



Give Your Pages A Design Makeover

Next time you have your company's marketing material in your hand, look at it as if you are seeing it for the first time. Is the design appealing? Does the message come through clearly? Are the colors pleasing and up-to-date? If you feel there is some room for improvement, then your material may be a good candidate for a design makeover.

When you understand the basics of electronic page layout and design, you will be able to analyze your current printed material and determine where improvement is needed. You will be able to tackle design problems with more insight. And since the success or failure of a page is heavily influenced by how well information is presented and organized, you may find that a relatively slight redesign will produce dramatic results.

Four Elements of Page Design and Layout

The best design begins with a plan that takes into account the basic elements of page layout: the headline or banner that establishes the purpose of the page; hierarchy that visually ranks the copy in order of importance; anchoring elements that need to be included but have secondary importance; and reader eye flow that describes how the reader's eye moves across the page.

When encountering a new page, the reader's natural eye movement is to begin at the upper left quadrant of the page, then move diagonally to the bottom right quadrant. However, this natural movement can be disrupted by things like dark areas (created by

heavy type or graphic elements), white areas (created by large amounts of white space) or competition between design elements of seemingly equal importance. The challenge of good design is either to cooperate with natural eye flow or to give clear signals to guide the eye around the page.

One clear signal is an attention-grabbing element – bold display type or a photograph or graphic – that commands the eye to move to the desired location and begin reading. This location typically indicates where the most important information can be found. After the reader completes this, it should be evident where to go next, either because of another clear signal, or because the next most important information falls within the natural eye flow.

Anchoring elements, because they have secondary importance, should be placed out of the way of natural eye flow but arranged to attract the eye after the primary information has been read. If the anchoring elements are part of a regular, recurring publication such as a newsletter, they should appear in the same location in each issue.

For many page layouts, the headline serves a dual purpose of orienting the reader to the purpose of the page and indicating the most important editorial copy. However, when designing a newsletter, the banner or masthead needs to establish the identity of the publication without overwhelming the rest of the page. The reader's eye should light on the ban-

ner or masthead, then move smoothly to the most important story on the page.

Planning the Design

To begin redesigning the page, disassemble it into its four basic elements, then analyze each element to see if it is up to its assigned task. Does the headline or banner establish the purpose of the page? If it is a headline, is it sufficiently bold to attract the eye and tell the reader where to begin reading? If it is a banner or masthead, does it identify the publication without competing with the lead story?

Next isolate the most important editorial copy. Determine whether it will fit comfortably on the page or if it needs to be continued. Analyze the photograph or graphic that accompanies it. Is it tied to the editorial copy in a way that creates interest or helps comprehension? If not, find something else that does.

Look at the anchoring elements. If they compete too vigorously with the most important editorial copy, determine how they can be changed – perhaps by being isolated inside a box, by being reduced in size or changing the typeface to a lighter weight.

Assembling the Elements

An effective, pleasing design has an underlying organization that is very satisfying to the reader. One of the best ways to achieve this organization is to use a design grid as the basis for the page layout.

Think of the grid as a framework to which the design elements are affixed. A grid may be a network of uniformly spaced horizontal and vertical lines to produce square modules; it may be a typographic grid that defines margins, columns and the principal spaces of the design; or it may be as simple as the guides in page makeup software programs. Its utility when redesigning a page comes from the fact that it keeps all the elements properly aligned.

Start placing elements on the grid, beginning with what you have decided is the focal point of the page. To establish hierarchy for the reader, be sure to incorporate strong contrast into this placement – a bold headline contrasting with the type for the body copy; an oversized graphic; or a photograph cropped to draw the eye.

Next, gather the rest of the information into logical groups and determine whether the groups are related or unrelated. Indicate the relationships with proximity; that is, place related groups close to each other and unrelated groups farther away.

As you arrange the elements, use the grid to create and maintain alignment. A strong line, such as the edge of a photograph, can establish a vertical or horizontal orientation for other elements (body copy, headlines or graphics).

Finally, examine the layout to see if there are any consistent design elements – things that recur in the design. A bold font, a thick line (also called a rule), a series of bullets, a spatial relationship or a color are all examples of repetitions that readers will visually recognize. Repetition helps unify a design; if none exist, create some.

Analyze and Refine the Layout

The final step is to analyze the lay-

out. Look for bad hyphenation; rivers of white space running through copy; trapped white space; heavy black areas; widows and orphans; sub-optimal leading between paragraphs; missing jump lines; too many rules; etc. Some techniques for locating these things is to squint so the words are slightly blurred, or hold the layout up to a mirror.

Ask Us To Critique

Because we know you want the best possible design and layout, we will be happy to look at your preliminary layout and make suggestions if necessary. Call <here insert the name of your CSRs> at <here insert your shop's phone number> and tell us when to expect your file. Good design does not come easily. It is a result of studying good design, understanding how to analyze design problems, knowing who the design must appeal to, applying simple design principles, developing a sensitivity to good design, and lots of trial and error.

Helpful Vocabulary Words:

Black space: the graphics, photographs and type in a layout.

Design grid: a drawn pattern of lines and coordinates used as a framework for a page layout.

Focal point: the center of interest in a page layout.

Jump line: a line of type indicating that editorial copy is being continued to another location. A jump line may be worded continued to or continued from.

Leading: in composition, the spacing between lines of type measured in points.

Masthead: the block of information that defines a publication; posts legal information; identifies the publisher and key contributors; and provides contact information.

Rule: a line used for borders, boxes and other typographic effects. Specified in a range of thickness called weights, measured in points.

Run-around: in composition, type set to fit around a picture or design element.

White space: in design, the absence of type, photographs or graphic elements. Trapped white space is white space appearing within lines of type, usually created by justifying type on a short line length.

Widow: in composition, a single word or part of a word on a line by itself, ending a paragraph, or starting a page.