

6 Design Tips To Save Your DIY Marketing Material From **DISASTER**



Mike Klassen

Direct Market Designer, Content Marketing Consultant, Speaker
Helping Businesses Increase Sales and Build Deeper Connections

www.mikeklassen.com

It's true... You only get one chance to make a great first impression. So don't allow your do-it-yourself marketing material to let you down.

One of the worst color combinations I've ever seen by someone designing his own marketing material is light, pink text on a black page.

My point isn't to make fun of the person who sent it to me for feedback. Instead, I want to illustrate what often happens when someone without a lot of design experience attempts to tackle things on his own. He's not the first to do something like that and he won't be the last.

On one level, his idea had some logic behind it. He was talking about getting a pink slip and losing your job, so it was completely natural to use pink as a color for the text. That doesn't mean it was a *great* idea, just a *natural* one.

And I suppose the full-page black background was used as a contrast with the pink. But unless you know how to properly make the colors interact, and you choose the proper font, the results can be almost painful to read.

In another example he sent, pink text was used on a white background. It failed just as much as the pink-on-black. A light color (pink) on the ultimate light color (white) is rarely going to fly.

For the record, a magazine ad for the *Susan G. Komen Race For The Cure* is an example of pink-on-black working. But it was

because a professional designer knew how to make it work. Using a default pink that you find in your word processing program is different than the varieties of pink a designer can create with professional design software.

One of the primary design goals of any marketing piece is *readability*. And just about the easiest thing to read is black text on a white background. (Just like you're reading now.)

Obviously, we stray from black-on-white in our marketing material. If we didn't, marketing material would be boring and look similar to what everyone else does.

So we know we're going to stray from black-on-white at times. It's knowing when and how far we can stray that separates professional designers and DIY designers.

I realize not everyone reading this is going to hire me, or any other designer for that matter. So let me give you some tips if you're doing small-scale design projects yourself.

1. Stay away from fancy fonts, at least at first

As you're doing your draft, stick with common fonts like Times New Roman and Arial. That doesn't mean Times and Arial will be the fonts you end up using. But I don't want you to get distracted from what should be your main purpose...

2. Get all the pieces in place without any thought to color or fancy fonts

Text, graphics, your logo... whatever it is, just get the raw pieces organized on the page(s). Make it readable at its most basic level without getting sidetracked by other issues. Ensure that any graphics you throw in, especially stock photos, have a clear relationship with the copy. Copy and photos should be sending a unified message.

3. Look at your basic layout in all it's non-fancy glory

If you could only print your piece in black & white (like in a newspaper), how would it look? Would everything be readable? Would there be an obvious relationship between the copy and any graphics you're using to support the copy? If not, go back to tip #2.

4. If things are looking good, now is the time to make color and/or font changes

Don't go crazy, and don't always feel that you have to be literal. Just because you're talking about pink slips doesn't mean you need to use pink. Pink text, in many cases, is a bummer to read. Obviously there are exceptions. But, and I don't mean this to be insulting, unless you have some sort of design background, you're unlikely to know what those exceptions are. The same applies to other color combinations that seem clever, but really aren't.

5. Take a moment to study what others have done

For example, let's say you're designing an ad for your local business newspaper. Get some recent issues of the paper and

see what people are doing. What's standing out to you, for good and bad reasons? I'm not suggesting you copy ads, but I think you'll find the easiest-to-read ads are not too complex. They grab attention (since they're fighting for it among the news and articles that people actually want to read) while being very easy to read.

6. Get feedback on your layout from someone you trust

Phrase it this way: "I designed this _____ and I really want you to rip it to shreds. Tell me every little thing that you don't like about it and why you think it might fail." The goal here is not to boost your ego with praise from someone who doesn't want to hurt your feelings. Your goal is to make money with your marketing material. For that, you need people who aren't afraid to tell you that, in a manner of speaking, your baby is ugly.

Now, I have to be honest... there is so much more to the design of marketing material than these steps.

If you're counting on your marketing material to help you make sales, yet you're doing the layout of your material yourself and have no real experience, you may be in for disappointment.

In the business world, "disappointment" is usually translated as "waste of money," "missed opportunities," and "our first impression made us look foolish and unprofessional."

But I know that, for a variety of reasons, it's not always possible to bring in a professional.

If that's the position you're in, use these steps to at least give yourself a fighting chance.

About Mike Klassen

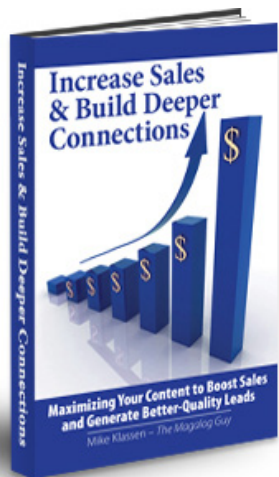
As a designer, I help companies **boost sales performance** by leveraging their unique content to build trust and long-term relationships with their customers and prospects.

I specialize in the layout of magalogs, books, sales letters, downloadable reports, and training material.

While some clients hire me to do the actual layout work, others hire me to consult with them on projects created in-house. This can help prevent the disasters I talk about in this guide.

In addition to working with clients around the world, I teach and speak to groups about content marketing and magalog marketing. My articles and advice have appeared in *Print Professional Magazine*, *ESBJournal*, *Home Business Magazine*, and *Inside Freelance Design*.

With the *Increase Sales & Build Deeper Connections Podcast* on iTunes, I'm dedicated to helping you boost sales and build deeper connections with customers and prospects.



I'm also the author of *Increase Sales & Build Deeper Connections: Maximizing Your Content to Boost Sales and Generate Better-Quality Leads*. In this free book, you'll discover not only why content marketing is vital to your business, but how easily repurposing that content will make it work harder on your behalf.

**MY MISSION AND PASSION IS TO HELP YOU INCREASE SALES
AND DEVELOP A STRONGER BOND WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS.**

If you'd like a professional working with you on your layout projects so you have the best chance of success with your marketing material, feel free to contact me for a free project consultation. To learn more about me and the work I can do for you, please visit: <http://www.mikeklassen.com>

We do a good bit of direct response, but find most advisors are all about 'pretty' and not 'results'. Mike, your input was dead-on. We happily adjusted our copy and graphics according to your advice, ending up with a piece that looked and performed fantastically. Plus, you were fun to work with. Looking forward to our next project!

Adams Hudson – President, Hudson Ink