TIPS: Designing Engaging Newsletters

Design is more than eye candy, "beautification," or making something "look good." Visual communication (design) should be tied to your overall marketing strategy, which will provide a framework for building your newsletter.

- Make sure that your newsletter, be it in print or online, is consistent with your other communications. That said, many nonprofits use their newsletters to upgrade their look and feel of their communications. In this instance, the other communications and marketing materials then follow suit.

- Consider your audience and purpose in the editorial content development.

- Before you start designing a newsletter, sketch out on paper or the computer, using thumbnails of each page to generate layout ideas. Sketch the placement of text, photos, and graphics to see how they might "fit" on a double-page spread and "flow" throughout the entire newsletter.

- When laying out the page elements, consider the entire spread instead of one page at a time. This will help you determine how you want to direct readers' eyes and tell the story. In a similar way, keep a review on how each spread is composed to determine if the overall flow of the newsletter is smooth.

- Take the "Squint Test." Make sure that a simple glance at your newsletter reveals the few important pieces of information that you want to convey. By squinting, you can see the overall design and what elements standout compared to others (i.e., color, type-styles, white space, varying paragraph lengths, etc.).

Color and Contrast

- Carefully select a color palette and stick to it. Often the color palette will start with your organization's brand color scheme. You can expand the palette with colors that compliment the brand. (Just limit the number.)

- Make sure there is enough contrast between the text and the background colors.

Suggestive color theme reflecting land and water of the region.

| HTC Green | Folliage, Grass, | Sand, Grass, dried foliage | Water, Sky | Water, Sky | Foliage |

Formatting and Creating a Grid

- Identify dimensions and page orientation (vertical/portrait or horizontal/landscape format).

- Decide on the number and size of the columns and gutters (gaps between the columns). This is often described as the "grid" on the page.

- Pages with two or three columns are the most common and easiest to work with.

Use of the "Rule of Thirds"

- A common and useful column layout is using three columns across the page. This allows you to use the grid in multiple ways. Use all three columns or spread the width of two columns leaving the third column as a side bar for the page.

Use White Space

- Intentionally leave white space on the page. This will mean leaving areas for the eye to "rest" where there isn't text or imagery. Short paragraphs, margins, captions, and space at the end of articles will help with this.

- Don't crowd the text to the edges. Make room for the page numbers (folios).

- Create short paragraphs. Strive for five lines or less; provide a variety of paragraph lengths where important concepts are their own lines.

- Intriguing subtitles are important to add to help the eye move down the page.

Use of Hierarchy with Images and Text

Imagery

- Using varying size of photos and graphics can create balance in the spread. For example, try using one large photo that illustrates the overall story. Then accompany the image with one or two smaller "inset" photos to further support the story.

- If the story needs only one photo then stick with that. Adding lots of photos to a page that do not support the story only confuses the reader and can distract from the overall content.

- Additionally, refer to the "TIPS: Utilizing Photographs to Create High Impact Visual Communications" by Community Consultants and W Design to help in selecting and composing images.
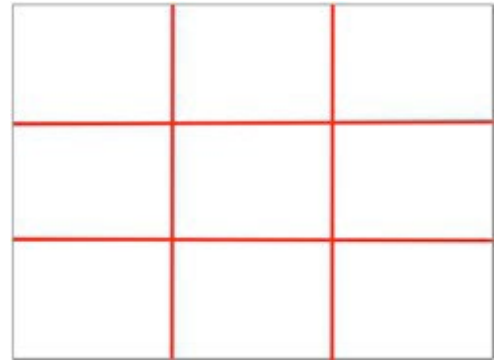
"Rule of Thirds:" three columns wide and tall

Using the "Rule of Thirds" in page layouts and photographs.
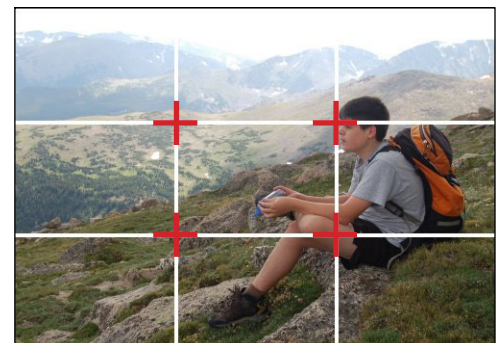
"Rule of Thirds:" highlighting key intersection points that can be used to help compose photos.

Typography

- Use titles, subtitles, subheads, body text, and captions to develop the story and make the copy skimmable.

- It is fine to use a different font family for your header and body text. At times, the introduction of an accent typeface can be used for pullout quotes or unique instances. As a whole, make sure whichever fonts you use read well together. Simpatico.

- Choose a font family with a variety of weights, such as light, book (most commonly used for body copy), medium, bold, extra bold, and various weights of italics. Stick to one font family for body copy and captions. This will give your newsletter a cohesive look.

- Limit the number of fonts used within the newsletter and keep them consistent throughout. There are a myriad of typefaces available for use. But, just because you have access to them doesn't mean they should all be used. For the strongest impact and reliability, select one or two typefaces for your publication.

- Consider your audience. For example, if your primary audience has aging eyes, you will want to factor that into your typeface selection and size. Many newsletters' body text range in font size from 10.5 to 11 points.

- Try making the headlines 2.5 times the size of your body text.

- Be careful. Fonts are like shoes or clothes. You might wear one size in one brand and a different size in another. Print out a sample of different fonts and point sizes to see how they will look on the printed page. Review other newsletters designed to reach similar auidences. Determine what kinds of typefaces will work for the look and feel that you want to acheive, and to help establish a rough word count per page.

Serif versus Sans Serif

Serif: A serif is a small line or stroke regularly attached to the end of a larger stroke in a letter or symbol within a particular font.

Sans Serif: The letter-form does not have extending features called "serifs" at the end of strokes. Sans serif fonts tend to have less line width variation than serif fonts.

- Typically serif typefaces (i.e. Times Roman, Garamond, etc.) are used for body text in print applications, as many feel that serifs help create a guiding line across a page. Sans serif typefaces (i.e. Arial, Avenir, Century Gothic, Helvetica, etc.) are used for titles, subtitles, sub-heads, and have become more common online.

- Readers are becoming more comfortable reading sans serif typefaces, based on increased online reading. Therefore, use in print is increasing too.

Avenir Regular

Avenir Medium

Avenir Demi Bold

Avenir Bold

Avenir Heavy

Garamond Roman

Gararmond SemiBold

Gararmond Bold

Note: Both of the typeface families above are set at 18 points. Notice the difference in the overall structure of each.

I am sans.
I am serif.