Although now only an associate member, Graceffo was honoured to receive the CVHBB Merit Award in 2008.

A little over two years ago Graceffo moved Sparkling Graphics & Design to downtown Courtenay. “People tend to take you a little more seriously if you have a ‘real’ office,” she notes. “And it is nice to have that distinction between home and work.”

“I love the freedom of being self-employed,” she adds. “I work on several projects at a time so have to be organized but I love helping people achieve the business look they want. Every project is different and that’s what makes my job so interesting.”



Some samples of work done by Sparkling Graphics & Design.

PHOTO BY KAREN MCKINNON