

# STANDARDS FOR LAYOUT AND PRESENTATION OF IDEAS IN TRADE CATALOGUES: SOME GUIDE LINES

*P Prataplingam*

Madura Coats Ltd  
Madurai-625001

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 11 Importance of Trade Catalogues

Trade catalogues form an important source of industrial information. They often contain information about products and processes which may not even be found in books and periodicals. Besides, some brochures contain findings of research and experience, and long bibliographies of references to technical literature. Therefore, the importance of the trade catalogue and other trade literature is widely acknowledged and realized in industry.

### 12 Formidable Problem in Organizing the Collection

To organise the collection of trade literature, which often comes in enormous variety of size and forms of content, is a formidable problem. This is mainly due to the fact that such literature is produced for publicity and advertisement purposes and variation in shape, size and content are resorted to as publicity gimmicks. (1)

### 13 Catalogues at Finger-tips

It is observed that generally for any product line, designers and buyers prefer one catalogue over another, which they keep at their finger tips for ready reference. The manufacturer who provides a preferred catalogue has an edge over his competitors, for he is the first to have his product considered. This is just because of recognising the fact that one catalogue can be preferred over another if it contains those elements that will force the user to keep it at the finger tips.

### 14 Lack of impact on intending users

Though, it is acknowledged and realised that the trade catalogues brought out by most of the manufacturers contain valuable trade and technical information, yet in most of the cases, the information is not presented in a systematic and easy-to-use manner so as to make an impact on the intending user of catalogues.

## 2 SCOPE OF THE PAPER

Therefore, in order to maximise the utilisation of the trade catalogues for fulfilling their purpose, an attempt is made in this paper to outline certain guidelines in presenting the information in respect of the contents and layout of trade catalogues of products and processes in a systematic and easy-to-use manner.

## 3 ATTRIBUTES OF A HELPFUL CATALOGUE

Besides, various elements in a catalogue, a few general attributes of a helpful catalogue may be stated as: it should be informative; complete, accurate and easy to use. These attributes are dealt in some details below:

### 31 Informative

To be informative, the catalogue should:

1) convey the utility of the product in such a way that the information given there should act as a prelude to further enquiries/discussion, paving way for liaison. If it fails, the further enquiries will not be received, but if it succeeds, the customer will want to study the subject in more detail. Thus,

if the information provided stimulates the desire for more information then its objective is achieved;

2) provide relevant information gathered from various sources and out of practical experience, so as to relieve the designer/user from the time-consuming and laborious calculations in order to select and apply a product/process to suit his requirement. Further, the inclusion of data and experience on the product function and maintenance gathered during the design and development period will be of much significance to the user of the product;

3) be specific in explanations rather than 'general', i.e. vague abstractions have to be solidified into concrete examples. For example, while describing the uses of a product it is better to list specific applications or areas of applications, instead of saying "It is a tool of 101 users"; similarly, it is better to state that "its rated production capacity is 200 pieces per hour" instead of saying "its fast";

4) provide special features of the product, prominently; and lastly;

5) include information useful for placing the 'order', so that there will be minimum time lag at the Manufacturer's end in executing the same.

### 32 Complete coverage

As far as possible, the above mentioned information should be given in such a way that it is complete. Many a potential customer may not take initiative to write to the manufacturers for further details, unless the catalogue gives fairly complete information which satisfactorily reveals their product's relevancy to them. Out of experience, sales engineers know the kind of information a potential customer needs and the questions the majority of them are likely to ask about their products. Efforts should be taken to answer these questions fully.

### 33 Accurate

Whatever information is provided it should be accurate. Inaccurate data, specifications, drawings, charts, tables and nomograms will not only spoil the image of the manufacturer (irrespective of the quality of the product), but will also cause heavy losses to the customers who rely on this information and use it.

### 34 Easy to use

Of all the above attributes, this attribute viz. 'easy to use' is most important and significant; for whatever required information (collected and verified after putting lot of efforts) is given completely, accurately, the catalogue's usefulness is impaired if the user has "hard time finding his way around in it". Therefore, the matter should be presented in

an organised and uniform way. For example, related products should not be scattered into different sections, but must be properly grouped, frequently consulted data should be similarly located on the pages for each products, and so on.

The trade catalogues are generally intended to be used by persons in industry, who are generally very busy. Besides, the user's time in other walks of life is also valuable, and the manufacturer cannot demand their continued attention. Because of this "time" factor, the manufacturer has to take all the trouble, so that the information presented should be of 'use' for them. Consequently, he has to use "visual aids" and 'quick' reference aids'. One cannot compress 'words' beyond certain limit without sacrificing the 'comprehension' and 'interest' of the reader, but a judicious use of tables; functional illustrations, figures etc. can communicate the same information not only faster but also much more effectively.

Also, the matter should be presented in a way most useful for organising and updating their 'collection' at the customer's end.

## 4 ELEMENTS OF A CATALOGUE AND OTHER ATTRIBUTES

The main elements of a catalogue are:

- 1 Format
  - 11 Fomat cover
  - 12 Inside front cover
  - 13 Contents page
  - 14 Inside back cover
  - 15 Back cover
- 2 Design
- 3 Words
- 4 Illustrations
- 5 Tables, charts and nomograms etc.

Besides the above main elements and the attributes mentioned in section 3, the essential attribute, however, is the planning of the catalogue which includes co-ordinating and incorporating the information keeping in view the attributes mentioned earlier. (Sec 3)

In addition to the 'nature of information' need to be produce this paper confines itself only to category 1) above i.e. Format. Even in 'format' the size of paper, type faces, printing etc. are excluded, laying emphasis on the various sections of the catalogue and the type of information to be provided thereunder, for maximum utilisation of the catalogue.

## 5 TYPE AND PLACE OF INFORMATION

## 51 Front cover

Leaving freedom for the artist or designer of the catalogue for depicting his ideas creatively, the following factors or items of information to be incorporated may be considered.

## 511 Catalogue No. /Publication No.

Usually every manufacturer will be assigning and printing some number on his catalogue which forms a sort of serial number of his publication programme. This number is found at different places in the catalogues issued by different manufacturers; such as on front page, right hand corner; back of the front page (below or above); on any part of the contents page; back cover; inside back cover etc. Moreover, the size of the 'Letters' is small and many times it is not prominently printed. Consequently, considerable time is wasted by the user in locating this number on the catalogue.

The importance of 'catalogue number' should not be ignored, for it is generally required to

1) Arrange the catalogue in sequence, within the catalogue file of the same manufacture and within catalogues of other manufacturers at the customer's end.

2) File the "supplements" issued, if any, from time to time.

3) Replace the old catalogue when it is superseded by a new catalogue, thus helping in distribution and maintenance.

4) Trace it in the catalogue collection, when approached from catalogue number of the manufacturers.

5) Trace the catalogue number in the "Surrogate Finding System" of the user's Library/Information system.

6) Enter the catalogue number in issue records if they are put into circulation at the users end.

In view of the above, it is recommended that the catalogue number be printed on the top right hand corner of the front cover so that one can easily locate that number always by looking at a particular place which is fixed for all the catalogues, irrespective of the organisation publishing it. This is just like printing the copy right year on the verso of title page.

## 512 Date of publication

It is found that catalogues seldom carry a date. Sometimes the date can be ascertained from the

printers' mark (or in its absence at least the date of acquisition, if recorded by the user). In the absence of date/year, a collection of trade literature becomes chaotic after a time. Therefore, it is useful if the date/month and year of publication is given just below the 'Catalogue Number' in types than those of the catalogue number.

## 513 Language Symbol

Generally, when catalogues are printed in different languages for overseas markets, obviously they will have the same catalogue number as the one that is in original language. In order to distinguish them immediately by seeing the number it is essential that 'language' indication be provided. For this purpose, some symbol should be attached either to the catalogue number or to the date of publication. It is preferable, if it is suffixed to the Catalogue Number e.g. 213E where "E" indicates English Language.

## 514 Specific space for the Reference Number of user

When the trade catalogues are sent to the potential users, it is expected that they will file them in their collection. In case they want to allot some reference number of their own filing system, a specific place should be earmarked on the front cover. And it is preferable if it is exactly below the printed catalogue number, demarcated by a small box.

## 515 Names of products

Whatever may be the design of the front cover, the index/names of the principal products should be concentrated at one place on the front cover as far as possible. This is in addition to the details to be given in the contents page. If the catalogue is describing only a single product, this problem does not arise.

## 516 Brand names, trade marks and names of the Manufacturers

Excepting some well-known products, which have a longstanding reputation in the market, it is difficult to distinguish between the brand names and trade names for new products just by seeing the catalogue. Failure to distinguish this will bring the user into conflict with the name of the manufacturer, while recalling the catalogue. Also, the personnel who process and maintain records may find it difficult to distinguish; hence, may enter in the records one for the other, creating chaos. Therefore, proper means should be adopted while designing and printing the catalogue to distinguish the name of the manufacturer from that of the brand name, easily and quickly.

## 52 Inside front cover

As soon as a user opens a catalogue, his eyes will first fall on the inside front cover. To capture his attention for a while the general history and the background of the manufacturer may be given here very briefly. In case the background is not given or not preferred, then an index or 'contents' of the catalogue should be given (See also section: 53).

## 53 Contents page/Index

If the catalogue is long enough (say over 50 pages) have sufficient information warranting a separate contents/Index page, then a separate page may be allocated for contents immediately after the 'front cover', and an index at the end of the catalogue. On the other hand, if the catalogue is short, the contents page should serve as a detailed index to the products, giving the 'capacities' of the products as well.

## 54 Inside back cover

Inside back cover should give complete names and addresses of the agents with Telex/Teleprinter and cable addresses with information on "How to order", including terms and conditions of supply; and any special note such as discount, so that time and money is saved on the part of the customer who can immediately seek clarifications for special problems, after browsing through the catalogue. In order to establish liaison between the manufacturers and the user, the addresses of the agents/representatives are essential.

## 55 Back cover

Generally, the back cover can be left blank or some photograph of the products/firms be given. In case the terms and conditions of manufacturers occupy the whole of the inside back cover, as stated in section 54, then the names and addresses, including cable/telex of the principal manufacturer and its various agents etc. should be mentioned exclusively on the back cover. In the case of small catalogues where description of the products continues even on to the inside back cover, the matter to be given in inside back cover should be shifted to back cover. Out of several products/processes of the manufacturer, if the catalogue is produced for only one product, then the back cover should briefly give the information about other products/processes/services of the production programme/organisation. The practice of some manufacturers of giving the overall sizes and capacities of the products in a tabular form on the back cover can also be emulated.

## 56 General Format

## 561 Loose leaf/Vs bound catalogue

Before planning for the production of a catalogue a decision should be taken whether:

1) permanent or loose-leaf binding is preferable for the entire product range, or

2) a number of separate product bulletins would be better than one large catalogue.

This decision will help in investing money economically in the production of the catalogue.

## 562 Quick Reference Aids

The provision of "thumbs", "index tabs" with colour code and detailed indices will be an asset as it saves time while referring. For example, for easier and quicker reference the main sections of the 'Expansion Joints catalogues (No. 456E of M/s. Metallschlauch Fabrik, Germany) are printed on paper of different colours as follows:

White: General subjects and information concerning three types of movement as well as special design.

Yellow: Axial absorption of movement.

Red: Lateral absorption of movement.

Blue: Angular absorption of movement.

Grey: Appendix with material tables, extracts from standards and other data sheets and conversion factors.

## 563 Margin for punching holes

If the catalogue is in the form of multi-folder, consisting of one or more sheets with many folds, then care should be taken to leave sufficient margin while printing, so that when complete folder is folded, required space should be left along with the margin for punching holes for filing.

## 564 Punched Holes

Some catalogues have ready made punched holes, having 2, 4 or 6 punches for the purpose of filing. This practice of un-even number of punched holes calls for usage of file folders/flat files/ring binders having variety of rings/fasteners and sizes. Such a practice is to be discouraged as it is going to create a filing problem. If at all they are to be punched at manufacturer's end, they should possess only two punches/holes and their size and distance should be according to the specifications of the standard punching machines available in the market. Otherwise, the publisher/distributor of the catalogues should provide a special binder along with the

catalogues which will suit the punching made on the catalogue. However, if standard punches are made at the manufacturer's end, it will certainly help the customers in filing them immediately and thereby keeping the file upto-date.

#### 6 DISTRIBUTION AND MAINTENANCE

Having spent large sums of money on producing a catalogue, if no proper distribution is made, it will become a liability instead of an asset. Maintaining a mailing list for distribution is good practice, but it has to be updated at least once in two years. Care should be taken regarding some customers/users, especially the engineers or decision makers who have the habit of procuring any catalogue or literature available free of charge, irrespective of its usefulness to them. In some cases where the catalogues are properly filed and can be retrieved at a latter date, and which have access to all those who need in that organisation, one or more copies can be sent to such organisations though there is no direct use to them immediately.

Distribution of the catalogues is not the end in itself. The manufacturers should see that the customers/potential users catalogues are kept upto-date. This obligation is more so, when the catalogues are in a looseleaf form. At times the customers may not sometimes, be able to keep track and file these additions and revisions properly. Therefore, serious thought should be given as mentioned before in deciding a 'loose leaf' form or 'bound' one.

After some experience in the distribution of catalogues, the suppliers must decide whether to discontinue the 'loose leaf' form or to break up a big catalogue into separate sections, whichever is suitable.

#### 7 FEED BACK

In spite of careful planning and good printing, a catalogue may not be perfect. Since salesmen use catalogues constantly and come directly in contact with the customers and the other users of the catalogue, they can evaluate the use of the catalogue and can seek suggestions for improving the catalogue.

In order to make the next edition better, there should be a feed back of these suggestions for improving, to the agency or authority responsible for bringing out the next edition, besides incorporating any corrections, revisions subsequent to the revised production programme of the company.

#### 8 AGENCY FOR PRODUCING AND UPDATING THE CATALOGUES

The sales manager in collaboration with the designer of the product, and the advertising man should be entrusted with the production and updating of the catalogues. This agency should comply with the guidelines and other factors mentioned in the preceeding sections in bringing on the trade catalogues for the products/processes/services of their manufacturers/enterprises.

#### References

- [1] PRATAP LINGAM, P: Trade and technical literature: A system for document finding. (Paper presented at the Ninth IASLIC Conference, 1969).