



## 11 Ways to Avoid Looking Stupid Graphically

APPEARANCES DO COUNT. THE DESIGN OF YOUR WEBSITE OR BUSINESS CARD WON'T BE THE DECIDING FACTOR FOR PROSPECTIVE CLIENTS, BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE: IT WILL BE A FACTOR. THE BEST WAY TO OBTAIN OUTSTANDING DESIGN IS TO HIRE A DESIGNER BUT, IF FINANCES DICTATE THAT YOU DO THE JOB YOURSELF, IT'S POSSIBLE TO AVOID DESIGNING AN ABOMINATION.

I should make this clear at the outset: I am not a designer. Color theory is a complete mystery. My younger daughter, who is a graphic designer, may secretly laugh at my feeble attempts but at least I'm generally able to avoid catastrophes by keeping a few guidelines in mind. And Jan White, who was a designer at Time for many years, has written books for people like me in which he describes a process that involves planning and thoughtful consideration of what the message should be.

Although you should avoid specialized tasks such as packaging design, you can probably design your own business cards and stationery. Even the overall look and feel for your website isn't out of reach as long as you turn the project over to someone who understands the languages used in website design.

In the past several decades, I've managed to design successful business cards, websites, brochures, and even the occasional book. In this issue, I'll share some of the concepts that I keep in mind when I'm called on to design a business card but many of the ideas also apply to other products.

**No Kitchen Sinks:** A business card is not a book, a website, or a brochure. Limit what's on the card to your name and title, a logo, the business name and address, contact information, and a unique selling proposition. Stop! That's it. Don't list the 173 brands your store carries or the

52 insurance companies you represent or the 37 flavors of frozen yogurt you offer. Just stop.

**Don't Print Your Own:** Homemade stationery looks like homemade stationery. Don't buy an Avery business card kit if you want to look credible in the marketplace. Instead, have a printer print your cards, letterhead, and envelopes. Online services such as [iprint.com](http://iprint.com) can produce professional-looking cards from the design you provide or create online.

**A Business Card is 3½×2:** Resist the urge to create a double-size card because you think it will really stand out. Most people still file business cards and if your card doesn't fit the filing system they have, your card will be in the trash.

**Use Your Own Logo:** Would UPS have been successful if they had selected a stock logo of Mercury? Services such as [iprint.com](http://iprint.com) offer standard logos that you can use in designing your business cards but at best these are trite and overused. Avoid them.

**Make it Readable:** If you avoid the kitchen-sink syndrome, this probably won't be an issue. A small typeface will allow you to cram more information onto the card but what good is this if the person you've handed the card to can't read it? If the people who make up your primary market are less than 30 years of age, you can easily get away with 7-point or 8-point type. On the other hand,

if you're marketing to those over 60, 10-point type is the smallest you should consider.

**Avoid Too-Large Type:** Too-small type makes the card unreadable. Too-large type identifies it as a clueless-hack job. Ask yourself what Microsoft (or Google or IBM or General Electric or Apple) would do. Here's a card from Apple. Notice how the typefaces vary only slightly in size. Sometimes the best way to shout is to whisper.



**Limit Colors and Typefaces:** Using corporate color is good. Do that and stop. Don't add another color because you think it will make your card stand out in a crowd. Clowns stand out in a crowd, too, but this is probably not the appearance you're seeking. The same is true of typefaces. Two typefaces is the maximum you should consider. One is better.

**Group Related Information:** You've probably seen cards with a name in the left corner, a job title in the right corner, the company's name centered vertically and horizontally, an address

in the lower left corner, and phone numbers in the lower right corner. Ugh! Think about how people use information.

**Make It Readable:** Some colors work well together; others don't. If your card's background is light brown and the text is beige, readability is going to be a problem. If color theory is as much of a mystery to you as it is to me, just stick with dark and saturated colors for text on a light and desaturated color for the background.

**Stay Away From Edges:** If you're designing your own cards, make sure that no text is near the edge of the card. "Near" means one eighth of an inch and, better still, one quarter of an inch. Anything closer might be trimmed when the cards are cut.

**Photos and Other Gimmicks:** No. If you're a real estate agent, maybe you can get away with a photo. Otherwise, don't even think about it. Holograms and other tricks? If you sell holograms, maybe; if you're a magician, maybe; if you're a regular business person, no.

Recently I redesigned the business card I use for TechByter Worldwide, my weekly technology blog. The online service iprint.com printed the cards and here is the result:



You might say that the name and title are too large and I might even agree with you but I used a light gray color so that it wouldn't be overwhelming; it also balances the logo at the bottom of the card. Contact information is all carefully grouped in the right column and the address information is in the left column. The logo is at the bottom, along with the unique selling proposition (the slogan) tucked in below.

Nothing important approaches any edge but the microphone stand bleeds off the bottom edge.

My name and title are provided, along with the website address, an e-mail address, and phone numbers for Columbus, New York, and Houston. And that's it. Nothing more is needed and nothing more is provided.



You might also suggest that the typefaces are not good choices and in most cases I would agree with that. The TechByter Worldwide logo uses a grunge typeface, though, and maintaining that theme works as long as the letters are large enough to be readable.

Don't do this to yourself! Among the flaws I created intentionally are these: The name is too large, there's a laundry list of products and services, the list is in a face that's unreadable, the design uses 5 typefaces and 4 colors, the contact information is too small, 4 phone numbers are listed with no explanation, the e-mail address is a Hotmail account, the slogan was an afterthought, and quotation marks were used for emphasis. Oh, and there's that hokey clip art on the right.

On the other hand, consider the ugly mess shown above. Would you deal with this person or would you write him off as a buffoon?

If your business card looks more like the parody at the top of this page and less like the Apple card I mentioned earlier, maybe it's time to review the design with these guidelines in mind. Ω

## Better Websites with HTML5 and CSS3

### IN PREPARING TECHBYTER WORLDWIDE FOR 2013, I'M SEEING THE ADVANCES AND ADVANTAGES OF THE NEWEST WEB CODING LANGUAGES.

The HTML5 specification won't be released for another decade but, as is common with the Web, most browsers have already implemented parts of the new specification and, combined with CSS3, the capabilities are exciting, at least if you're a geek.

Website development has progressed from the stage at which positioning was controlled by tables (think of writing a document in Excel) through a stage where coding conflated presentation with organization to a new level where presentation and organization are separate.

Semantic markup controls the structure of the document while formatting markup controls the appearance of the document. Although this separation is critical for vision-impaired users who rely on screen readers to convert Web pages to spoken words, it's also helpful for anyone who specifies, designs, or uses Web pages.

Until now, website design required the use of non-semantic markup that cluttered the code. One example is the website where I discuss technology issues each week, TechByter Worldwide. Each article's headline is followed by a paragraph that has a design that's different from the rest of the

article. Currently this paragraph must be coded as `<p class="first">`. That's a paragraph tag with an additional specification that the browser should fetch the CSS code associated with the selector "first" and apply it to the paragraph.

With HTML5 and CSS3, it's possible to specify a CSS selector for the first paragraph that follows an H1 header within an article and to apply specific formatting to that paragraph. No special coding is required and that's a plus for the website designer as well as for those who use the site.

Any newly designed website should use HTML5 and CSS3. Ideally, existing websites should be retrofitted to use these new technologies but, given the cost of doing that, you'll be happy to know that browsers will continue to render old, non-compliant sites for the foreseeable future. Ω

