

[NEWSLETTER DESIGN]

Basic tips for designing newspapers

PRINCIPLES GUIDING DESIGN

BACKGROUND

- ▶ Newsletters are a visual medium, existing in a highly visual (and increasingly digital) world – television, the Internet, specialty publications.
- ▶ Good design starts with good content. Design is not imposed on content, but rather arises from content. Content drives design.
- ▶ Design is not an add-on. It is an organic part of your newsletter.

ROLE OF DESIGN: COMMUNICATION

- ▶ **Storytelling:** Use type, pictures and graphical elements to excite the reader and enhance the story.
- ▶ **Road map:** Design is a way to organize and give structure to content.
- ▶ **Identity/personality:** Design is a way to create a distinctive style and appearance that reflects who you are and the community you serve. Think corporate/community identity. Look at what you and others are reading and viewing, and bring some of that style and design aesthetics to your newsletter.

BASIC FOUNDATION BLOCKS OF DESIGN



TYPE AND TYPEFACES

- ▶ Type is the most basic form of communication in print, and the single-most important element for determining the readability and personality of your newsletter.
- ▶ Use no more than three typefaces: one for text, one for headlines and supplemental text (labels, page numbers, etc.), and one for display and headings. The simpler your type palette, the more cohesive your overall design will be.
- ▶ Use a serif face (such as Constantia) for text. It's generally easier to read. By contrast, a good sans serif can create a modern, contemporary feel.
- ▶ Body type should be a minimum of 9 points and no more

than 12 points; 10 points is ideal, but it does depend on which typeface you use.

- ▶ Headlines should be a minimum of 14 points paired with 10 point body type; 18 points is ideal for all body type sizes. Bigger point sizes can be used for display type.
- ▶ Use the whole range of fonts within a typeface family (or families). Use different weights and styles to highlight material and create type variety: light and bold; regular and italics. Don't use underlines to do this. Also avoid using all-cap captions; they're too hard to read. All-caps work for labels, but sparingly. Contrast in weights, styles, typefaces creates variety and provides texture.
- ▶ Unless it's all you have, avoid using Helvetica (or Arial). It's plain-Jane type that brings no character to your newsletter.
- ▶ Ragged right text can differentiate between regular stories and shorter items for contrast and organization.



DINGBATS

- ▶ Specialty fonts such as Zapf Dingbats or Wingdings let you give your newsletter its own typographic style. Why use plain, round bullets when you can use another distinctive shape?
- ▶ Dingbats can also be used as graphic elements in details boxes, lists, etc. In interactive electronic editions they can become "buttons" for links to the Web.

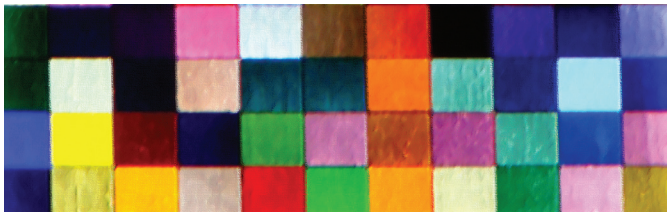
RULES

- ▶ Rules are typographic elements that also can help organize content.
- ▶ Use of rules is an arbitrary design decision. If you use them, do so sparingly and with a purpose.
- ▶ Use vertical and horizontal rules to separate elements on the page, thus organizing content. Use rules as column rules, to underscore headings, to create reverse type panels, or to box elements you wish to highlight.
- ▶ A mixture of weights, such as 1 point vertical and 3 point horizontal, offers good contrast.
- ▶ Black, gray or color bars can be used with reverse type for labels, etc.



ARTWORK

- ▶ Next to type, artwork is the next most important element for determining the personality of your newsletter.
- ▶ Choose clip art that supports the character you want your newsletter to have.
- ▶ Use good quality clip art. You don't have to depend on inexpensive packages that look cheap on your pages. You also don't have to spend a fortune.
- ▶ Think of art that will help illustrate or represent the topic. You don't have to be literal.
- ▶ Don't rely totally on religious clip art. You need such art in your arsenal, but it can be limiting. Base your choices on the needs of the topic.
- ▶ Photographs communicate emotion, drama and fun. They may also give your newsletter a more modern appeal.
- ▶ Photos have the most immediate impact on readers of anything else on the page.
- ▶ Just about everyone has a digital camera or cellphone with a camera, which makes shooting and sharing photos easier.



COLOR

- ▶ There are three colors you can use on any page: black, white and gray. Black is type, rules and artwork – your ink color. White is your paper (if you use white paper). Gray is available if you can make screens from black (in 10 percent steps). It is also the tone of body type on a page.
- ▶ Gray screens can be used for shadows behind type or boxes, for rules, or for artwork to add texture to your pages. A minimum of 20 percent and maximum of 60 percent is a good range.
- ▶ Bold type or rules in black add weight and contrast.
- ▶ White space (also called negative space) adds air or openness to pages. Don't feel compelled to fill every space with type or art.

- ▶ Use full color (CMYK or RGB) for a more up-to-date appearance. This is particularly important if you do an electronic (pdf) version of your newsletter for distribution by email or posting on your website. There is no cost for using color in electronic media and you can still print it in black and white for print distribution to hold down costs.

THE DESIGN PROCESS

IDEAS TO MAKE YOUR NEWSLETTER MORE EFFECTIVE

- ▶ Organize content in some recognizable structure. Think in terms of the life of your congregation or session organization. Whatever structure you choose, be consistent from issue to issue.
- ▶ Focus on the one special event or topic that is the defining event in the life of your church each month.
- ▶ Include on a regular basis basic information that members may need, such as names and phone numbers of staff and session. This also helps newcomers make connections and learn who people are.
- ▶ Provide an index. Even though newsletters are not big, people still like an index of what is inside. If you're consistent in your organization and packaging of content, an index isn't as important.
- ▶ Every page is important, even the part with the mailing label. Remember, your newsletter is an outreach tool, as well. Outward appearance, though certainly not a Christian value, does say something about your church.

THINGS TO HELP YOU KEEP YOUR SANITY

- ▶ Plan ahead. Work together to know what's coming. Be active in giving ideas about what kinds of information you need to give your newsletter the finish you want it to have.
- ▶ Set deadlines, for content and for publication. Have a schedule and try to stick to it. Otherwise, it will encourage piecemeal supplying of content and uneven production.
- ▶ Prioritize. Invest most of your energy where it will get the most benefit. Pick your shots. Set formats that are pleasing and efficient for those pages not suitable for intricate design. It also simplifies production.
- ▶ Know the limitations of yourself, your staff (or volunteers) and your equipment. Operate within those limits. The upshot: *Keep it simple.*

[**TYPOGRAPHY**] *10 typeface alternatives to Times Roman*

Times (or Times New Roman)

Baskerville

Georgia

Cambria

Hoefler Text

Caslon

Jenson

Constantia

Minion

Garamond

Sabon

[**TYPOGRAPHY**] *10 typeface alternatives to Helvetica*

Helvetica (or Arial)

Calibri

Gill Sans

Candara

Myriad

Corbel

Trade Gothic

Franklin Gothic

Tahoma

Frutiger

Trebuchet

[RESOURCES] *Type, artwork, tips*

The Web is a great place to look for newsletter help, and some of the best is free. Here are some worthwhile sites.

TYPE

► **FontShop** (www.fontshop.com/freefonts). This is a professional type foundry site that has occasional offers of free fonts.

► **MyFonts** (www.myfonts.com). A commercial font site that also offers free, professional fonts. Simply create an account to access free fonts or to purchase others.

► **Font Squirrel** (www.fontsquirrel.com). A site with free, quality commercial-use fonts. Selection of usable serif and sans serif typefaces is somewhat limited but is worth searching.

There are literally dozens of sites offering free fonts, some of dubious quality. Just Google “free fonts.” If you’re serious about developing a distinct identity for your church, which includes your newsletter and other communication, consider investing in good type. Google “typography” or “type foundry” to find professional sites.

PHOTOS

► **Stock.xchng** (www.sxc.hu). This site is loaded with free stock photography, much of it of good quality. It offers thousands of photos and other graphic elements on a wide range of topics, easily searchable by keyword.

► **MorgueFile** (www.morguefile.com). Another site with good quality free stock photography. It offers thousands of photos on a wide range of topics, searchable by keyword. Overall, not as comprehensive as Stock.xchng.

SOFTWARE

► **OpenOffice** (www.openoffice.org). OpenOffice is an open-source office software suite for word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, graphics, databases and more. It works on all common computers. It stores all your data in an international open standard format and can also read and write files from other common office software packages, such as Microsoft Office. The best thing is you can download and use it free of charge. Use the graphics module to design newsletters and other print elements.

► **CutePDF** (www.cutepdf.com). Want to circulate your newsletter by email but can’t afford Adobe Acrobat

Professional? This site offers a free pdf printer, CutePDF Writer, which lets you “print” your newsletter to a distiller that creates a pdf file, readable in Adobe Acrobat Reader. You can then attach the pdf document and send it by email or post to your website for download. Not as full-featured as Adobe Acrobat, but if all you want to do is create simple pdf documents, this will do the job.

TIPS

► **New Entrepreneur** (www.newentrepreneur.com). This site by Roger C. Parker, a marketing and communications consultant, offers thorough basic tips for improving your communications, including newsletters.

► **Poynter Institute** (www.poynter.org). This is among the top journalism research/training organizations in the country. If you want to learn more about newswriting, photojournalism and design, there is much on the site that even a novice can learn from. Also offers links to many other worthwhile journalism sites. It may seem overwhelming, but for that person in your congregation who takes the newsletter as their personal mission, it is an invaluable resource for learning.

CONSULTANT

If you want some professional help to improve (or makeover) your newsletter, contact Rick Frennea at rfrennea@yahoo.com or 205-942-7150. With more than 30 years of experience in the newspaper industry and 15 years as a newsletter editor/designer, Rick is willing to consult free as his mission to aid the communications efforts of churches within our presbytery.