

TOPTIPS

GRAPHIC DESIGN DOs AND DONTs

TT08

Graphic Design is a wonderful thing. Text, colours and images can have a very powerful impact on the world around us. But when its done badly, the consequences can often have unexpected results. In this month's Top Tips, we look at what can really help to create good design and what to watch out for to avoid putting off your audience.

1. Fonts

First off - AVOID Comic Sans. That's right...avoid it (for those Comic Sans lovers out there...you know who you are)!! Look around you, notice what is popular and what others are using and try to imitate that. Alternatively stick to simple, clean and modern fonts that are easy to read. If its a slightly more funky font you're after, free font websites such as www.dafont.com are great for some alternative and interesting downloadable fonts that look good and are striking. Lastly, avoid using too many different fonts in one design.

2. Imagery

Using good images is always a fantastic way to attract attention to your audience. Often it's the image and not the text or content that catches the eye of the average passerby. So use some good, clear images that portray your message well. There are some great photo stock websites out there which offer some good images for free or at least very cheap. Two examples are www.freefoto.com for use by charities or www.istock.com, both of which have some very professional looking images.

3. Layout

When it comes to layout, its a good idea to go for the 'less is more' style. Keeping the design clutter free of too much text and too many images helps viewers to understand the message you're trying to get across more easily. Though, be sure not to miss out any important information you need to get across and don't make it too bland.

4. From a distance

If you want to capture the eye of a passerby from the other side of the street, use large images in your design. Don't be afraid to fill the whole area of your working space with a striking image that stands out. The image will often pull the viewer in to find out more information. You can overlay the text above the image without interfering with it.

5. Other examples

If you're like me, and your creative juices follow the behaviour of Alton Tower's Nemesis roller coaster, (as in up and down, not a rapid decrease in life expectancy), then sometimes you'll need a little help from others. Its always beneficial to take the time to look around you and see what's currently out there. Keeping up to date with current trends is key to successful design, but always maintain your own style by adding your personal flair to your work. Make a habit of picking up promotional material around you. Take those flyers that get handed to you in the street, order

catalogues and brochures from other organisations, and regularly surf the web looking at other designer's websites and their portfolios.

6. Target audience

This is a really important one. You can come up with an award winning design but it could still be as ineffective as that photocopied newsheet in Comic Sans printed on yellow paper.

Make sure you ask the right questions before starting out. Find out who its for, the age range, the gender and the nature of the subject. Look at what's already out there for your intended target audience and aim for that general direction in your design.

7. Colours

Spare a thought for those with a sensitive stomach. When it comes to colours, it can very easily go wrong. Many people will have very different opinions as to what looks good and what doesn't. A good way to determine what colours look good together is to do two things: 1) google in 'colour wheel'. This is a helpful guide as to what colours 'should' look good together. The colours opposite each other on the wheel are suggested to work well together, 2) again, look at other promotional material around you and see what colours other designers have used together. These two ways are pretty safe bets.

8. Photocopying

Ah..the photocopier. The administrator's best friend, and the designer's worst enemy. Much like a Big Mac, they're quick and cheap and I have no doubt that photocopiers are a brilliant invention and definitely have their uses...but not in the flyer reproduction department. Quality often says a lot and goes a long way. If you want to give a good impression and want to be taken seriously, good print is often a great way to achieve this. Local printers can reproduce your flyers/posters/letterheads in small amounts at a decent cost.

9. Amateur Volunteers

There are often two main reasons why we use amateur volunteers (or the office secretary) to come up with a design – to give them a chance to practice their design skills and...because they're cheap (or even free). Not having to pay or paying very little for a design is definitely a benefit, but that benefit may cost you in the long run. Ineffective design and poor response may be the result of going cheap. If you want to get the message across clearly and effectively, my advice would be to use a professional designer or at least somebody with a good portfolio and a few years experience in the game. They'll know what makes good, effective design and will also know what to avoid. Freelance designers are often inexpensive and very good.

10. Let go and hold back

Finally, its time to let go. There's nothing wrong with giving it your best shot at a design, but if that's not your role or gifting, hand it to someone else. Let someone with a natural talent or flair take care of it because sometimes your masterpiece can often in reality be a mess-terpiece! And for those budding designers out there, prepare to be thick-skinned. Welcome criticism with open arms and be sure to consider what they say. People can often see things that you may miss.

That's it. I hope this Top Tips helps you in creating something breath taking that will stun the world (in a good way)!