

Publication Design for the Layman

You don't have to be a graphic designer or trained artist to know what looks good—what works and what doesn't work. Effective publications can be produced using some very basic guidelines.

There's no secret to creating interesting and exciting publications. There is however specific guidelines for helping you to effectively plan, design, and develop professional-looking documents.

You don't have to be a graphic designer to know what works and what doesn't work. Effective publications are produced using very basic guidelines — ones that designers use to create those eye-catching documents. Use the five tools in this article to help you successfully plan and design your next publication:

Understand the purpose of your piece.

Good marketers spend a lot of time targeting and researching, to ensure that the right message is sent to the right audience. This same technique applies when designing a publication. Three important factors will dictate the preliminary design of your piece:

- ✓ **Who is your audience?**
- ✓ **What is your message?**
- ✓ **How are you going to distribute the information?**

Once you have thoroughly answered these three questions, you are ready for the next step.

Learn from what already works.

Many of the ideas that catch your eye are from concepts that have already been used—ones that have a successful track record. Look at the work of others who have had the type of response you are looking for. Make note of what you like about their creation. Also challenge yourself by identifying things that you would change or improve. Your goal with this step is to identify and develop your ideas.

Organize and plan your publication.

Organizing and planning are fundamental life skills. Both can be applied here when designing your documents. You already know your audience, you've decided on the message to send, and how you want to get the final document to your readers. Now your task is to organize

your thoughts and plan the presentation of those thoughts. The best tools for this are pencil and paper. Jot down your thoughts on paper and you will begin to see your ideas take form. Use this step to define a visual draft of your final publication.

Be consistent.

Consistency is a key element to the success of publication design. I realize it is very tempting to use different fonts, graphics, and layouts. However, the average reader looks for consistency and is often disgruntled by the lack of it. Consistency is what keeps your readers moving steadily through a document. Too many design elements or changes in design will tire the eyes of your audience, and they will lose interest.

Use restraint.

With the availability of clipart, photographs, and illustrations—from software companies and the Internet—it can be hard to use restraint when designing your publications. But you must. The primary purpose of adding images and cool fonts to a publication is to enhance and organize the content so that it is pleasing to the eye of the reader.

The concept of designing eye-catching documents is not all about the color you use or the font that you choose, but rather how effectively you were able to:

- ✓ **Understand the purpose of the publication.**
- ✓ **Learn from what already works.**
- ✓ **Organize and plan your thoughts.**
- ✓ **Be consistent.**
- ✓ **Use restraint.**



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About the author

Donna M. Murphy is an editorial specialist, a veteran writer and a published author who has written, edited, and designed extensive collateral and key solutions products for print and the web. Training manuals, operating procedures, business documents and content quality assurance encompass a large portion of her assignments. Donna is the creative force behind Summit Publication Design, LLC, and has specialized in content organization, quality assurance and publication design since 1997. Visit Donna's website at <http://www.summitpubdesign.com> for information on her comprehensive services, helpful resources, more articles like this one, and strategies to help you improve the quality and effectiveness of your publications.

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