

## **Space Together Things That Belong Together -- Graphic Design 101**

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One of the first things I learned about graphic design was that there is a hierarchy of importance for the information in every graphic design project, printed page, Web site page, advertisement, brochure ...

### **WHAT'S On The Page?**

Typically, a Western audience reads from top to bottom and left to right. That doesn't necessarily mean information has to be placed on a page in that order. As readers, we look at a page and attempt to figure out what is the important message on that page. If everything is shown the same way, same size, same spacing — no order of importance is established for anything on the page. It all looks foreboding and unfriendly.

### **BUILDING Hierarchy**

When you look at many well-designed ads, there's a headline that is big and attention grabbing, maybe a large photo, and then the rest of the information is arranged to give each part more or less importance. There may be additional smaller photos showing details, or contact information or where to find a product. There may be copyright notices at the bottom of the page in small type. All of these things are designed, sized and spaced to help the reader move through the information logically. Readers aren't forced to work through everything to find the important items. Even the paragraphs of this post help to distinguish parts of this topic. Adding subheads makes it even easier for the reader. If I wrote this as one long paragraph, with no breaks, it would be a lot harder to read. And I'd run the risk that you wouldn't bother with it.

## **SPACING Unites or Separates**

When you are placing elements on a page or even typing long documents, spacing can help the reader determine what items go together. A simple example is the subheads I'm using in this post. They are closer to the paragraphs they go with than they are to the paragraphs before them. You don't have to think about what the subheads belong with; it's obvious from the spacing.

Looking at well-designed ads, you may also see the use of a company's logo or brand. It will probably be spaced near contact information, address, phone numbers, even Web addresses and the names of contacts. This is all information that fits together logically and so spacing these things together makes a unit out of them. It separates this important information from the rest of the elements on the page, therefore giving it a position in the page's hierarchy.

## **SPACING Photos**

Making photos look good on a page can be difficult, particularly if there are many photos or if they are all different sizes. But spacing things together that belong together can help here too. See if the photos break down into more than one subject or category and if they do, consider designing a couple groupings rather than just plopping them all on the page the same way. If they don't separate into categories, there still may be some that are more important than others and those could be slightly larger. Or group one large photo with several related, but smaller photos. And remember to space the photos near any text that refers to them. Don't make your reader search for the photo he is reading about, or for the description of the photo he is looking at.

## **LIMIT the Number of Important Points**

Pretend you are the reader and look at the page. What jumps out first? Is that the most important thing on the page? Is that what you wanted readers to see first? What do you look at next? Does your design create a logical path through the information on the page? If you become confused at any point about what comes next or what goes with what, then the page layout needs work. A common error is to try to put too many important points on one page or in one ad or document.

## **MORE Isn't Always Better**

When too many things are presented with the same importance, then none of them look important. Even when you are talking about one subject, one product, one service, some information will be more important or relevant. Keep those relative importances in mind when writing the text and when sizing and placing that text on the page. If you have more than one or possibly two ideas, items, etc. that are of equal importance, it is probably best not to attempt to combine them in one project.

## **BOTTOM Line — Think About Your Reader**

Remember that you know more about what you are marketing or advertising than your reader does. It's unrealistic to expect that reader to absorb or even be interested in knowing everything you know. So don't overwhelm him with too much significance. Keep it simple. One message at a time is best and when you must add more, be sure to build a hierarchy that the reader can easily follow. He'll be more likely to read your message and more likely to understand and remember it.

These are just a few ideas of how to make your pages look better and work harder. If you would like more design, marketing, advertising, and Website tips and advice, visit <http://www.ballyhoo-blog.com> or go to <http://www.pinscreative.com> and join our mailing list to get our Flourish Newsletter.