

# Desktop Publishing – The Basics

## What this is about:

Desktop Publishing: hearing the term makes professional graphic artists and typographers cringe, at the thought of lousy home made amateur art work. Anyone that needs to create and produce printed materials, whether they be promotional pieces or business forms, should seriously consider hiring graphics professionals for these needs. After all, a lot of training and experience goes into printed pieces that look appealing, get the message across, and give a necessary first-rate impression. Having said that, there is a wealth of desktop publishing software available that enables you to create presentations, brochures, posters, business cards and a wide variety of materials needed to run a business or advertise for a local garage sale. Here, we'll attempt to provide some pointers so that your desktop publishing projects will have the best look possible without spending years in design school.

## Not a Typewriter



First and foremost, one has to realize that a personal computer is not a typewriter. Many of the conventions used on the old-fashioned typewriter need to be smashed when making the transition to true typography on a PC. The PC allows you to do many things, producing far more professional looking results than can be achieved on a typewriter. Forget those old habits and trust us. Your finished piece will look much better if you do.

Never double space between sentences. It's a habit that's hard to break but you must do it. In the days of mono-spaced typewriter imprint, it was necessary to double space to provide enough visual separation in sentences. On the PC, the letters in most type fonts are of variable width, i.e. the letter **i** takes up much less space than the letter **m**, negating the need to double space after sentences. A common exception to this is the font *Courier*, which is mono-spaced. If you actually like *Courier*, be sure to double space

between sentences when using it. Commonly used fonts such as Times and Verdana have proportional characters and accordingly, look much better on the printed page.

Avoid the temptation to use all the fonts (typestyles) you have available on a single printed brochure or flyer. It looks tacky and is the first sign that your piece has been produced by an amateur. Typically you should never use more than three different fonts on a page, and most times two is plenty. Instead, make use of **bold** and *italic* versions of your fonts for prominence, and perhaps another stylized font for headlines. Never underline type. This was done on typewriters for emphasis when there was no other way. With a PC and a desktop publishing program you have the ability to **bold** or *italicize* your type, even make it larger, to emphasize certain words or phrases. OK, are you with us so far?

## **Punctuation, Alignment, Design Elements.**

Use real apostrophes and quotation marks. On a typewriter this was not possible, but there is a difference between a foot mark and an apostrophe. Likewise, there is a huge difference between an inch mark and opening and closing quotation marks. Check your software documentation to see how to do this. It might seem a bit of a pain, but it is worth the effort to get a professional looking result.

Never use all capital letters for emphasis. Type set in all CAPS is hard to read and is again a sign of amateur typesetting. Use **bold** type instead. On the Internet, in email or chat rooms, all caps is considered shouting. It's rude. Keep this in mind when tempted to use all capital letters in your printed pieces.

Avoid using left and right justified text unless your lines of type are long enough to get away with it. Many people think text should be justified both left and right to look professional but this is not true. Many times if your columns of type are very narrow as in the case of a tri-fold brochure, justifying the text will result in large gaps between words making the type look strange and actually making the reader think of these gaps as pauses, such as where a comma might be used. Be sure that your DTP software is set to auto-hyphenate where necessary and left justification looks just fine.

Watch out for widows, words left by themselves on the last line of a paragraph. If you have to, adjust the letter spacing of your paragraph so that the last word will fit on the line above, or rewrite the last sentence to avoid the widow. In some cases it's OK to leave a widow on the last line if it's a long word and the length of the line is short.

When designing your piece, avoid using shaded screen backgrounds for separation or emphasis of parts of the page. This looks good on professionally printed materials or on web pages, but for the most part, screens look bad on forms or promotional materials that are laser printed or photocopied. Instead, use simple frames, white space, or a different font to separate a particular element from the rest of your copy. If you must use screened

backgrounds, be sure to print the document with a coarse dot pattern so the photocopier is capable of reproducing the dots consistently.

On the same subject, when you're planning on copying scanned photographs, use the maximum coarseness in the halftone screen of your photo. A high quality laser printer might print a photo that looks good with very tiny halftone dots, but the photo will look bad when copied. Set your printer to do halftone photos at no more than 85 lines per inch or you'll be sorry.

If you follow these simple tips you're well on your way to producing printed materials that have a moderate degree of professionalism. Don't hesitate to look at professionally designed brochures, magazines and business forms for ideas. If you really want to give the best impression to your potential customers, forget about desktop publishing and consider hiring a real graphic arts professional to design and print your materials. They know what looks good and the dollars you spend will be worth it, attracting new customers and impressing your current ones.

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