



DESIGN

magazine edition

TYPOGRAPHY

expert tips on
how to use it

THE HOW TO'S
of using color
effectively

COMPETITION

how to stand
out from the
crowd

PHOTO FINISH

use your images
to make an
impression

LAYOUT

using the grid
to perfection

HISTORY

how the past
has shaped
design

THE THEORY OF
**GOOD
DESIGN**

AN ANALYSIS OF MAGAZINE DESIGN, ITS EFFECTIVENESS,
AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS AUDIENCE.
BY CALLIE BYRNES





photo by Callie Byrnes

According to John Johaneck (1999), “Magazine design is subjective,” (p. 1). It has been nearly 15 years since he stated this, but his words still ring true today. Magazine design has evolved throughout the years, but even professionals are willing to admit that what is considered “right” is a matter of opinion (Burgoyne, 2005; Johaneck, 1999). The first magazine ever published was Godey’s Lady’s Book in 1867 (Holstead, 2013b). Since then, the industry has undergone a variety of changes, including the hard structure of the Bauhaus influence and the chaos of the Dada movement (Holstead, 2013b). Magazine designers are always

looking for something new to set them apart from the rest of the industry, but they must remember that they are first and foremost trying to communicate with their audience (Dolić, Pibernik & Futač, 2008; Holstead, 2013a). What designers consider the best design and what readers prefer can sometimes be completely different.

Magazines are more than just a verbal medium; they rely heavily on visuals to tell the story as well. While articles relay large amounts of information, they are one of the least looked-at elements in a magazine (Meggs, 1992). Graphic designers are important because they take the verbal document and arrange, size, frame, and edit different images and texts into a coherent publication (Luptin & Phillips, 2008.) For

designers, layout is “arguably the most basic, and the most important, element” (Rockport Publishers, 2005, p. 113).

According to Holstead (2013), design is a way a publication addresses its ideas. While graphic design is an artform, it is also a tool graphic designers use to convey certain messages to the audience (Holstead, 2013a). However, because of the subjectivity of design, “good design” cannot be easily pinned down to a simple set of rules and regulations. Even expert designers argue over what is considered superior design in comparison to others. To completely understand the different aspects of magazine design, we must look at the history of design and a breakdown of the elements within a magazine layout.

HISTORY

in review

MODERN DESIGN IS INFLUENCED BY ART MOVEMENTS AND PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING

Magazine design has been influenced by more than a century of ideas. Art movements such as Expressionism, Constructivism, Destijl, and Gestalt psychology are a few of the major movements that have played large roles in the development of modern design (Holstead, 2013). However, perhaps the two largest influences on modern magazine design are the mid-century Bauhaus movement and the postmodern Dada movement (Holstead, 2013b; Lipton & Phillips, 2008; Poyner, 2003).

The Bauhaus movement began with artists and architects in the early 20th century who were interested in breaking things down into their smallest units. They believed in basic forms and in the theory that less is more (Holstead, 2013b; Lipton & Phillips, 2008). In the words of Dieter Rams, “Good design is as little design as possible. Less, but better – because it concentrates on the essential aspects, and the products are not burdened with non-essentials” (Byford, 2012, p. 1). The Bauhaus

philosophy is what inspired the idea of designing on a basic grid to keep the design structured and simple.

The Dada movement, on the other hand, is nearly opposite. This postmodern movement highlights the importance of chaos and anarchism, including the key themes of deconstruction, appropriation, technology, opposition, and authorship (Bennett, 2006; Holstead, 2013b; Poyner, 2003). According to Poyner (2003), the Dada movement “doesn’t set out to argue that there shouldn’t

be any rules in graphic design, only that during this period many designers, including some influential ones, have proceeded as though this were the case,” (p. 2).

While these movements may seem drastically different, modern magazines are a hybrid of the two, meshing the clean simplicity of the Bauhaus with the edgy art of Dada (Holstead, 2013b; Lipton & Phillips, 2008; Poyner, 2003).



Top: This spread is an example of a design influenced by the Bauhaus movement. The layout is clean and structured (Vogue, 2013, Nov.).

Bottom: This layout is influenced by the Bauhaus movement in design. The text is slanted and there is no apparent grid utilized (Nylon, 2013, Nov.).

BREAKING DOWN THE ELEMENTS

DESIGN IS A MASH-UP OF TYPOGRAPHY,
PHOTOS, COLORS AND LAYOUT

While graphic design is oftentimes thought of as an art, designing a magazine is different from creating a billboard or cereal box.

Many graphic designers make the mistake of creating layouts that are so busy and exhaustive that readability is lost (Johanek, 1999). Wardn Charchar, Inchauste, Rundle, Jovanivic, Heilmann, Anayian, Kolb, Weinschenk, and Bradley (2011) state, "Simplicity is the key to creating an interface that does not obstruct the user from their goal and that contributes to a good experience," (p. 57). Basically, designers should not sacrifice the readability of a publication for the sake of its aesthetics. The importance of readability can be seen the different elements of magazine design and how they are utilized, including font, photos and illustrations, color, and layout (Dolić, Pibernik & Futač, 2008).

typography

According to an interview with Oliver Reichenstein, "With good typography, you can score on a level that is subconscious to most users. Hardly anyone can discern good from bad typography, but everybody can feel it," (Byford, 2012, p. 1). Text is a key element of magazine design. A magazine's copy holds the majority of the content in magazine spreads, so it is important that it is easy for the audience to read. According to Reichenstein, "Typography is not about making or choosing a nice font. Whether you design or set type, what you do is design text for optimal performance" (Byford, 2012, p. 1).

There are many problems that can occur when trying to choose the right typography. One of the biggest mistakes designers make is choosing specialty fonts that are too flashy or nearly illegible and take away from the message (Holstead, 2013b;

"Typography is
not about making
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nice font."

Johanek, 2000). These fonts can take away from the main function of design, readability. Designers must also be careful about mixing fonts that are jarring together. Mixing too many typefaces and weights on fonts cannot only be displeasing to the eye but difficult to read (Hoff, 2012; Holstead, 2013b).

"Of course there is no readability without legibility," Reichenstein said. "But few type setters understand that if they have no clue about microtypography (legibility), then they cannot excel in macrotypography (readability)," (Byford, 2012, p. 1).

Other violations of readability often deal with the use of typography for graphic design means. One is text or layouts that require the audience to turn the publication on its side to read. This creates more work for the reader. Unless this sideways text specifically benefits the design, it should not be implemented at all (Johanek, 1999; Holstead, 2013b). Another of these violations is using reverse or surprinted text on busy backgrounds, such as photographs. (Continued on page 7)



While specialty fonts are often discouraged, the gender icons in the headline is thoughtful and clever. The space between the word "gap" works because it is both visual and conceptual to the article (Cosmopolitan, 2013, Oct.).



Vogue (2013, Nov.) often uses clean fonts that promote readability and accessibility to the audience. The designer utilized large sans serif fonts for the headline and used a serif font for the body.



Clean headlines lead to easy legibility. The large dropcap gains attention from the audience and leads the reader into the story (Vogue, 2013, Nov.).



Left: Cosmopolitan's (2013, Oct.) spread shows good usage of how small amounts of color can be a good accessory. **Right:** Pictures can be used to lead readers into the story, such as the lock on the door that leads to the headline (Cosmopolitan, 2013, Nov.).



Left: Nylon (2013, Nov.) uses minimal photographs to catch the audience's eyes and draw readers into the story.

Big picture: Vogue (2013, Nov.) gives good examples of full-spread photos, such as this one used for their concept "Out of this World."

These should be kept to a minimum, as it is often much harder to read this copy in print (Holstead, 2013b; Johanek, 1999). Similarly, designers must be careful about using type of a color value that is too closely related to the color of the background (Hoff, 2012; Holstead, 2013b).

Designers should also be careful about type size. The most common font size used in magazine publications is between 9 and 14 points (Dolić, Pibernik & Futač, 2008; Holstead, 2013b). Another key mistake designers make is not putting the right amount of leading between each line of text, or not using enough tracking and kerning between letters (Hoff, 2012;

Holstead, 2013a). This also leads to illegible type and diminishes readability. These mistakes can often go hand-in-hand, especially with rookie designers.

"One of my biggest pet peeves is inappropriately-sized type," Holstead (2013a) said. "Type that's too big for the space or too small to be legible, or type with bad leading" (p. 1).

Fonts should not control the design; they should compliment it (Byford, 2012; Johanek, 2000). There are many mistakes designers can make, but with careful consideration, one can use copy to better enhance his or her publication.

photos

Images carry connotations. They are an alternative form of storytelling and are used to provoke emotion from the reader. It helps readers visualize the textual content and put the article into context (Meggs, 1992; Dolić, Pibernik & Futač, 2008). Photos and other graphics are oftentimes the most important part of a layout.

According to Holstead (2013b), photographs should be used to control the design of a publication. Colors utilized, the orientation of

the type, and the layout are determined by the photos. Because readers naturally read a page from top to bottom, the most important images should go at the top of the page to garner attention. The text should flow around the pictures uninterrupted for better readability (Holstead, 2013b; Johanek, 2000).

Photos should follow the "less is more" theory and should be used sparingly on a spread (Holstead, 2013b; Johanek, 2000). This means that great photos deserve proper presentation and should not be crowded onto a page with four or five other photos. Instead, particularly good photos should be displayed by

itself or with few others (Holstead, 2013b; Johanek 2000). They should be laid out in a way that makes sense to the reader in a way that helps them move from one place to another in an article (Johanek, 2000).

The way a picture is edited is just as important as how it is laid out. Photos should be cropped in a way to maximize its effect on the reader (Holstead, 2013b; Johanek, 2000). Manipulating the lighting or coloring on the pictures is easy with today's technology; however, digitally altering a picture with the intent to deceive the audience is perhaps one of the biggest missteps a designer can take (Holstead, 2013b;

Krug, 2010).

As long as graphic designers follow these rules, photographs and images will benefit his or her layout and help pique audience interest in an article or publication.

color

Color is an important attention-grabbing technique in graphic design. Johanek (2000) said that it is better to use color as an accessory as opposed to a focal point in the design. (continued on page 10)



According to Dolić, Pibernik, and Futač (2008), “The usage of colors decreases the monotony of a magazine and increases its visual value,” (p. 4).

Colors can come in a variety of different schemes. The color wheel is an important tool for designers because it follows certain patterns that will make it easier to choose schemes (Holstead, 2013b). It is important to learn which color matches fit best with each other. For optimal contrast, one should use complementary colors, or colors opposite of each other on the color wheel. However, for a more subdued effect, it is better to use analogous colors, colors that are side-by-side on the color wheel. However, if one chooses to use tones from all sides of the color wheel, the design could become displeasing to the eye and hard to look at (Dolić, Pibernik & Futač, 2008; Holstead, 2013b; Johanek 2000).

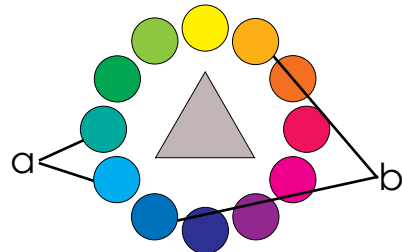
Using tints and shades of certain colors can also add to a layout. For intensity, one can add a percentage of black to a pure color. This creates

a shade of the original hue. Adding white to a solid color creates a tint, and helps for calmer, quieter designs (Holstead, 2013b; Johanek, 2000).

Colors, used wisely, will help a layout pop and stand out to readers. Used with inexperience, they may make readers completely bypass the design.

the color wheel

(Farrand, 2012)



a. an analogous color scheme
b. a complementary color scheme

layout

Layout is “arguably the most basic, and the most important, element” for any medium of design (Rockport Publishers, 2005, p. 36). Layout is the

full display of a magazine and how it is set out, from how you set the type to where you place images. It is a publication in its entirety.

One of the main components of a layout is the grid. The grid is a system of columns and rows that structure the layout of a publication. The grid is important because it promotes conformity throughout a publication. It also keeps recognizability throughout a publication, despite different visual elements (Carpenter & Honeywill, 2002; Dolić, Pibernik & Futač, 2008).

The biggest mistake a designer can make with a grid is making it too simple or too complicated. These can either restrict a design or make it visually chaotic. For magazines, the 12 column grid is the most utilized as it gives designers a plethora of different design options while still looking structured (Dolić, Pibernik & Futač, 2008; Holstead, 2013b).

Without layout and a grid, some publications might not be cohesive or ordered, which may make them easier to overlook or forgettable.



The continuity of layout makes it apparent to the reader that these two separate spreads are part of the same package. The repetition of the text's orientation and the star graphic element pull the layouts together into one media package (Nylon, 2013, Nov.).

CONCLUSION

how to SUCCEED *in magazine design*

HOW TO STAND OUT FROM
YOUR COMPETITORS AND
INTEREST YOUR AUDIENCE

There are hundreds of magazines in print. Many of them follow the basic rules of design. It is easy to produce a publication that looks good with the technology the magazine industry possesses (Burgoyne, 2005; Holstead, 2013a). Covers are particularly important, because a good cover will jump out at passersby and grab attention from consumers (Holstead, 2013b; Rivers, 2006).

“Everyone’s got their own theories,” said Jeremy Leslie, John Brown Citrus group creative director. “There are lots of rules and if you visited a news agent, it wouldn’t be difficult to establish what those rules are. There’s a headshot, usually of a woman. She’s got to have eye contact. There are lots of bright colors. A day-glo logo. But then you can absolutely follow those rules and fail” (Burgoyne, 2005, p. 3).

If you look at different publications that are all within the same niche, such as women’s magazines, you can see many similarities between

them. For instance, *Cosmopolitan* and *Vogue* both give advice on fashion and relationships. They both use large logos across the top of the cover and feature covers with pictures of women who are looking at the audience (*Vogue*, 2013, Nov.; *Cosmopolitan*, 2013, Oct.). However, much of the design

“It’s not about
which design is
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for the audience.”

between the two is different. *Vogue* is considered cleaner, with subtler colors and fonts. *Cosmopolitan*, on the other hand, uses bright, warm colors to draw attention from readers. It is slightly more cluttered, using overlapping photos and collages in its layout (*Cosmopolitan*, 2013, Oct.). *Cosmopolitan*’s fonts are slightly bolder than *Vogue*’s thin, whimsical letters. *Vogue* is

conservative next to *Cosmopolitan*’s flashy liberalism (Holstead, 2013a). They seem on opposite ends of the spectrum, but they both sell well.

According to design expert Carol Holstead (2013a), the two sell well because even though they land in the same niche, they’re targeting different audiences.

“It’s not about which design is better, it’s about whether it does what it needs to do for the audience,” Holstead (2013a) said. “You have to look at things and think about if it appeals to the audience or not, but it doesn’t matter if I like it. As for *Vogue* and *Cosmopolitan*, both are appropriate for its audience,” (p. 1).

It is important for magazine designers to design with their audiences in mind while keeping fresh ideas on the table to keep readers interested (Burgoyne, 2005; Holstead, 2013b). If magazines can accomplish this, they can gain readership and overcome competition.



to CONCLUDE

Modern magazine design has been influenced by years of art movements that have impacted the use of typography, photographs, color, and layout. Together, these

elements form together to perform maximum readability and reader interest. According to Dolić et. al. (2008), the most important rule of magazine concept is “information in front of form, i.e. the message above the aesthetics,” (p. 5). Readers have a tendency to be attracted to designs that are easy to understand

and navigate, and will therefore gravitate toward magazines that reflect their interest and reading level. In other words, form follows function—if designers create a product to maximize readability, design aesthetics will follow.

a note from the
AUTHOR

AUTHOR CALLIE BYRNES USES THE RULES OF DESIGN
TO COMPARE TWO POPULAR PUBLICATIONS

As a student researching magazine design, I have learned a lot of do's and do not's of design. It is something I apply every time I walk by a newsstand, and the things that I notice about each publication are often not what my friends do. To demonstrate this point, I took one issue of *Vogue* (2013, Nov.) and one issue of *Cosmopolitan* (2013, Oct.) and compared them using the rules of design that I gathered from my research.

I have always thought that *Vogue's* overall design is cleaner than *Cosmopolitan's*. *Cosmopolitan* generally uses photo collages or

series of overlapping photographs, completely disregarding the grid that it uses for articles. This can be discombobulating and make readers unsure of where he or she is supposed to look first. While *Vogue* occasionally uses the collage method to display photos, it often opts for full-page or full-spread photographs to illustrate its articles. This simplicity gives *Vogue* a tidier look and makes the magazine easier to navigate.

Another way that *Vogue* is more sophisticated in its design is its simple use of color. *Cosmopolitan* is often culprit to using many bright, neon colors on a spread at once. These colors can compete for attention on the page and become

distracting. This circus effect of colors can also be found on the cover, which uses a brightly colored background and several neon colors for the copy. However, *Vogue* often reduces its usage of color to a few select swatches. Many spreads from *Vogue* utilizes one spot color per spread and only

I have always thought that *Vogue's* overall design is cleaner than *Cosmopolitan's*.

a select few throughout the entire publication. These colors are often used minimally and are reserved for headlines or drop caps.

When it comes to layout, both magazines have their pros and cons. One area where *Cosmopolitan*

comes off stronger is in its usage of layout. Much of *Vogue* is designed page-by-page instead of utilizing full spreads. This can sometimes make the publication feel disjointed; as a reader, we tend to see two side-by-side pages as one unit, not two separate pages. *Cosmopolitan* has its fair share of single-page designs; however, it slightly outweighs *Vogue* in its amount of full-spread designs.

Vogue's layout is often better at using white space than *Cosmopolitan's*. *Cosmopolitan* often fills much of its spare space with content and can become a sensory overload to readers. *Vogue's* design follows the rules of the Bauhaus and is more likely to keep spaces of its design open. This allows for a cleaner-looking layout that appeases the eye and is easier to follow.

I believe that *Vogue's* design is the superior of the two publications. Its sophisticated design is visually appealing and timeless, while *Cosmopolitan* often straddles the line between innovation and discord. However, while my personal preferences and much of the research I've gathered is in favor of *Vogue's* design, *Cosmopolitan* comes out on top in magazine sales. In the first half of 2012, *Cosmopolitan* trumped *Vogue* in sales by selling over 150,000 more magazines than the latter (Ponsford, 2012). This better illustrates the idea that what one considers good design does not necessarily correlate with positive audience feedback or better sales. What *Cosmopolitan* lacks in design, it makes up for in commercial success.



Vogue (2013, Nov.) uses simple colors and fonts for its cover, while *Cosmopolitan* (2013, Oct.) uses a variety of bright colors and different fonts.

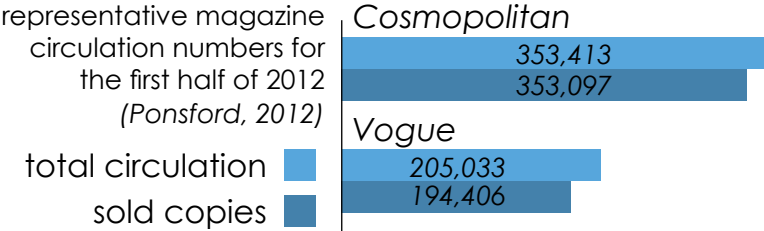


Cosmopolitan (2013, Oct.) often displays photos in collages that break the grid and create awkward white space throughout the spread. It is also known for using many colors per page.



Vogue (2013, Oct.) uses minimal colors and simple pictures. However, this is also an example of a spread designed page-by-page instead of as a whole.

Cosmopolitan vs. Vogue



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