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Newspaper Design : Infographics

By

Peter Ong
Newspaper Design:
Infographics

presented by
Peter Ong

paper presented at the
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November 26, 1994
What readers expect of their papers

1. News (Of course, stupid!)
2. Accuracy (Not just some of the time)
3. Credibility (Trying to hoodwink us, eh?)
4. Professionalism (I'm paying you good money)
5. Consistency (I demand it)
6. Respect for their time (Please, please, please)

Findings of Urban & Associates
Respecting readers' time takes many forms. It demands crisp, clear writing, of course, as well as treating page make-up and packaging as an inherent part of the communications process, and not just a cosmetic application after the fact.

- Chris Urban, market researcher
Seeing is a visual process connected with images. We see the landscape; we see a painting. The process is intuitive, emotional and simultaneous. We experience this process involuntarily.
Visual Thinking

Reading

Reading is connected with the verbal process. We decode the written word. To do this we must know the code. The process is cerebral, rational, deliberate and linear.
Seeing anew

Thinking visually means we have to see things in a new way. It requires associative thinking. Lateral thinking. Patterns and dots, rather than logical and rational. Therefore when writing a story it means the shape of information (such as a graphic) rather than length.
Types of newspaper readers

1. Junkies 5%
2. Specialists 10%
3. Hardcore 30%
4. Mass market 40%
5. Sunday only 15%
How readers process a page

- Text: 25%
- Captions: 29%
- Briefs: 31%
- Advertising: 52%
- Headlines: 56%
- Photos: 75%
- Artwork: 80%
US newspapers dull, difficult to read, says study

Call for change in writing style

BALTIMORE — American newspapers are dull and difficult to read. But different ways of writing news articles could help newspapers attract some of the readers they have lost.

That was the conclusion of a major study made public in Baltimore this week at the annual convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

The study suggested that newspapers must challenge many of the rules which had governed journalism for generations.

It was prepared by the group's literacy committee, which was formed partly because of growing alarm that young Americans did not read well enough to understand newspapers and were abandoning them as a result.

The literacy panel challenged the fundamental form used for newspaper articles, the “inverted pyramid”, in which the top is heavy with important facts and trails off into less-significant information.

The panel’s work is part of growing efforts by news professionals to grapple with the effect of limited literacy and try to re-invigorate newspapers.

The study’s conclusions appear to bolster efforts by some newspapers to increase the quality of writing and to vary writing styles.

In addition to aesthetic reasons which had been advanced in the past as reasons for these changes, the report added an economic incentive: Survival.

The study cited newspaper writers and editors who, it said, relied habitually on approaches to writing which were “daunting and difficult to understand for readers”.

It said: “The basic conservatism and frantic pace of our profession keep us from enlarging our repertoire of forms. So, year by year, we keep boring and confusing our readers and driving them away.”

Experimenting with articles published in the St Petersburg Times in January, researchers had reporters try four different writing approaches (See box above).

Each of the four differently written articles about the same event was printed in some copies of the St Petersburg newspaper and researchers then interviewed readers. Younger and less-frequent newspaper readers favoured techniques other than the common inverted-pyramid-style article, the study found, suggesting that newspaper writing could be altered to attract new readers.

THE FOUR APPROACHES

THE researchers had reporters try four different writing approaches.

- Traditional: “Pets remain a popular gift despite the advice of animal advocates.”

- Narrative: “Just before Christmas three years ago, Lesly Stevens was forced to play Scrooge. But the result was a better life for Pumpkin, a nine-week-old kitten.”

- Radical-clarity (explaining everything): “Imagine yourself in this situation: You get an adorable puppy as a holiday gift.”

- Writer’s point of view: “They are the little animals the holiday season purports to adore: The puppies with the big eyes and floppy ears.”

Result: The study found that the articles with writer’s point of view were least effective to readers.

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THE Future

- Colour will be a standard feature in most newspapers
  - Editor & Publisher survey
  - New York Times
  - Wall Street Journal
  - In the UK

- Colour printing will be of a very high standard

- Greater use of information graphics
The Future

- Pages will be designed rather than laid out
- Tighter editing because readers have less time
- Advent of the quickie paper with many, many editions
- Advent of the fax paper
- Phenomenal impact of desktop publishing
DESIGNING WITH READERS IN MIND

1. Organise information for him

2. Use visual signals to guide him

3. Package the information for easy access
ORGANISATION

Find sequence and rhythm

SIGNPOSTING

Use visual signals to direct readers into the page with the help of the following:

- Logos, symbols
- Graphics, maps, at-a-glance boxes
- Labels, straps, subheads
- Summaries, standfirsts
- Colour and typography
THE DECADE AHEAD

5 things a paper must do to stay relevant

§ Become more efficient to read.
§ Respond to different levels of interest.
§ Become personally useful to readers.
§ Become more accessible and engaging.
§ Target niche audiences more effectively.
PACKAGING

1. It calls for decision making. Should story be long or short? How should it be played? Length and depth are not synonymous.

2. It calls for design. How can you package the contents into an integral whole?
THE DECADE AHEAD

Be personally useful

§ Give better play to topics that affect readers most directly.
For example, homes, personal finance, relationships, etc.

§ Tell them where to get information.

§ Focus on impact of stories on readers.

§ Provide context for readers.

§ Run lots of calendars and listings

§ Explain, explain, explain.

§ Update coverage to recognise the way we live.

§ Put government coverage to the test: Does the story affect our readers?
**Friendly takeover**

U.S. military moves toward a full-scale invasion as U.S. troops mass near the border.

**World cup games**

The World Cup games are scheduled to begin today in Brazil. Several countries are expected to travel a long distance.

**Panama**

The Panama Canal is expected to open on schedule.

**Toxic waste disposal**

Pollution czar bans all dumping as other efforts fail.

**Sports environment**

The Australian Olympics are expected to be a success.

**U.S. proposes ban on deadliest weapons**

The proposal was rejected by the Senate.

**Panama**

A forest is expected to be opened on schedule.

**Toxic waste disposal**

The Australian Olympics are expected to be a success.

**Sports environment**

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THE DECADE AHEAD

Be more accessible

§ Liven up mix of stories on the front page.

§ Get reader participation.

§ Familiarise readers with reporters.

§ Use more colour.

§ Use more graphics
Target your audience

§ Go after women readers
    Run more pictures of women
    See how the competition reaches out to women. Examine Women's magazines

§ Make the same effort with the elderly

§ Make the same effort for younger readers
The entire design process always begins with writers.

Reporters should:

1. Integrate themselves fully into the design process

2. Learn to think graphically

3. Look for graphic potential in every story

4. Collaborate with sub-editors and artists in the final packaging of their stories