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# Basic Graphic Design Primer

Design Tips for Your Church Publications

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## **About the author**



### **Diana Cacy Hawkins**

Diana Cacy Hawkins is a freelance writer and professional copywriter. She has dedicated a good portion of her copywriting skills to helping those in the Christian field.

Upon embarking on her writing career, she found that many small churches do not have the tools they need for their volunteers and paid staff. The Digital Church Secretary came to life because of this need and Diana Cacy continues to regularly produce products designed for the smaller churches.

Diana Cacy has worked for three different churches, as a volunteer and a paid secretary. Each Church was in a different denomination and has provided her with valuable insight to the needs of the churches today.

When she's not building church materials, Diana Cacy can be found in multiple locations online. When not working, she's spending time with her wonderful husband, Bill, and their two children, Amber and Michael.

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# Basic Graphic Design Primer

## Design Tips for Your Church Publications

Understanding the basics of graphic design will help you create church materials that engage your readers and compel them to become involved in your church activities.

By using pictures, clip art, the right amount of white space, and the proper font styles, your readers will get more out of your newsletters and feel more connected to your church.

You do not have to be a certified graphic designer or desktop publishing expert to make your church publications look professional. All you need is a few tips and a willingness to learn ... and to pay attention to how your design guides or influences your reader.

I show how to build many of the church publications in Microsoft Word 2007 because that's what I use most often for the simple projects and it's what many computers come with. Microsoft Publisher works very well and I've often used it to create church publications.

Another helpful software to use with your desktop publishing software is Photoshop. Photoshop is readily available in many department stores, office supply stores, and online. With it, you can edit your church pictures. Sometimes all it takes is one simple adjustment to a picture to enhance your publication, such as changing the shirt color in a portrait.

For those who wish to learn how to do even more with desktop publishing or graphic design, Adobe's In-Design is a wonderful software. Bear in mind that with a software that has more bells and whistles the price tag is going to increase. If you decide the investment's worth it, learn how to use your new software and gain all the benefits from it.

### Five Myths of Graphic Design

When it comes to people entering into the world of desktop publishing and graphic design, there are a few myths in working with church publications that I've come across.

Here are the five most common ones that often come to my attention:

**Myth #1: The more color you have in your design, the more effective the publication is.**

This is a dangerous myth to believe in. Color can be important to your publication design, but the wrong color or too much color can actually drive people away from the words on the page.

An excessive use of color can make the reading awkward, interfere with your message, and make the page look gaudy and unappealing. Your newsletter's message will be weak, and important information that you place within your pages will go unread.

Color can help you succeed when you use it with restraint. Use it wisely to accentuate single large elements, like a block of important bullets in a church bulletin or flier, or your newsletter's nameplate.

Sometimes, churches do well printing their publications on a single color paper with just black ink. Graphics and text can be designed to work well together without the use of color. Often black and white photos have more clarity. It's also more cost efficient.

Color can be appealing for giveaway items, such as homemade bookmarks and inspirational cards. Just keep the goal of presenting a pleasing design that brings out your message, and avoid making your publication too busy.

### **Myth #2: You've got to use the crazy, fun fonts to get people's attention.**

Wrong. Wrong. Wrong. Still, there are people who will say otherwise, but statistics show that you can hurt your publication with the wrong font.

Crazy, fun fonts can actually work for fliers announcing special events if you do them right. The flier must be engaging without being too busy. Your main headline of the flier may consist of a fun font like Jokerman (found in most word processing software). But it must be of a size that makes the words very readable, and placed in an easy to read area. Remember, some of the readers won't always be kids with good eyesight ... you may have kids and adults who have vision problems that need this information also.

A general rule to keep in mind is to use an easy to read font. Sans-serif typefaces like Arial and Helvetica are very ideal for headlines.

### **Myth #3: Fill every space on the page.**

Overcrowding your pages will make your publication harder to read and will weaken your message. The area void of text or graphics, called the white space, is essential to guiding your reader's eyes and adds visual impact to your publication.

Some points to remember:

- Margins provide a frame for your copy. This includes the white space around columns of text. Your pages are neater looking and easier to read when you provide your reader's eyes a resting place.
- Surrounding your headlines by white space increases their impact. Using a little white space above the subheads helps guide the reader into a new section or thought and makes it easier to read.
- White space isn't always "white". It can be any area that is void of graphics and text. (Note: Using a shaded background can actually make the text harder to read instead of easier if used too much.)
- White space provides contrast. Surrounding a block of text with white space also works to draw your reader into the text.

**Myth #4: Using "Reverse text" will make my message stand out more.**

There are exceptions to every rule, but as a norm ... no, this is false.

"Reverse text" refers to a block of white text against a black background. While it sounds as if it's something different with which to grab your reader's attention, it's actually harder to read and will cause your message to be unnoticed in a lot of cases.

I suggest not using it at all.

**Myth #5: Headlines are more powerful when underlined and/or in all capital letters.**

Underlining headlines and subheads for emphasis doesn't work. It actually weakens your message and makes them harder to read.

Using all capital letters is like yelling at someone. People don't like being yelled at. And using all capital letters makes the words harder to read. Use them sparingly.

### A Few Notes About Font

I've mentioned fonts in the myths above, so here's a few tips and explanations about fonts.

**Font type:** This refers to the style of the font. There are many styles available on your computer software. Times New Roman is one that I use for nearly everything. Another common style is Courier New.

**Type styles:** Font types can be Serif and Sans-Serif style. In Serif style, each letter has little flourishes (This is a Serif style.). In Sans-Serif style, there are no flourishes. (This is a Sans-Serif style).

**Font Size:** Font sizes are measured in points. What you're reading now is a 14 point size. My headlines and subheads are 18 point or 16 point. This is a 12 point. The 12 point is the size most commonly used for the body copy. Sometimes people prefer 11 point. Some of your smaller publications may take 10 point, but not as many. You want to choose a font size that is easy to read for the majority of your readers.

**The Font Variables:** You can choose to bold, italicize, or underline your words.

Bold is common for headlines and subheads. Also, if you're creating a bulleted list of items, such as for a church brochure, sometimes it helps increase readability if you bold every other bullet item.

In church publications, quotes of scripture are often italicized. You may also find occasions when you wish to italicize body of text to separate it from the surrounding text, such as short thank you notes that you quote from.

I don't use underlined words very much anymore. Not only do they endanger the readability of the text, but they can be confusing today. Especially if you creating any publications for online use. In online publications the hyperlinks are designated with an underline.

### **Design Does Matter**

Your message is not only in the words, but in everything that's in your church's publication. The wording, the font, the white space, and the graphics all work together to bring your message to the reader. Keep your message foremost in your thoughts as you design your church publications.

The eye loves contrast. Still can't go wrong with black text on white background. Reversing that to be white text on black background doesn't read well and actually tires the eyes out.

Many of your readers have tired eyes. Be gentle on them. Use easy-to-read font, provide plenty of white space for resting their eyes, and avoid shaded backgrounds as much as possible.

Graphics accentuate your words. Use them wisely. If you have a person speaking directly to your reader, like a message from your pastor to the congregation or a special invitation to a new person to join your church, a picture of the pastor will often help keep the reader's attention. We like to speak to each other one on one, face to face.

Headlines and subheads should be short and to the point. Avoid excessive wording. Use them to introduce your topic. They should not be full sentences because this actually slows the wording and decreases their power.

With a bit of practice, studying, and attention to detail, your design will increase the effectiveness of your church's publications.

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