

Seven Design Secrets for Making Your Direct Mail Easy to Read

Presented by Automatic Mail

Successful direct mail is aimed at getting people to read rather than just “look” at your direct mail piece. But reading requires work for most people, so at the end of a long day, opening and reading mail can be a challenge.

The goal of designing mail is always to encourage reading and to make reading easy. Specifically, a designer should try to draw attention to the copy, make reading easy by applying basic rules of layout and typography, and help communicate the writer’s message.

Here are seven design tips to make reading easy.

1. Help the eye move left to right. That’s the natural eye movement for people in Western cultures. That’s why using serif type is a good idea for body text — the serifs (the little horizontal lines on the tips of letters) form a lateral line for the eye to follow. Type should never be set top-to-bottom or at an extreme angle since this interrupts the natural eye movement. Type should be set flush left and ragged right in most cases, especially in letters. This helps the eye when it comes to the end of one line of type and skips down to the next.

2. Avoid anything that makes the eye stop. Weird type or extreme letter spacing creates “fixations” where you don’t want them. This slows reading and interferes with comprehension. On the other hand, you may want to make people pause for a split second on key words or an 800 number. Italics, underlines, bold, and large type will make the eye stop where you want it to.

3. Design for the natural “eye span.” Well-designed magazines, newspapers, and newsletters generally use narrow columns. This allows readers to quickly take in a line of copy and easily move down to the next for fast reading. It’s not necessary to have ultra-narrow columns for every printed piece, but wide columns should be avoided.

4. Divide copy into logical chunks. This is primarily the job of the writer, but the designer is usually responsible for how headlines and subheads look. Most people read and understand copy better when they are able to take in chunks of information. For example, if a headline reads “Now you can get 12 issues for \$12,” you might break the copy into two visual chunks: “Now you can get” on one line and “12 issues for \$12” on the next line. You could also play with a second color or larger type to emphasize one chunk while downplaying the other. Ellipses (...) and dashes (—) divide copy into easily-absorbed chunks better than commas, colons, and semicolons: “Now you can get ... 12 issues for \$12.”

5. Don’t make words look unusual. For most text, especially body text, you should not set type in all caps or italics because that masks the look of words and makes them less

recognizable. Lower-case with an initial cap is best for most sentences, including headlines. For numbers, remember that spelling the number helps a reader move faster, but if you want them to notice the number, use the numeral.

6. Use standard type and layouts. That doesn't sound very creative, but for easy reading you shouldn't get too creative. In most cases, a simple Roman or serif typeface is best for body copy. Roman typefaces have features that make them easier to recognize than sans serif or odd typefaces. In other words, the less attention you call to the type, the easier the copy is to read.

7. Take pity on readers with tired eyes. This means using type that's large enough to be read easily, 9 to 12 points minimum for body copy for average readers, but slightly larger for older or very young readers. Break long blocks of text into smaller paragraphs, indent paragraphs, and space between paragraphs to give the eye visual rest. Black type on white paper is easy on the eyes. White type on black or a colored background is okay for short bits of text, but exercise restraint with this technique.

None of this means a designer shouldn't be creative. It simply means that you must consider who is reading and how they read. It's important to create the right feel and look for a direct mail piece, but ultimately everything should be geared for easy reading.

Direct mail design looks simple to the untrained eye. But it can be a challenge. Just as a copywriter cannot write words at random, a designer cannot design at random. There is always a purpose. And that purpose is always to get people to read and respond.

A good designer will understand what the writer is trying to say and find ways to help that message come through loud and clear.

This special report is a service of **Automatic Mail Services** — direct mail processing, printing, data processing, and fulfillment since 1971. Automatic Mail thrives on providing you with the leadership you need to achieve the greatest possible response to your direct mail campaigns at the lowest postage rates. For additional information about the “Seven Design Secrets for Making Your Direct Mail Easy to Read,” call us at **718-361-3091**.



Automatic Mail Services, Inc

45-01 34th Street

Long Island City, NY 11101

718-361-3091 (Fax) 718-937-8568

info@automatic-mail.com www.automatic-mail.com

DMS562J

© Copyright 2008-10 Automatic Mail Services, in association with Marketing Communications Group, Inc. All rights reserved. All product names and/or logos are copyrights and trademarks of their respective owners. None of these owners has authorized, sponsored, endorsed, or approved this publication. You have permission to distribute this document in its entirety, as long as it remains unaltered from its original form and with all credits and copyright notices in place.