

PLANNING AHEAD

When the pencil is mightier than the computer

by John Miles (from Publish magazine)

You're ready to lay out your monthly newsletter

on the computer: All of the articles have been edited, with headlines and subheads added, and the illustrations in—but you're still not exactly sure where to place the text and graphics.

Rather than proceeding directly into your page layout program, my advice is to take out a piece of paper and a pencil at this point and start sketching your layout ideas. Sure, your PC or Macintosh may be an ingenious and sophisticated tool, but you'll get the best results if you know how you want the layout to look before you actually start working on the computer.

Trial and error at the keyboard can be frustrating, as you must often wait for the machine to catch up with your thoughts. With pencil in hand, you can try out (and reject) ideas with a speed that'll leave your computer at the starting gate. And you don't have to be Picasso; rough scribbles will be enough to get you started.

Here's how to sketch out your page design, using a pencil and a large sheet of paper:

- Draw a rectangle and the actual size of two newsletter pages and divide it vertically.
- Measure and draw the pages' columns and margins. You might want to do a few rough sketches to decide how many columns you want, and what proportions you would like the margins to be. The measured drawings, though, should be reasonably accurate, so you can see the actual areas you have to work with.

You don't have to lay out the entire publication with a pencil and scratch paper, of course. Once the page depth, column widths, headings have been established, you can lay out the rest of the publication on your computer screen.

- Roughly sketch out the pages as the reader will see them. Look at the text and pictures you plan to include. It helps to print out your text in the appropriate type size, to get a visual idea of how it will look and how the size fits (or doesn't fit) in your layout.

- As you try out different arrangements, make notes to yourself regarding the changes you have made and why. These notes will ultimately keep you from retrying things that didn't work well for you in the past. Don't simply use the first idea that comes into your head—experiment; but don't be surprised if in the end you decide you were right the first time. (See Illustration 1)

There are several tools to assist you here, including type specimens, line counters, grid sheets, and production notes.

Type specimens. The typeface you see on screen is a slightly modified version of what will come out of the laser printer.

In very large type sizes, the type can look wildly distorted on screen. To accurately design with a typeface on paper, you need to see the type in its printed form. Type specimens are a tool that designers and printers use constantly, and they're easy to make;

- On the computer, key in a complete font—capitals, lowercase letters, figures, and punctuation—for each typeface you plan to use. For example, your type specimen could include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZabcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz123456789.,:;!\$%&*()[]?

- To get the complete range of font weights and sizes available to you, high-light and copy your type specimen several times on screen. Then convert the specimens into various fonts you might use, and print them out. For

example, if you rely mainly on Helvetica, print out examples of that typeface in such fonts as 9-point roman, bold, and italic: 10-point roman, bold, and italic; and so on (see Illustration 2).

- Use these type specimens as a reference when planning your pages. (When you print out the fonts, it will take the laser printer several minutes to hunt for all the type variations and print them.)



HELVETICA

8pt roman ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZabcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz123456789.,:;!\$%&*()[]?

8pt bold ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZabcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz123456789.,:;!\$%&*()[]?

10pt roman ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZabcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz123456789.,:;!\$%&*()[]?

illustration 2

Line counters. When you need to squeeze or pad your text, line counters allow you to calculate the number of text lines you can reasonably get onto your page. Line counters are simple to construct:

- Set a block of continuous text, without paragraph indentations and in a reasonable column width, in the type size and line spacing you intend to use for most of your text.
- Number each line at the beginning of the line.
- Once you've printed this text, cut the sheet of paper so that the lines can be compared against your pencil-sketches layout or grid. With this line counter under a piece of tracing paper, you can try rough but accurate layouts quickly (see Illustration 3).

1 Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur
2 adsum let dictum est. Magnum loreat
3 septem sum, quis datum probet ibsor.
4 Ullamcor duo feugate eu tvoop, licateus
5 duis vulpatus. Odio calfuomu sa ciltse
6 velum. Datum rustisa bontat sqhora filia
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14 goltrait oblis forcau sombris enlabouma.

illustration 3

Grid sheets. Every layout has constant measurements and proportions, such as where the text starts at the beginning of an article, or where the page numbers are positioned. It's worth making a simple grid sheet on transparent paper that can be placed over each printed page; this helps ensure that everything is in the right position, and that the alignments are what you expect them to be.

Production notes. Every time you design a document, particularly if you're pleased with your results, make a note of all the specifications—typefaces, sizes, margins, and so on—and everything you need to remember to get the same result next time.

Keeping a record of the process also will allow someone else to pick up the same style, will help you build up a repertoire of templates that you know work for you, and will remind you, when you want to experiment with a different design, how sizes and shapes relate to one another on the page.

With a little planning, you can go confidently to the keyboard, specify your margins and columns, pour your text, and place your graphics knowing what you're going to get. Of course, the layout sketches you've made are just that: sketches. As such, they're rough and might not always be accurate. You might find that your text is running too long and has to be cut, or that your headlines need rejusting.

But these edits and adjustments are precisely what the computer is designed to do with speed and accuracy. What the computer can't do, of course, is design pages for you in the first place—and that's why you need a pencil, a piece of paper, and a little imagination.

John Miles wrote *Design for Desktop Publishing* (Chronicle Books) and is a principal in the London-based design group of Banks and Miles.

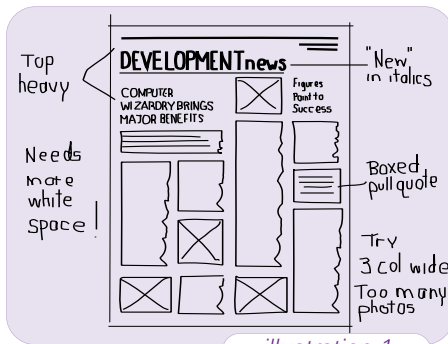


illustration 1