



May 2011

PRINTtips



Graphics

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Mailing

Under One Roof

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Design Tips for... Desktop Publishers

Are you a desktop publisher? If you own a small business, work for a small business or nonprofit organization, or volunteer at a community organization and use a computer to prepare files for print or the web, then you meet the definition. Desktop publishers prepare business stationery (business cards, letterheads, and envelopes), forms, sales and marketing materials, newsletters and similar documents and print them on the desktop, have them printed by a commercial printer such as TechneGraphics, distribute them in electronic format, or publish them to a web site.

The term *desktop publishing* was coined in 1985 by Paul Brainerd, founder of Aldus Corporation, to describe the capability of the computer program Aldus PageMaker. PageMaker, which was later purchased by Adobe, was a new kind of software program, distinct from a word processing machine (which was essentially a typewriter with some form of electronic editing and correction capability). PageMaker enabled one person to perform on a computer what had previously been many separate manual functions associated with getting documents ready to print: design, typesetting, and assembling all elements into a page layout.

Over time, as features were added to desktop publishing software and easier-to-use consumer versions were developed, what had once been a job (i.e., desktop publisher) evolved into a set of job skills needed for a wide range of positions: office manager, department head, administrative



or legal assistant, secretary, real estate agent, even receptionist and volunteer worker.

We, too, are part of the evolution of desktop publishing. Phototypesetting, mechanical camera work, and manual paste up gave way to desktop publishing, then evolved to a complete digital prepress process, with output to either offset press plates or our high-speed color digital printers. For us, desktop publishing means we can produce a first proof faster, make alterations quickly and easily, and significantly improve the quality of the printed image.

Success in desktop publishing

Today desktop publishing is a broad term that encompasses the three main activities of document preparation:

- *Preparing text.* The information that is being presented is written, edited, checked for spelling and grammar, and made available as a digital file.

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- *Preparing images:* Photographs and images to illustrate the text are selected or created, color corrected, manipulated, and sized.
- *Assembling elements:* The prepared text and images are placed and arranged on the page using principles of graphic design.

Success as a desktop publisher depends partly on selecting and learning to use the correct tools for the three main activities, and partly on mastering the basics of design.

Several different kinds of programs are needed for desktop publishing. They correspond to the activity areas.

- *Word processing.* A word processor is used to compose and edit text and to check spelling and grammar. Two popular word processing programs are Microsoft Word and Corel WordPerfect.
- *Graphics software.* This category includes illustration (drawing) software and image editors. Illustration programs permit great flexibility in sizing illustrations or drawings; image editing software (paint programs or photo editors) are used to manipulate photos and scans. Adobe Illustrator and CorelDRAW are examples of illustration software; Adobe Photoshop and Corel PaintShop Photo Pro are image editors.
- *Page layout.* Page layout software is another way of saying *desktop publishing software*. This software is designed to integrate text and images on the page, anchor page elements in place, create multiple page documents, and provides tools to add artistic details to the layout. Desktop publishing software permits control over type, including character spacing (*i.e.*, kerning and tracking), line spacing, control of hyphenation, and line endings. The leading page layout programs are Adobe InDesign and Quark XPress; Microsoft Publisher and Adobe PageMaker are also choices.

A word about using software programs such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Photoshop and Illustrator for page layout: while some people have developed great proficiency with these programs and use them to produce business cards, brochures and other items, we do not recommend this practice. None of these programs were designed for integrating text and images, and none offer the control over page composition that is built into an actual page layout program.

Desktop publishing is more than software

To produce truly successful designs, more is needed than proficiency with desktop publishing software. A good desktop publisher also must know about color, typography, page composition, images (photos and illustrations), prepress, printing and bindery. Here are a few tips to guide you:

Color

Black type on a light background is more legible than type reversed out of a colored background. Reversed type is 15% more difficult to read, and should be no smaller than 12 points. 75% of all readers prefer black type on light background.

Typography

When confronted with good and bad typography, a majority of readers recognize bad typography immediately. Limit the number of fonts in a document to two or three. Because serif typefaces are slightly more legible than sans serif, use a serif font for text-heavy documents. 67% of readers favor serif typefaces. The most legible typefaces for body copy are between 9 and 12 points. Lowercase letters are more legible than uppercase, and there is no difference in legibility between headlines set in all lower case and those set with initial capitals. Words set in all caps are read letter-by-letter and are approximately 15% slower to read than words set in lower case.

Page composition

Align all elements to each other or to a grid, either vertically or horizontally. Align objects along the same edge or center them. Use one strong visual element; if using multiple images, connect them by keeping them aligned and in proximity. To

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create a more dynamic layout, use an odd number of visuals or text columns. (Thirds creates a very pleasing composition. Use white space around the edges of the page, text, and graphic elements to create visual breathing room.

Images

For photographs, use a resolution of 300 dpi in the size the photograph appears in the document. Color correct photographs, change the color of images, size and crop photographs and images in the appropriate program (illustration/drawing or image editor) before importing the image into the page layout program. For professional-looking document, limit use of clip art.

Prepress

Create proofs and mockups for review prior to printing. After approval, create PDFs to be used for printing. Collect all fonts, linked images, and the fonts within linked images for submission.

Printing

Use the right color space for the document output.

Bindery

Be sure the layout allows for post-press operations such as folding, cutting, trimming to the bleed, drilling, and mechanical binding. Allow for page creep in multi-page documents that are being saddle stitched.

Know when to do it yourself – and when not to

We encourage our customers to do some desktop publishing projects themselves. That's part of the reason we send this newsletter with helpful information.

But there are certain projects that will be finished faster and at less cost if you provide all the inputs – Word files containing text, digital photo and image files, or photo prints and hard copy images that need to be scanned – and let us complete the layout. We have the tools, skills and experience to get to the finished product on time and within budget.

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Five Principles of Good Design

To help you develop your skills as a desktop publisher, we offer these five principles of good design:

Principal 1: Good design has a purpose. Consider what the document is to accomplish, who the audience is, what image you want to portray, and what reaction you want to invoke. This will guide all your selections – the typeface, the color palette, the layout itself.

Principal 2: Good design makes things simple. A good design will make a difficult concept understandable by guiding the audience through the presentation. Well chosen stock photographs, charts, illustrations, or other graphic elements improve audience comprehension.

Principal 3: Good design holds the reader's attention.

Engage the reader immediately with an eye-catching headline, graphic image, photograph, white space, or unusual layout. Then guide the reader through the important points so nothing important is missed.

Principal 4: Good design has an underlying logic.

The audience will see not only the text, graphics, and photographs on the page; they will react to the underlying organizational structure of the document. Be sure you have one, and be sure it is consistent.

Principal 5: Good design doesn't call attention to itself. One measure of a good design is when the reader gets the intended message without being distracted by the design itself.



“Consider what the document is to accomplish, who the audience is...”

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*“... prepare the text
in Word but let us
handle formatting
with our page layout
software.”*

Q.

*Can I use
Word to
format my
documents?*

A.

Many people who have become very proficient at Word like to use it as a page layout program. This may work for simple layouts such as letterheads, FAX sheets, forms, flyers, reports, manuals and product bulletins. In general, if a document is primarily text, if the finished size is

8 ½ x 11 or 8 ½ x 14, and the finished document is a single page or multiple pages that don't need to be bound or can be stapled in the corner, then Word will produce a good print file.

However, if the document needs to be finished after printing – such as folding, cutting, or saddle stitching – then prepare the text in Word but let us handle formatting with our page layout software. All these finishing activities require adjustments to the dimensions of the panels or subsections of the document as well as creation of a “live” area with defined boundaries that are smaller than the panels or subsections. Unlike page layout software, Word is unable to accommodate these requirements.