



Good Magazine Design

By Claire Brocklebank

What do you do when you want to put together an aesthetically appealing magazine, but have limited knowledge and cannot afford professional artwork or designers? Take the elements you can access, and the ability you do have, and use those to your fullest advantage. Some general hints:

a) Select typography wisely. In general, less is best. People new to design tend to overuse the different fonts available. Most designers will choose four or five fonts to use throughout the magazine. This keeps a more consistent look throughout and makes life easier for the designer.

b) Use royalty free art. There are many CDs available with free photos and clip art. Of course, these are also available to everyone else; you see the same images over and over in other publications. Most designers use clip art sparingly. Even a simple picture of a daisy can add texture to an article.

c) Use your scanner. You can scan just about anything. A piece of crumpled paper. A twig. A leaf. A map. Flowers, insects, paper clips, other small objects. You can make small things look big and you can distort shapes. The key is – be creative.

d) Rely on simplicity and quality. Many church magazines and newsletters cram as much as possible on a page—and lose their readers. It is better to have one picture where you can see who is in it, than six pictures of myriads of faces. When you are not sure about design, work on something simple. Most magazines or newsletters will

follow a basic pattern of 3 columns and two columns throughout. From time to time this is varied, but there is generally a pattern.

e) Offer the familiar and the new. Magazines maintain a consistent look so that regular readers know what to look for and are comfortable. Readers also enjoy surprises. Something different, something new – but at the same time something old and something familiar. This ‘balance’ needs to be held in constant tension.

f) Balance text with graphics. Magazines by nature are generally populist, that is, the readers are not looking for a theological debate that lasts five pages and is text intensive. That type of article is usually best suited for a journal, or maybe as one major feature in the magazine. But even if it is a major feature, it should have adequate graphics to go with it. Modern magazines tend to use graphics extensively. Readers are looking for an article that will be a quick read. Only use a really large graphic if it is good quality. Work out a word count per page and have your contributors stick to it. We work on approximately 750 words per page. That gives us a little room to maneuver with graphics. We tell the writer to drop another 150 words for each photo that they want to add with the article.

g) Love the white spaces. Some new designers have an absolute urge to use up every bit of space possible with text or pictures. Don’t be afraid of space. It makes for easier reading and it is much more pleasing to the eye, thus drawing the reader to want to read your magazine.

h) Use color sparingly. The temptation is to use every color possible on every page. Unless you do it for a special effect, it is better to use color with care. It creates a better impact when it is not overused.

i) Buy other magazines. See what appeals to you and get ideas from them. They got their ideas from somebody else, and they in turn got their ideas from others. God has given us all different gifts, and once the

creative juices start flowing, it is exciting to see where they lead.

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