Desktop Publishing in Education

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INTRODUCTION

As an effective visual communication tool, desktop publishing is used in every area such as general publications and graphics, multichapter documents, and publications with tabular materials such as technical and statistical publications (Chagnan, n.d.). General publications and advertising graphics like newsletters, magazines, brochures, small booklets, posters, and flyers are created and distributed every day. Classroom teachers in K-12 usually send flyers, newsletters, and/or posters to students and parents to announce classroom news, activities, field trip instructions, and the like. College and universities use brochures and flyers to recruit students and to advertise new courses. Additionally, more and more instructional materials are created with desktop publishing programs in classrooms.

Skill level for desktop publishing can range from what could be learned in a few hours to what requires a college education and years of experience. Therefore, creating a desktop publishing product varies a great deal from taking a couple hours to several days to complete. People who are familiar with Microsoft Word can easily create a fancy project by integrating clipart or graphics with the text-based materials. Professional designers or people with design backgrounds can create a professional looking project with more complicated and sophisticated software. This article will briefly review the background of desktop publishing, the software that can be used, and appropriate design principles that should be adhered to when developing publications. The author will also discuss teaching strategies used in a desktop publishing class that involved students creating and designing desktop publication materials using Adobe InDesign.

BACKGROUND

Desktop publishing began in 1985 when the first page-layout software, Page Maker, was released. The ability to create "what you see is what you get" (WYSIWYG)

page layout on the screen along with the print capability of 300 dpi (dots per inch) resolution was revolutionary for both the typesetting industry as well as personal computer industry. However, PageMaker had many limitations and its interface was not user friendly. With the introduction of QuarkXpress, a more powerful page-layout software in 1987, and an increasing number of digital typefaces, desktop publishing became mature in the publication realm. QuarkXPress held its dominancy in the publishing world from 1990s to early 2000s because of its various functions that professional designers needed. QuarkXPress added new features each time a new version was released. However, QuarkXPress is not for inexperienced users due to its complicated interface and the steep learning curve. In addition, the software is very expensive. Therefore, people regard QuarkXPress as a desktop publication tool only for the "talented" professional designers.

The first version of Adobe InDesign was released in 1999 and immediately attracted many users because it provided almost every feature appeared in QuarkXPress but much easier to use and a couple hundred dollars cheaper than QuarkXPress. More and more inexperienced users can create professional design in InDesign with little training. InDesign began gaining popularity in desktop publishing since then and overtook the dominant position from QuarkXPress in recent years because of its powerful typographic controls and integration with other Adobe publishing products such as Photoshop, Illustrator, and Acrobat in the Creative Suite. In addition, InDesign has other unique features such as Story Editor to make editing text easier; a Separation Preview palette which lets designer actually see color separations on screen before printing; nested styles for automatically applying character styles to a drop cap; headings automatically appear at the top of each column; the ability to export PDF format or save a page as a JPEG image without buying third-party tools (Blatner, 2003). With InDesign CS3 (version 5.0), announced in March 2007, InDesign becomes more powerful and user friendly.

DESKTOP PUBLISHING IN EDUCATION

Desktop publishing refers to the creation of digital files for desktop or commercial printing such as newsletters, brochures, posters, flyers, name cards, and other projects that use page layout software. Graphic designers and nondesigners use desktop publishing software such as QuarkXPress, Adobe InDesign, Microsoft Publisher, or Apple Pages to create print projects for business and for pleasure and to create visual communications for professional or desktop printing. Desktop publishing software helps designers to set up the document page layout, place text and graphics accordingly, choose fonts and colors, and prepare digital files that will print properly by using desktop or commercial printing processes. Most desktop publishing software has drawing tools so that users can draw simple graphics in the document. However, complicated and fancy graphic design should be done in a specific graphic design application. Therefore, desktop publishing software is also called a page layout program.

According to Bear (n.d.), desktop publishing is often used interchangeably with graphic design. However, desktop publishing is often considered an easier activity than graphic design because graphics used in publication documents are often created in other applications so the designer does not have to spend a lot of time in designing them in desktop publishing applications. According to Bear (n.d.), not everyone who creates desktop publishing does graphic design. In contrast, most graphic designers are involved in desktop publishing. Desktop publishing is the production side of design. One has to be trained to be a designer, but can create a desktop publishing project with little training.

Best Desktop Publishing Software

Two page layout applications are dominant the professional desktop publishing market: QuarkXPress and Adobe InDesign. Both are powerful desktop publishing tools and each has its own advantages and disadvantages as described above.

Having taught Desktop Publishing for four years, the author prefers Adobe InDesign to QuarkXPress and other similar software because InDesign is relatively easy to learn and less expensive to own. Although Blatner (2003) had been using QuarkXPress over 10 years, he immediately switched to InDesign CS after comparing QuarkXPress 6 and InDesign CS because he found that InDesign was the real page-layout program he needed. Chagnon (n.d.) also mentioned that InDesign is not as difficult to learn as QuarkXPress because the interface of InDesign is clear and logical. Users who have experience with other layout programs can make the transition to InDesign easily.

InDesign has movable dockable tabbed palettes giving users quick access to most formatting commands that helps minimize visual clutter on smaller computer monitors. The program has the ability to quickly and easily manipulate text and graphics on the screen to try out new ideas. InDesign has the function of transparency and inserting drop shadows on photos, graphics, and texts. The ability of conduct clip paths, techniques used to mask the background of a graphic, clearly places InDesign ahead of QuarkXPress, which does not have this feature (Chagnon, n.d.).

Design Principles

The way that items are placed on the page determines the structure of the design and may affect the overall readability. Placement also determines how well the design communicates the desired message. Therefore, learning and implementing some rules or principles of design that govern the placement and structure of layout is important. Robin Williams (2004), in her book: *The Non-Designer's Design Book*, provided four basic design principles for those who have no experience or formal training in design to adopt. The principles include: *contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity*.

Contrast means to make different items on the page very different. For instance, altering the type, color, size, shape, line thickness, and space on the page can give the layout different contrasts. According to Williams, contrast is what makes a reader look at the page in the first place. Therefore, contrast is the most important visual attraction on a page.

Repetition helps keep the design consistent and strengthens the unity by reusing elements or using similar elements. Designers usually repeat colors, shapes, textures, fonts, size, graphic concepts, and so on, to maintain consistency of the page layout.

Alignment refers to the visual relationships between items on a page. Alignment is achieved by lining elements up along an edge or imaginary path (Lohr, 2003). Components cannot be arbitrarily placed on the page. Instead, every element should have some visual connec-

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