

# VAN BRIEFING

BRIEFING FROM THE  
VOLUNTARY ARTS NETWORK



## Designing and producing your newsletter

The production of a newsletter involves a number of disciplines from producing text on a word processor to briefing a print shop. Most publications are now produced electronically and if this is not the case, the publication will certainly begin this way on a word processor.

You will need a knowledge of:

- creating and handling electronic files
- typography and page layout
- converting pictorial material to electronic format
- the postscript environment
- the print process.

You will need the following equipment:

- a computer!
- a bubble jet or laser printer
- a desktop scanner
- word processing and page layout software
- removable storage media ie. floppy or larger capacity disk or tape.

The process in brief, in order of production is as follows:

- produce text on word processor
- acquire pictorial material
- import both into page layout programme
- produce page layouts
- test compatibility and send your files or laser outputs to your print shop together with the original pictorial material
- brief the print shop for the production specification.

We will look at the design of the publication first, moving on to the technicalities involved in newsletter production in section 2.

### Section 1

#### DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

In the design of your newsletter, the aim is to present your information in a coherent way and to obtain maximum legibility and impact. The first task is to get your reader to pick up your publication, and then to hold their attention by presenting your information clearly and attractively.

#### Masthead

The masthead should contain your organisation's logo, the name of the newsletter, if there is one, and the issue number and date. If space permits, this information could be spread over the cover in its entirety, otherwise use as much space for the masthead as you can spare. This is the item which will attract the reader to your publication and so should receive careful thought in its design.

If you are running two or more colours, consider using your organisation's corporate colours. This will keep a consistent visual style with your other publications and promote your overall identity. Keep the design simple and if you are using a name, keep it short.

#### Text

Once your text is written, you need to import it into your page layout programme. You now have a number of decisions to make from the choice of typefaces to the overall layout which will be combined with the pictorial material.

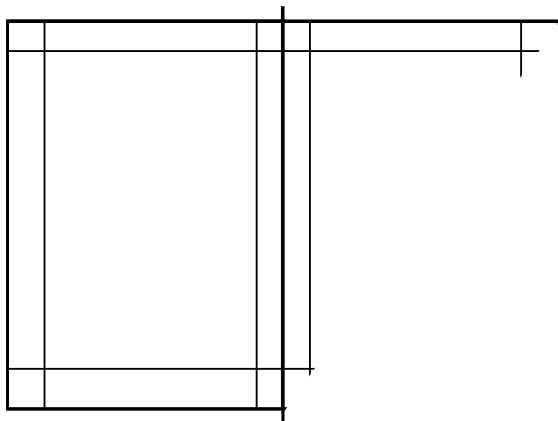
As a general guide, three typefaces are enough, bearing in mind each will have different weights (from light to bold or extra bold) as well as italics. Contrast the headings with the text face, for example, using sans serif and serif faces. Familiarise yourself with the various styles available and keep in mind your organisation's corporate fonts if you

have them. Use type which has some character but ensure its legibility precedes this. If you are unsure, stick with Helvetica and Times, both tried and tested fonts.

Type sizes for text reading can vary from 8 point to 14 point. The physical appearance of the same point size for different fonts will vary, so an optimum size cannot be given. Try to make the leading (line spacing) at least 2 points larger than the point size (9 / 11 for example). A good eye will help to choose both a suitable typeface and the size and leading. If in doubt, ask yourself, "Can I read this easily?"

When considering page layouts, treat each two page spread as a whole as this is how the publication will be viewed. Before you start, create a document and set the viewing to 100%. Try different column widths with different point sizes of type and bear in mind that the number of words per line should ideally be around 6 - 12. This gives some flexibility in setting your column widths. The number of columns per page will depend on this factor, the width of your margins and the overall page size.

For a good visual balance, page margins should be based on the proportions shown below:



There are obvious reasons for setting up in this way. A greater space below the type area will prevent the type appearing to fall off the page, while a greater space on the outside of the page gives ample room to hold the publication. Type column widths are best kept equal in size if you are new to layout, otherwise, study other similar publications.

Set up a grid with consistent margins and type columns but try not to be too predictable from page to page. There are many ways you can do this:

- **use reversed out type for headings or small amounts of text**
- **use different weights of type and different typefaces to emphasise articles**
- **use tints of colour to run behind blocks of type**
- **use pictorial material creatively to run type around or to run as a tint behind type**
- **use graphic shapes and devices to enhance the layout**
- **use colour creatively**
- **use rules only sparingly to separate blocks of text.**

The alignment of type within each column needs to be consistent. You have a number of choices, each with pros and cons:

- **justified type creates a straight edge on both sides of the column, but can produce unsightly letter and word spacing. This is especially noticeable over narrow column widths. Look at some newspapers!**
- **ragged left or right maintains consistent word and letter spacing but leaves, as its name suggests, a ragged edge on one side of the column**
- **centred text, used only in appropriate circumstances, leaves a ragged edge on both sides of the column.**

The decision on which to use must be made on the relative merits and according to your eye.

You do not have to stick to the same method throughout the publication but set up some consistency, for example, use a different method only within a self contained article which you are highlighting in some other way also.

It may be tempting to cram as much text into each page as possible in order to keep the total page count down but using generous margins and some white space can greatly improve the readability. Try to bear this in mind and strike a balance between the two.

## Pictorial material

Good quality photographic prints, transparencies, or drawings can all be used as original material to illustrate your articles. Colour images convert to black and white quite successfully for reproduction. Crop images if necessary before or after they have been scanned into your layout, but don't expect photographs or continuous tone illustrations to look very good if you are leaving your desktop scans in your file to output at your print shop. See IMAGES.

Page layout software can create basic graphs and diagrams, but if you need to create them on a regular basis you may be wise to invest in a dedicated software package. If you are scanning on your desktop, note the constraints outlined in IMAGES. The design of this material is a discipline in itself but adequate results can be obtained using a good eye and logic.

Use images to break up large blocks of type, either running type around them or extending images over more than one column, for example. Different sizing for images and laying them across columns can break the predictability of the page without upsetting the consistency or your layout. Remember to treat each spread as a visual entity and to plan the positioning of your images within the layout accordingly.

If you are using more than one colour to print your newsletter, a duotone might give a better result if you have a good photograph which you may want to feature. This involves using both colours to create the halftone for your image. The particular colours can greatly affect the end result so discuss the possibility with your printer before deciding.

## Colour

The number of colours used will depend on your budget. If you are printing a single colour only, remember it does not have to be black. For a little extra cost, printing two colours can give a greater impact while the feasibility of running three is a tougher decision on cost v. impact. Full colour (four colour process) is a wholly different scenario and your budget will need to be very healthy to withstand this production. Obviously the results are suitably worthwhile if you can afford it but the production process itself is different to printing spot colours. If you have particularly good and colourful images you want reproduced authentically, then consider this route, but ensure you are aware of both the process and the cost first.

## Paper

There are basically three types of paper when you are going to press with your newsletter.

- **Uncoated**

As its name suggests, this paper has no coating. It may be suitable for some purposes but if you are printing halftone images, the reproduction quality can suffer as the paper has a higher ink absorption rate than coated papers. Under this heading is included most coloured paper so beware!

- **Art paper**

This paper has a gloss coating, giving much better results when printing. There are many types of art paper and generally the heavier the coating, the greater the cost. They are all suitable for both spot colour and four colour process printing.

- **Matt art paper**

As its name suggests, this paper has a matt coating as opposed to gloss. It is equally suitable for most printing and often it is personal preference which decides between the two. Some printers can experience slow ink drying on this paper type.

Paper weight is measured in grams per square metre. Typically weights may run from 50gsm to around 250-300gsm at which point paper becomes board and is measured in microns. For newsletter production a weight of between 100-170 would be suitable. Ask your print shop to make up a dummy if you want to get the feel of the publication before going to press. A self cover publication, where the cover weight is the same as the text weight might be better on a heavier stock, while if you are running the cover on a heavier weight, the text can afford to be on a lighter stock.

## Binding

Many types of binding methods exist, from paperback perfect binding to spiral and comb binding. Depending on the number of pages your newsletter makes, you will need to make a decision about binding. If you have only two sections (8 pages) you may well just inset one section into another without any binding. Any more than this and stapling is the cheapest option if your printing run is 50 copies or more.

## Section 2

### ELECTRONIC PRODUCTION

**Most offices use PC based hardware whereas the printing industry uses mostly Macintosh hardware. Files created in PC format will need to be read by your print shop so they can successfully be output to film. Translating text only files from PC to Mac is fairly straightforward but translating page layout files containing text and pictures can require a little more perseverance.**

If you can establish a good relationship with your print shop they may be able to guide you through a suitable working method that ensures successful results.

You may choose either to give your print shop 'camera ready' laser prints from your desktop, or to supply postscript files to output to film. If you go with the former, give the print shop your original images to scan and drop in to replace yours. You won't have to worry about exporting files and compatibility between PC and Macintosh as no electronic information will change hands. The print shop will shoot your laser prints straight to film and separate colour as long as you mark them clearly on an overlay and different colours don't touch. You won't get such a good result as supplying postscript files and this method only suits a single or spot colour. If you are to export postscript files you need to study the section on exporting files.

## Layout

If you have access to only a word processing package, the capabilities of layout are extremely limited, so it is worth acquiring some sort of page layout software. Software ranges from QuarkXPress, a professional design and layout package to SERIF page plus which is a fraction of the cost but obviously less capable. SERIF page plus has the ability to manipulate text, images, tables, and photographs.

Most page layout packages have a facility to separate colour and to apply crop marks for the print shop to trim by.

## Fonts

Fonts fall into two categories: TrueType and Postscript. If you use Postscript fonts, your print shop must have the same fonts from the same source. If they don't your text will reflow, changing the number of words per line and sending down or bringing up words from line to line.

TrueType fonts are treated as downloadable fonts by a postscript driver. You may specify how to send TrueType fonts to your printer, as bitmap or Adobe Type 1 format, generally using the Send To Printer As command. Don't map a TrueType font to a postscript font by font substitution or text can reflow! If in doubt, stick to the TrueType fonts installed in your computer. All TrueType font information is included in your postscript output file so you don't have to worry about output problems on another printer.

## Images

Your desktop scanner will probably input line art (black and white images), greyscale (continuous tone images, like photographs) and maybe full colour. Greyscale and colour images should only be scanned for position within your layout. When you output laser prints to pass to the print shop with your electronic files, you should also give them your original images. These are then re-scanned on a drum scanner and substituted for your desktop scans. If you leave your desktop scans to print, the results will be disappointing.

This does not, however, apply to line art scanning. Line art mode does not see grey, and scans only bitmapped images. If you are going to scan a logo or a line illustration, for best results make sure the original is as large as possible on your scanner platen and calculate the final resolution size to be at least 600 dpi. If you scan an image at 400 dpi and then import into your page layout package at 50%, the output resolution will be 800 dpi. Conversely, an image scanned at 600 dpi and then enlarged to 200% will have a resolution of only 300 dpi, so beware!

Formats to import images vary. TIFF images can be re-coloured in your page layout programme, EPS images cannot. If you scan a mono image as an EPS format, you cannot import and change the colour. Image compression can drastically reduce the size of line art bitmaps, most without sacrificing quality. Check before committing yourself.

## Exporting files

Once you have created your newsletter, you now need to ensure that the file is transferred to your print shop without any change occurring. This often means taking a PC file and opening it on a Macintosh.

Firstly you will have to ensure your file is in postscript format. Here is one method which may work for you. If you already have a postscript printer installed, you can skip the next paragraph.

Windows provides printer drivers. There are some for laser printers and some include the facility to create a postscript file as an alternative to printing directly, so you can install a printer you don't actually have. Consult your manual for instructions. From your publishing software, select this printer and 'print' each page to a file. You will have to use the set-up options to 'print to a postscript file' and enter a

different file name for each page you print. Don't make this printer the default printer if you want to continue using your 'real' printer afterwards.

Secondly you need to check the file size and decide whether you will use floppy disks or another media format to transfer the file. Remember your print shop must have the same hardware to drive the respective media. If you only have a floppy drive, use software to compress and split large files so they can be spread over several floppies. Your print shop will need the same software to access your files! Make sure all associated files (TIFFS, EPS files etc) are included with your main file as the page layout package often takes only placement files from these and maintains a link with the original file. Check the fonts you have used and ensure their authenticity will be maintained (see FONTS). Check also your picture usage. Both can be done in a simple command within your page layout package.

Thirdly, it would be very wise to run a test with your print shop before sending the whole file. Remember your print shop will output films on an image setter with a resolution of between 1,200 - 2,400 dpi.

**Producing your newsletter might seem a daunting task, but now that information technology has engulfed the office, producing copy on a word processor is now commonplace. If you possess an eye for design and layout, taking this a step further would seem the logical progression. It might mean learning how to use new software and dealing with a commercial print shop, and there are undoubtedly pitfalls along the way. However, a little perseverance can pay dividends, allowing you to create and keep total control of your newsletter throughout its production.**



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