

MARKETING GUIDE

Engage Your Audience

How to Use Design to Create Connection

INTRODUCTION

As a nonprofit marketer, you need to know how to make the biggest impact with limited resources. How do you know when design is helping you or hurting you? How can you get the most out of the design process?

If you are personally responsible for designing materials or if you manage designers, we have some tips for making sure that your investment in design pays off.

Here we lead you through the five major steps in the design process and let you know what you should be doing during each step to get the most out of design.

The Five Steps

There are five major steps in the design process.

1. Strategy

This first phase is dedicated to thinking about what you're trying to accomplish and how you think you'll get there. Great creative work starts with a well-conceived strategy.

2. Concept

The concept phase unleashes your right brain. What is your central message? What images and visuals can bring your ideas to life? What materials and structure will grab attention?

3. Design

During the design phase, you take ideas and start to sketch them out. You bring together various design components—color, type, size, photography, etc.—and assemble a visual approach that brings your concept to life.

4. Production

If design is a blue-print stage, production is the point where your piece actually gets built. You lay out the piece in its entirety, check it again and again to ensure it's perfect, then print and begin to use it.

5. Follow-up

Every process is a learning opportunity. Don't forget to stop and ask what you did right and what you can improve on in your next communications piece.

1 Strategy

Novice designers forget that much thinking goes into a designed piece before the actual “design” work begins. Starting with design may impose your own subjective likes and dislikes on the project. Starting with strategy and moving to concepting gives you a clear route that is guided by the goals of your organization.

Define Goals

- What change happens in the world if this piece is successful?
- What actions do you want your audience to take?
- How does this fit in with your strategic plan?
- What are your metrics for success?

Understand Your Brand

What is brand?

- Every organization, service, product, etc. has a brand.
- Brand is just another word for “reputation.”
- Brand is what you want to stand for.
- The past affects the future.
- Consistency is important.

For example, if you want to be known as “grassroots” and “financially efficient,” don’t publish a glossy annual report (even if printing was donated) and fill it with photos of your wealthy board members attending your black tie gala. Look for ways to reinforce “grassroots” and “financially efficient” at every opportunity, and soon you will be known that way.

Plan for Success

- Develop parameters, like size restrictions, postal requirements, and weight.
- Define deliverables—will a postcard help you fulfill your strategy, or should it be a booklet?
- Establish your budget.
- Make realistic schedule/deadlines.

Why Work with a Designer?

- Professionals have knowledge about resources.
- You need a professional designer just as you’d need a professional electrician, architect, or plumber.
- A good designer is a communicator first and a graphics person second. They can help you think through your challenges, be an extension of your team, and bring expertise that you probably don’t have in-house.

How to Select a Designer

- Tell your designer what your goals and requirements are, and make sure they know what your budget is for design, writing, photography, and printing.
- Ask for a written proposal.
- Ask to see design samples.
- Look for a designer with a range of design styles in their portfolio—don’t be tempted just to shop for a design that looks like what you want.
- Look for someone who will listen to you, not just try to convince you to accept their creative ideas.
- Consider what you get for what you pay.

Like anyone you hire, you want someone with the professionalism to listen to your needs but also offer independent, well-informed ideas.

Pro-bono work is great for your budget, but it’s harder to keep people accountable. Don’t forget that your own time has costs associated with it, 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

- Who is the audience?
- What is the most important message that needs to come through?
- What is your organization’s tone and style?
- What will differentiate your organization?
- What is the story you’re trying to tell?
- Focus; you can’t do everything.

Brainstorm Ideas

- Research sources of inspiration.
- Work with others.
- At this stage, no idea is a bad idea.
- Be open to different forms. What is the best vehicle for your message? (Can an annual report also be a calendar?)
- Remember that you are solving a communication challenge. Creating a work of art is not your first priority.

Think About Design as You Write Your Copy

- Write visually.
- Ask yourself: How will this come alive on the page?
- Remember that you have more than just words as tools. Pictures, illustrations, color, and size all help you tell your story.
- Involve your designer in the writing process.
- Be prepared to revise.
- Hire the pros (Mission Minded!).

3 Design

After all the thinking that you've done, it's time to bring your strategy to life. Designers have a number of tools at their disposal. Knowing how each element is assembled and relates to the others is what distinguishes a professional designer.

Consider different design approaches and, through a couple of rounds of changes, narrow down to a single, consistent visual approach. Once you've agreed on that approach, don't change it. Elements like color, type, imagery, and layout are much harder to change later in the process.

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 surviving the mail?

What materials will you use?

And what message will they send? Is sustainability an issue? How does gloss, 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? What do you sacrifice and what do you gain?

Color Tells a Story

- Ask: Does it help or hurt (distract)?
- Choose colors because they function, 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 be stronger than full-color.

Typography

Follow the Rule of 2.

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, visual relationships.

Layout

- Layout is where all the design elements come together. Has it been put together 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.
- Ensure visual consistency with other materials.
- Are all the elements on the page aligned with one another?
- Is there a clear hierarchy of information? Ask yourself: Where does my eye go first? Is the right information being brought to the fore?
- Be bold with use of white space. Have the courage to leave plenty of room around text rather than using up every inch of space on the page.

Use Great Images



Use:

- Photos of the people your group helps
- Close-ups and faces
- Dramatic images
- Attention-getting shots
- Cropping/repeating/juxtaposing



Don't Use:

- Group photos
- Donors giving checks
- Speakers standing at a podium
- Fancy benefit balls and dinners

4 Production

During the production phase, you'll go from 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 intended. Has any text been left out? Are changes needed? Now is the time to fix it.

Supervise the Work

- Make big changes early to avoid unexpected costs.
- Compile all your changes in a single document. Don't send them one at a time.
- Check to make sure every change you request gets made.
- Proofread, proofread, proofread.
- After the piece has gone to print, visit the place where it's being printed and check the printer's proof before printing your total quantity. Your designer should be there with you to guide you.

5 Follow-up

So, you got your piece out. Was it a success? Take the time to ask your team a few important questions.

- Did you meet your goals?
- What worked, and what didn't?
- How can it be changed or perfected?
- Track costs—did you stick to budget?

Learn More

Mission Minded is a branding firm that works exclusively with nonprofits, independent schools, and foundations. We believe you only reach your highest potential if people understand the importance of your work—not just what you do, but why it matters.

Every day we partner with clients like San Francisco Opera, Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, and the Denver Art Museum to help them determine the brand—or reputation—for which they want to be known. Then we help them bring that brand to life through key messages, logo design, web design, and more.

As a result, 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.