

Guidelines for Designing Effective Marketing Materials¹

Although social media has eclipsed much of our print materials used as part of our marketing plan, there are still rules to follow to regards to design that affect the impact of the written word. These rules for writing go beyond grammar and punctuation. They relate to the feel of the written word and how the reader views the communication.

Marketing experts explain that print is still an important medium as part of the overall marketing plan. Print materials help to promote the website and social media presence on the web. These print materials act as the word of mouth for new customers. Even more important, though, is the writing you do for creative content for your website and social media. The same rules apply.

Here are some tips when creating everything from infographics to brochures, newsletters, rack cards and more:

1. WORDS IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS LOSE THEIR SHAPE. PLEASE DO NOT USE ALL CAPS. THIS IS NOT THE NORMAL WAY WE INTERPRET LETTERS WITH OUR BRAINS. LARGE FONTS AND BOLD DOES NOT SOLVE THE PROBLEM.
2. Times New Roman is a highly legible typeface. Use something like this, which is easy to read.
3. Arial is even a better font for quick reading because it is a “sans-serif” font. That is, Arial does not have the little “flags” on the tops of letters like “t,” “b,” “h,” and so on. Compare this “Times New Roman” with the one in #2.
4. *Italics can be difficult to read and should be used sparingly.*
5. Do **not** *mix* TOO *many different* **type styles**. (Also, all of these are 13-point fonts – remember that 13-point in Times New Roman is not the same as 13-point in other type styles.)
6. Jagged right edges are much easier to read than fully justified lines. Be cautious of the readability of your document when utilizing full justification in your materials.
7. Write for quick reading. If you cannot read it aloud without taking a breath, your sentence is probably too long. Short testimonials, brief statements, etc., will get people interested. The only reason to write more is because you have created compelling content. This is content that readers can’t stop reading – it tugs at their heart strings, it makes them think, it is meaningful.
8. Photos grab attention quickly and keep interest, and deliver your message in a more memorable manner than words. Choose a picture with impact and with people in the picture! Pictures. Pictures. Pictures. People just don’t read any more. 60% read everything like a billboard – headline, logo; 30% read bit – but quickly; only 10% read most. Using words over pictures is a trend in marketing. Be sure the contrast is important and that the letters don’t get pixelated.

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9. Black colored text on a white background is the most readable combination of colors. So, try to stay as close to black as possible, i.e. – dark blue, and as close to white as possible, i.e. – pastels or light colored backgrounds without too much “action” going on. Also, a spot color for your title, or call out boxes add a great eye catcher.
10. Whether it is brochures or websites, columns are good to shorten the distance the eye has to travel across the page. People are more likely to read things they can get through them quickly.
11. In numbered lists, tab the entire paragraph rather than allowing the second and successive lines to extend to the left margin. <<<Do not do this!
12. When updating last year’s hard copy materials (such as brochures and rack cards), find out if anyone is reading. Are they catching the public’s attention? Have you heard any comments from customers or employees about these items? Get as much feedback as possible. Find out if information is understandable and sufficient.
13. Have someone not involved with your business examine your headlines and review your social media posts. Are they compelling? Does the lead or the headline draw them in? Headlines should bring life to your writing and help the reader relate to the information.
14. Re-think your content. Are you explaining why you are awesome? Are you connecting with customers? Go beyond the benefits of shopping at your place rather than somewhere else. Explain what are you “-est” at! People love to hear that Jane Doe, their neighbor, had a great time at her son’s, friend’s birthday party at your farm.
15. When shading something that will be copied using a basic copy machine (instead of sending to a printer), the rule of thumb is to use no more than 10% shading. Anything higher will not copy and will end up with lines through it.
16. White space is good! Clutter can distract from your message – by sending the wrong message!
17. Borrow ideas. See what others are doing. Without copying, use these ideas to develop your own feel.²

² Resource: *The Communicator’s Handbook* (1990), Agricultural Communicators in Education (ACE). USDA Extension. Washington, D.C.