Review

Publication Design Workbook: A Real-World Design Guide

Timothy Samara

(Rockport Publishers, Gloucester, MA, 2005. 240 pages.

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Whether you're developing a four-page newsletter or a 400-page catalog, the basic fundamentals of design still apply. A document is like a puzzle; each piece, or each design element, must fit flawlessly in place. The *Publication Design Workbook* by Timothy Samara attempts to show designers how elements of design can work together to efficiently convey a message.

Samara is a member of the design faculty at the School of Visual Arts, the Fashion Institute of Technology, and New York University, and has been in the design industry for more than 15 years. He uses publications from more than 50 contributors as examples in his book.

The first section of the book, "Designing to Read," explains a variety of design concepts. This section is further divided into three areas: "Thinking," "Reading," and "Building." First, the author emphasizes the importance of thinking through a design. "The designer's role is to examine the content and to begin thinking about how it will look and feel, related to its messages" (p. 13), Samara explains. This section also addresses content organization. "Strategies for organizing content involve sorting the material into manageable parts that are related to each other: by kind, by part to whole, by complexity, chronologically, by relevance" (p. 20), writes Samara.

Second, Samara addresses typography issues within a publication: type size, spacing, leading, and paragraph width. "The choice of typeface establishes a voice for the content that positions it in a specific way through associations an audience may ascribe to face itself" (p. 30), he writes. He goes into detail about fine-tuning type and challenges readers to "know your dashes" (p. 42), "take a look at the figures" (p. 43), and "hang your punctuation" (p. 44).

The last part of the section discusses formatting and structure. The grid system is described in detail. "The benefits of working with a grid are simple: clarity, efficiency, economy, and continuity" (p. 68), writes Samara. He also explains the need for flow and pacing in a publication, describing it as a visual rhythm: a way of presenting information in different layouts to engage the reader with every turn of the page.

In the second section, "From Cover to Cover," the author uses 10 case studies to illustrate the concepts discussed in the previous section. Various publications, including magazines, catalogs, a hybrid brochure/magalog, a newspaper, a literature system, and an annual report "highlight the individuality of expression that each designer brings to creating an engaging solution, while addressing the universal issues inherent in designing publications" (p. 89). In addition to the final designs, the author includes each organization's communication goals, as well as each designer's strategies, sketches, and personal comments. This helps the reader understand each approach. "Despite basic similarities each must address, from typeface selection to structure to color to format, there is no single way to begin planning or working through the design of a document" (p. 89), notes Samara.

The final section, "Publications in Action," is a showcase of publication designs from around the world. Samara shows how contemporary and progressive methods are applied practically to design. Many categories of publication are represented, showcasing design advances and a multitude of messages from around the world.

This book would be a helpful resource for graphic designers looking for new ideas and perspectives. Samara offers advice and tips to elevate designers' skills. Because this is not an easy-reading book, it would not be a functional textbook for a course or workshop. However, it provides fresh ideas and dynamic visuals that instructors may find appropriate to use as examples in courses and workshops on layout and design.

Although there is extensive narrative in the book, the most helpful information is actually found in the captions and text boxes. Through hundreds of examples and captions, Samara demonstrates basic fundamentals coupled with cutting-edge design. The three sections offer easy navigation through the book, but a basic knowledge of design principles would help the reader take full advantage of the author's concepts.

About the Reviewer

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