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Typography Today

Typography has always been critical in graphic design

But, because of the tremendous amount of clutter and visual saturation of message after message fighting for our attention, typography has an even higher priority today. Computers and photographic type machines have given designers the freedom to experiment with type in ways that were impossible just a few years ago.

Today, designers can go far beyond typeface selection or size of type. They can overlap or interlock letters...experiment with the weight or slant of letters. There are new ranges of options within a given type family, alternative characters, ligatures, special symbols and ornaments. The designer can easily control the space between letters and the distance between lines. Type can be distorted, twisted, outlined or stretched. The possibilities are endless.

Unfortunately, typography has become so varied and unusual, some designers are losing sight of its true purpose...to communicate a message. The designer must use typography to enhance and support the message. That means understanding the words before sitting down to design the piece. There is no justification for the designer who considers the copy as something to be weighted, specified and measured without any regard to its meaning.

So selecting a suitable typeface is an important consideration. Appropriate typefaces are not always the most obvious typefaces. For example, qualities like age or tradition are not always well served by old-style typefaces; nor is using bold, structural letters to deal with something like machinery. There are no rules that crisp serifs should be used for fashion or flowing script for perfume. A classic example of this is the typeface used on the Chanel No. 5 label. Its simple and basic sans serif letters have long become a hallmark of elegance for this product.

The goal of the graphic designer is to suggest typefaces that are appropriate and, most importantly, readable. If your message is constructed with a poorly designed typeface...or type that's too small...or too fine...or printed in too light or too dark an ink color, there's a good chance your message will be lost. What's more, you'll have wasted valuable time, energy and money while appearing unprofessional to your potential customers.

Finally, remember that once you settle on a typeface that appropriately reflects your organization and its products—a typeface that's professional, clean and invites reading—stick with it. Change only for a specific purpose or to achieve a desired effect. It will help give your communication its own identity and recognizability. And that's what successful advertising is all about.

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