

# Turn Your Desk Into an Ad for Yourself

You have a precious tract of real estate right before you each and every day. It can do more than support your computer, your stapler and your Cup-a-Soup. Put it to work by adding some components that people identify with success and credibility—and deleting some others.



**1. THE BEST TECH THAT MONEY CAN BUY:** We live in a digital world, and displaying a computer capable of dealing with anything that's thrown your way tells people you're tech-savvy and you insist on staying that way while others fall a little behind. A top-of-the-line computer also hints at a heightened level of creativity, while a superior laptop says, "I'm ready to take this show anywhere on a moment's notice."

**2. A PHOTO OF YOU IN ACTION:** Show visitors the side of you they don't quite know. The main photo on your desk should make them think, "Wow, I misjudged this person!" Whatever your passion in life is outside of work, that's what they should see. Stereotypical shots of spouses and kids get forgotten because they're so familiar; consider grabbing some attention. Authentic action shots beat boring poses every time.

**3. PENS THAT MEAN BUSINESS:** When you go so far as insisting on using writing tools that are a cut above the ordinary, it sends a message that you're probably a quality-first leader in many other aspects of your life.

**4. BUSINESS CARDS:** Go ahead and tuck them out of the way; you want people to know you have them, not that you expect they'll take one. The key here is that they should be custom-made, not the freebies your company passed out two years ago. Avoid trendy designs and go for a classic look with a single subtle twist of your choice.

**5. ONE WELL-CHOSEN PILE:** You get a maximum of one intimidating-looking pile of papers on your desk. Two suggests you're falling behind on things; none at all makes people question if you really have your hands in anything tangible.

**6. DESK LAMP:** Ugly overhead fluorescents remain a symbol of corporate or industrial drudgery. Creating your own lighting scheme, even using only a single desk lamp, greatly improves the ambiance of your office. (Plus, the sight of someone sitting in the dark lit only by that one lamp embodies the phrase "burning the midnight oil" no matter what time of evening it actually is.)

**7. A BOOK:** "Yes, I read, and am always reading!" is what you want them to think. But a trendy business title everyone knows from magazine covers doesn't carry as much weight as something intriguing and different on almost any nonfiction topic, from the history of the Roman Empire to the psychology of mice. Show them you're into expanding your knowledge rather than just narrowing it to what your company does.

### **NOT SO WELCOME:**

**8. TOOLS OF WORKPLACE ADMINISTRIVIA:** The more of these you have on display, the more people may think you're a tape-dispensing, paper-cutting, glue-sticking worker bee, not a leader.

**9. EVIDENCE OF CALORIC NEEDS:** Bad enough you're eating at your desk and not with colleagues (the hallmark of a hard worker but not necessarily a leader). Leaving the remnants around just isn't classy.

**10. AWARDS:** The problem with awards is that they outstay their welcome, and unless you're constantly winning more, it can make it seem like you're leaning on bygone glories.

**11. CALENDARS:** It's 2017 and your calendar is in your computer and on your phone because of item #1, right? Right?

**12. WHIMSY:** Silly little things that hint at a sense of humor are cute only for a very short time. The goal of developing a leadership image is not to express that you're fun; it's to express that you're worth following.

**13. A LOCKING DRAWER:** The sight of someone unlocking a drawer shouts paranoia and makes people wonder, "What secret stuff is *in* there, anyway...?"