

## Nine Mistakes Beginners Make

With a computer, a bit of software, and internet access, almost anyone can be a 'desktop publisher.' And that's a good thing. Power to the people. Self-expression. A voice. A forum.

But along with the proliferation of information (and opinions) that came with the home computer and the internet, came a lot of bad graphic design. I made all of these blunders and more myself as I was getting educated in the principles of design, layout, typography, etc. In the interest of helping to raise the bar for any 'newbies' out there, I offer these nine traps to avoid:

**1. Gray Pages.** Lack of contrast on a page means monotonous, hard-to-read copy. A beginner tends to cram a page full, omitting subheads, white space and other elements that break up (and chunk down) the content. See "Contrast" in this issue, "Break Up Text with Graphic Elements" (July 2004), and "Hooking Skimmers & Scanners" (January 2007)

**2. The Ransom Note Effect.** Too many fonts. I know...it's tempting to go wild with all the type possibilities out there. But for a clean look, keep it to three per page: a headline font, a body copy font and an accent font. See "Type Families" (January 2005) and "Type Do's and Don'ts" (October 2006)



**3. Floundering Focal Point.** When multiple elements compete for the reader's attention, it can create a confusing mess. Far better to grab the reader's eye with one strong element (a picture or headline) and lead them through the hierarchy of information with intention. See "Keep it Simple: One Focal Point" (April 2006) and "Visual Hierarchy" (July 2006)

**4. Shotgun Blast.** Instead of scattering your content all over the page, try grouping related elements (text and/or graphics) into just a few clusters to prevent information overload and needless clutter. See "Come Closer: Proximity" (April 2009)

**5. Low Res Images.** While they're great for screen use and keeping file size down, screen resolution images (usually 72 ppi) may pixelate or blur at print resolution (300 ppi). Shoot photos at your camera's highest quality setting, and find or create high quality (high res) artwork for your print projects. You can always size down but not up. See "De-mystifying Resolution" (April 2005)



**6. Make It Bigger.** That's the title of Paula Scher's book referencing the common request clients make of their designers to up-size their logo. But to attract and engage the reader, go instead for a strong headline, photo or illustration. Add compelling body copy to walk them through the sale. An understated logo communicates confidence. It can stand alone as a punctuation mark or be packaged with your call to action or contact information.

**7. Outside the Lines.** While a full-on grid overlay is not always necessary, aligning elements with document margins, a centerline, or each other helps bring cohesion and balance to a composition. Intentional 'renegades' allowed. See "Grids: Myths & Misconceptions" (April 2011)

**8. Boxed In.** Outlining everything with rectangles has 'amateur' written all over it. Give your page layout room to breathe. Let your design elements out of their boxes to move through space and mingle. See "Creating Motion in 2-D" (July 2011)

**9. Mismatched Graphics.** I love finding the right illustration to communicate a concept at a glance. Far more challenging is finding multiple images to communicate multiple ideas in the same document. Compatibility is key. Does the graphic enhance or detract? When in doubt, leave it out.

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