The Benefits of Business Cards

Carolyn Trietsch recently defended her PhD in Entomology at Penn State. You can check out her research at the Frost Museum at Penn State, view her website, or follow her on Twitter, @carolyntrietsch.

Caption: Some of the business cards I've printed to help communicate my research. Try experimenting with different pictures, card sizes and styles, to see what works best for you! Photo by Carolyn Trietsch.

Welcome to a new semester! Classes are getting started, the smell of fresh school supplies is in the air... and conference season is already getting ready to rear its ugly head. As you start preparing for these upcoming professional meetings, consider printing out some business cards for yourself.

Every graduate student should have business cards.

Let me repeat that: EVERY GRADUATE STUDENT SHOULD HAVE BUSINESS CARDS.

"But I don't have results yet!" I can hear you say. "And I'm just a student! I'm not important/adult enough to have business cards!"

Here's the truth: you are definitely important enough. You're not just a student, you're a researcher (and probably a teaching assistant as well). Even if you don't have results yet, you're going to have results in the future that people will need to hear about. And that's where business cards can help.

Business cards are great for <u>networking</u>, which you need to do to continue on your career path. But they aren't just for job-hunting; you can use them to forge new collaborations with other scientists or, by adding pictures, use them as a visual aid for communicating your research.

All business cards should have the same essential information (i.e. your name and contact information), but that doesn't mean that they should all look the same. Here are some ways to take your business cards to the next level.

Add Pictures

Pictures are great tools for communicating your research. I learned the value of this early on in my research career as an insect taxonomist studying Megaspilidae, a group of wasps that isn't well known, even among wasp researchers. I wanted to find a way to both communicate my research and raise awareness of this little-known group of wasps. Adding a picture of my wasps to the back of my business cards helped me accomplish both of these goals. Showing people what the wasps looked like helped them learn how to identify them, and it also helped people remember me. And by adding pictures that I took using different specimen imaging techniques, including confocal laser scanning microscopy, it helped demonstrate my skills to potential future employers.

Add QR Codes

Maybe you don't have pictures of your research, or maybe you have something that doesn't fit on your business card — consider adding a QR code instead. You can set up a QR code for almost anything, so when someone scans it with their phone, they can immediately see your website, resume, or even get a direct link to one of your publications. This is also a great option to see important figures or video files from your work.

Add your presentation time and location.

If you're presenting a poster or giving a talk at a conference, consider adding this information to your business cards. This doesn't mean you have to print out new business cards for every conference — just make some stickers or labels with the time and place of your presentation. Then, your business cards can double as invitations to get people to hear about your research.

Be creative.

You want a business card that will help people remember you, so try new things to help you stand out. If you're studying protein folding, why not add some origami folds to your business card? Or if you're studying literature, why not make your business cards into book marks?

A unique business card is a great way to start a conversation — and isn't that what networking all about?

Do you have any suggestions for making your business cards stand out? What business cards have stood out to you? Tell us below in the comments!