



Creating Successful Annual Reports

The annual report is the ultimate reflection of your company's brand, in printed form. It should encapsulate your company's brand essence, personality, culture and strategy. It has a number of specific audiences but also can act as a flagship piece of communication—a marketing piece lasting and working for a whole year. The best reports also reflect the confidence a company has about revealing itself to the reader.

The statutory information, namely the performance figures, appears in every annual. Beyond that, your annuals need to tell a story—a compelling argument as to why a shareholder should retain their shares or an investor should put their money into your company. It also needs to clearly express your company's attitude to its future business potential, its take and actions on corporate and social responsibilities issues, and the part its staff plays in the company's performance.

In order to tell this story, your report needs a concept—a core thought or narrative. The strength of the words, images and graphics used will define how effectively that narrative comes across, and ultimately how memorable it will be to the reader. The story needs to start on the cover, to compel readers to open the book, and follow through the book with pace and intelligence. Your report also needs a clear system to help the reader navigate through the book and highlight the information they want, be it the financial highlights or the Chairman's statement.

Audiences

Your annual report's audiences are wide and varied. Shareholders may be private investors with a handful of shares or major institutions who own half the company. In some cases a two-book approach can deal with this—creating a short, Summary Financial Statement with a simplified message and basic financials, along with a full Annual Report document for the institutions. This can be very cost effective, as you print appropriate numbers of copies for each audience.

Other audiences include analysts, customers, staff (how well does the report reflect their take on the business they work for?) and potential employees, for whom the report can serve as a powerful recruitment tool. Governments and environmentalists, as well as a whole list of other interested parties, will also scrutinize your report.

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The Process

Annual reports are a totally collaborative experience. Each person on the team needs to contribute if an effective report is to be delivered within the timeframes. A typical project team may well consist of people from the following areas: company executive, corporate communications, finance and investor relations. Each area must take responsibility for supplying chunks of information that will go into the report and, as an overall team, they will need to input and help guide the creation of the report. From Kaldor's side, our team will consist of: an account director, responsible for the overall running and direction of the book; a creative director, lead designer and copywriter, collectively responsible for the generation and application of themes, ideas, content and the look of the report; and a project manager, responsible for the day to day running of the job. Behind the scenes, Kaldor will have a production manager responsible for handling the turnarounds of content, getting the book ready for print, and checking the book on-press after signoff. In general, the process follows the following pattern: briefing session, research, audit of previous reports, analysis of competitors' reports, creation of initial concepts, generation of paginations, presentation of visuals and written content, production of photography and/or illustration, creation of templates for financial pages for typesetting, final presentation, dropping in final figures, sign off procedure, release of artwork, signoff of printer proofs, printing, and finally delivery.

The Final Product

Far more than a public statement of financial matters, your annual report provides the rare opportunity to tell your company's full story, for the benefit of your shareholders, current and potential employees, and of course customers. Done right, it will be your most effective communication, marketing, advertising and recruitment tool.