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OUR
WORD
FOR IT

CARTER RAE COMMUNICATIONS LTD



DESIGN

A BRIEF GUIDE TO DESIGNING
MAGAZINES AND NEWSLETTERS

INTRODUCTION

Designing magazines and newsletters is a completely different skill from designing corporate brochures, annual reports, posters, marketing leaflets – or indeed, almost any other kind of graphic design you can think of. Why? Because the editorial imperatives are paramount. The design must be made to work to support the editorial requirements and not the other way round. Magazines and newsletters often contain a considerable amount of written and visual material. It is vitally important to guide the reader through this material by making it easy to find the key articles. What's more, you can emphasise the important articles, thus supporting your editorial objectives.

○ WHAT ARE THE BASIC PRINCIPLES?

Start by designing a grid. A typical newsletter grid will have three or four columns for an A4 page, while a magazine may have three columns for news pages but possibly only two for feature pages. The margins at top and bottom and on each side – which help to create the all important 'white space' (see opposite) – must be carefully considered. Once you have designed the grid, stick to it.

The next critical decision is which typeface to use. Often this may be dictated by your company's rules, though you may be allowed to add in a decorative face for headlines. Unless you are very sure of your design skills, don't play around with different typefaces. You might want to use two fonts for flexibility and variety. Typically, one should be a serif font, the other sans serif.

With the basics in place, you can start to lay out your material. Again, there are many tricks of the trade you can use to make your pages dynamic, interesting and attractive – while supporting your editorial objectives.

Note: Keep a file with samples of magazines you have seen that you like – and don't like. Try to identify the specific things that work and define why. Adapt ideas that work for your own use.

○ **HANDY TIP 1: GRIDS AND GRADING**

- ❑ Treat facing pages as spreads and not as separate pages. Even if they deal with different subject matter, they should have visual unity.
- ❑ Decide what's most important on each page (it could be a story or simply a good picture) and give it prominence.
- ❑ Grade the other stories on each page in order of importance. Don't have too many headline styles and sizes, but do ensure that minor stories are given progressively less prominence than more important stories.
- ❑ 'White space' on a page can add greatly to its appearance and ease of navigability. You can also add dynamism by breaking photographs into this space or using it for pull out quotes or captions.

○ **HANDY TIP 2: TYPOGRAPHY**

- ❑ Be careful when reversing text out of colour: it can be very difficult to read in quantity.
- ❑ Set up your type styles – for graded headlines, for news stories, for feature stories, for captions and so on.
- ❑ Never alter your basic styles by enlarging or reducing type to fit the space. Always cut copy, add pull-out quotes or enlarge photographs to help the arrangement on the page instead.
- ❑ Use running headers or footers to help to 'signal' the structure of the magazine to the reader.

○ **HANDY TIP 3: IMAGES**

- ❑ Where possible, choose photographs for their interest and not simply because the CEO appears in them. Give the best photos most prominence.
- ❑ Use cut-outs or feathers to remove poor or distracting backgrounds and also to add dynamism.
- ❑ If your publication is four-colour, let the photographs dominate. Colour used in boxes, headlines and so on should be carefully controlled or the effect will be very distracting.

Further Information

If you have any questions in relation to the brief information contained in this introductory guide, or would like assistance in establishing your design, please contact:

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"The function of a designer is to solve the problems of communicating products, concepts, images and organisations in the most original and precise form. At its best, this is achieved through the collation of carefully chosen and arranged elements, the presentation of which is based on a formula that is essentially simple but that has been refined by the many stages through which it has been developed."

Alan Swann, Basic Design and Layout. London 1987.