

MARKETING GUIDE

# Engage Your Audience

## How to Use Design to Create Connection

## INTRODUCTION

As a nonprofit marketer, you need to know how to make a big impact with limited resources. But how do you know when the design tools you're using are helping or hurting you? How can you get the most out of the design process?

Whether you manage designers or are one, we're here to help ensure that your investment in the process pays off. This guide will lead you through the five stages of design and outline what you need to do during each to most efficiently—and impressively—achieve your goals.

## The Five Steps

### 1. Strategy

Great creative work starts with a well-conceived strategy. In this first phase, you need to reflect on what you're trying to accomplish and how to best make that happen.

### 2. Concept

In the concept phase you put your imagination to work, asking and answering questions that bring your strategy to life creatively. What is your central message? What visual elements will complement your theme? What materials and structure will grab your target audience's attention?

### 3. Design

During the design phase, you take ideas and start to sketch them out. You choose design components imagined in the concept phase—color, type, size, photography, etc.—and use them to create a design.

### 4. Production

If design is the blueprint stage, then production is the point at which your piece actually gets built (or printed or published online). You lay everything out, check and recheck it, then send it out into the world.

### 5. Follow-Up

Every process is a chance to learn. In the follow-up stage, ask yourself what went well and what you can improve on in your next design piece.

# 1 Strategy

Novice designers forget that a lot of thinking goes into a designed piece before the actual “design” work happens. If you begin with design straightaway, you’re likely to impose your own subjective likes and dislikes on the project. If you start with strategy instead, and then develop a concept, you’ll have a clear path toward achieving your organization’s goals.

## Define Goals

- What change do you want to bring about with this piece?
- What actions do you want your audience to take?
- How does this piece fit in with your strategic plan?
- What are your metrics for success?

## Understand Your Brand

### What is brand?

- Brand is just another word for “reputation.”
- Brand is what you want to stand for.
- Every organization, service, product, etc. has a brand.
- Everything your organization does—intentional or not— affects your brand.
- Consistency is crucial for building brand.

For example, if you want to be known as “grassroots” and “financially efficient,” don’t publish a glossy annual report filled with photos of wealthy board members attending your black-tie gala. Instead, look for ways to reinforce your “grassroots” and “financially efficient” personality, and soon that’s how your organization will be known.

## Plan for Success

- Establish parameters, such as size restrictions, postal requirements, and weight.
- Pick a form for the final piece—will a postcard or a booklet best implement your strategy?
- Create a budget.
- Set a schedule with realistic deadlines.

## Why Work with a Designer?

- You need a professional designer just as you’d need a professional architect, pilot, or attorney.
- A good designer will help you think through your challenges, be an extension of your team, and bring invaluable expertise to the project.
- Professional designers can steer you to useful resources and help make the choices that will make the most of your efforts.

## How to Select a Designer

- Tell prospective designers what your goals and requirements are, and be clear about your budget for design, writing, photography, and printing.
- Ask to see design samples.
- Look for a designer with a range of design styles in their portfolio—don’t be tempted to shop for a design that looks like what you want.
- Ask for a written proposal.
- Look for someone who offers independent, well-informed designs, but who will also respect the needs of the organization and the purpose of the piece over their own creative ideas.
- Understand that more experienced designers cost more. Pro bono work may be great for your budget, but it’s harder to keep volunteers accountable—and your time is valuable, too.

# 2 Concept

Once you’ve developed your strategy, it’s time to think creatively about how you can achieve your goals.

## Start by Writing a Creative Brief

### Answer the following questions:

- Who is the audience for this piece?
- What is the key message that needs to come through?
- What is the story you’re trying to tell?
- What is your organization’s communications tone and style?
- What differentiates your organization?
- Since you can’t do everything, what is it most important to accomplish?

## Brainstorm Ideas

- Conduct research to find inspiration.
- Collaborate with others.
- Keep everything on the table. At this stage, no idea is bad.
- Stay open to different forms of communication. What is the best vehicle for your message? For example, can an annual report also be a calendar?
- Your priority is to solve a communication problem, not to create a work of art.

## Think About Design as You Write Your Copy

- Use imagery to make your ideas vivid in your audiences’ imaginations.
- Ask yourself: How will this come alive on the page?
- Words aren’t your only tools. Pictures, illustrations, color, and size all help you tell your story.
- Involve your designer in the writing process.
- Be prepared to revise.
- Consider hiring professional writers. Your investment in design will be squandered if your message doesn’t come across because you wrote it yourself.

# 3 Design

After all your careful thought, it's time to begin to bring your strategy to life. Your professional design team will know how to best unify the elements that came out of the strategy and concept phases, consider different approaches, and, through a couple of rounds of exploration, settle on a single, consistent visual approach.

Once you've agreed upon this approach, don't change it. Elements such as color, type, imagery, and layout are much harder to adjust as you go, as each choice affects other choices.

## Build a Piece That Works

### What is the Structure of the Piece?

Will you create a brochure or a folder? Will your audience be attracted to innovative folds and shapes, or should you employ something more traditional? Do you need to worry about the piece being sturdy enough to survive the mail?

### What Materials Will You Use?

And what message will they send? Is sustainability an issue? How does finish, paper color, and paper weight affect your message?

### Keep an Eye on Budget

Can you afford to do what you want to do? Is there a cheaper alternative? If so, what do you sacrifice and what do you gain?

## Color Tells a Story

- Do your color choices enhance or distract?
- Choose colors because they function well, not because you like them.
- Just because you *can* print full-color doesn't mean you should. Sometimes less is more. Two-color printing can make a stronger impression than full-color.

## Typography

### Follow the "Rule of Two"

Stick with two typefaces:

- One serif typeface for text and captions (e.g., Times New Roman)
- One sans-serif typeface for headers, subheaders (e.g., Arial)

### Use Type Consistently Throughout

This includes use of justification, capital letters, formats, and the visual relationships between type and imagery.

## Layout

- Layout is where all the design elements come together. Have they been assembled in a meaningful way? Does the design tell a story and reveal information?
- Make it pass the I'm-too-busy-to-read test by letting photos and headlines tell the story.
- Is there a clear hierarchy of information? Ask yourself: Where does my eye go first? Is the right information being brought to the fore?
- Make sure this piece is visually consistent with other materials you've produced.
- Are all the elements on the page aligned?
- Be bold with the use of white space. Leave plenty of room around text rather than filling up every inch on the page.

## Use Great Images



### Use:

- Photos of the people your group helps
- Close-ups and faces
- Dramatic images
- Attention-getting shots
- Creative cropping, repetition, and juxtaposition of images



### Don't Use:

- Group photos
- Photos of donors giving checks
- Shots of speakers standing at a podium
- Images of fancy benefit balls and dinners

## 4 Production

During the production phase, you'll go from working with a couple of sample pages to laying out your document in its entirety. During this phase, you'll want to pay close attention to ensure that your piece is being built the way you envisioned it. Has any text been left out? Are changes needed? Now is the time to fix it.

### Supervise the Work

- Make any big changes early to avoid unexpected costs.
- Compile all your changes into a single document; don't send them one at a time.
- Make sure every change you request gets made correctly.
- Proofread, proofread, proofread.
- After the piece has been sent to the printers, go there with your designer and check the first proofs before printing the entire run.

## 5 Follow-Up

So, you got your piece out. Was it a success? Ask your team some important questions and answer them as specifically as you can:

- Did you meet your goals?
- What worked and what didn't?
- How can your process be improved?
- Did you stick to budget? If not, where were the overruns?

### Learn More

Mission Minded is a branding firm that works exclusively with nonprofit organizations.

We believe that a brand that sets you apart is essential to a nonprofit's success. Every day we guide nonprofits to uncover the big, bold idea that will attract more people to their work. Because in today's world, a worthy mission is not enough. You've got to communicate what makes you unique at every opportunity.

Our clients successfully raise more money and attract the support they need to achieve their goals. To find out how Mission Minded can help your organization, call us today at 415-990-9360.