Banner & Display Designs That Get Noticed: Graphic Design & Trade Show Displays

by Rick Hendershot

Create striking banner and trade show display designs by implementing what this author calls the 'Photo ID Design Model'. Find out what the essential elements are of the Photo ID Design Model. This article will guide you through the process of making your banner and display designs successful.

In some of my other articles about advertising and display design I have referred to what I call the "Photo ID Design Model". This is a very useful device if you create advertising for your company or organization. It is usually the easiest way to create a striking banner or poster. And it will almost always give you a result that gets noticed.

The significance of a "photo id" is that it contains a photograph which is the dominant, or at least the most important graphic element. The other elements on the card— such as the person's name, address, or ID number — these other elements "support" the photo. They are not necessarily less important than the photo. But the photo is clearly the main element from a functional — and therefore from a graphic design — point of view.

If you are not used to thinking of graphic design as related to function, this may seem like an overstatement — "Hey,it's just a card with a picture on it." But think about it for a minute. A photo id has the specific job of identifying a person. And it is therefore the photo which determines the function of the card. It therefore stands to reason that the photo should be given the most attention.

When you apply the photo id model to poster, billboard, or banner design, the result is usually pretty straightforward.

You assume the dominant element in the piece will be your choice of photograph. And you also assume the photograph will be the main "identifier" — the thing that defines the look and even the content or theme of the piece.

For instance, you find a photo of a cool looking guy wearing sun glasses. This suggests certain ideas. Many of them do NOT fit your product. But one or two of them might, so you go from there.

Serious advertising designers may object that this turns the usual communication process upside down.

They might say, "You should always start with your selling message, and find elements that illustrate that message." For instance, if you want to sell "pet care" products, you should begin with the theme you want to communicate, and then find elements that illustrate that theme. Say your theme is something like "Our pet care products make happy pets." This theme would then suggest various ideas for photographs and headlines.

Of course this is nice in theory, but in actual fact, advertising is rarely that straightforward. In reality what usually happens is that you start out with a fairly specific idea ("Our pet care products make happy pets.") As you try to develop it you realize it doesn't quite work or you can't find the photograph you had in mind. Then as you're leafing through the pile of available "pet care" photos you see one that evokes an interesting response. So you modify your original concept to fit the available photograph.

In other words, the photograph may not have started out as the most important element. But in the process it has become the "organizing theme" for the ad. If you still think this distorts or perverts the communication process, think about all those cleavage pictures on the front of women's magazines. The cover designer knows that cleavage sells magazines. So the photo is the starting point. The rest follows.

Elements of the Photo ID Model
Of course there are no rules about what elements your banner or poster should include, but generally they should be as follows:

1. Product photo or photo collage
2. Main Headline
3. Product Description
4. Company Identifier (Logo, address, etc.)

Anything more than this will tend to make it overly busy. This is especially the case with posters, billboards and banners which are usually meant to be viewed from a distance. You should not try to convey detail. Just your primary selling message, and perhaps an overall image.

Temptations to not be creative

One of the problems with the photo id model is that we may end up expecting the photo to do TOO much, and think the rest of the elements are unimportant. We may think it is not necessary to create an interesting headline, or give the special offer some graphic appeal.

In other words we settle for the ordinary rather than coming up with something creative. We settle for a simple description of the product rather than an imaginative statement of what it can do for me, what problem it can solve, or how much money I am going to save if I buy it. We settle for a headline like "Full Color Vinyl Banners" when we could have said "Ill never go back to those other boring old vinyl banners".

I think it is safe to say that, in advertising at least, creativity is almost always better than the lack of it. Of course, this is difficult to prove. And even worse, many people claim they have no creativity in them, so they think this excuses them from trying a little harder to come up with an interesting headline.

But in advertising it really comes down to this: "Do you want your ad, your poster, your billboard, or your banner to be effective or not?" And now that we have that settled, why not try thinking of something that will get peoples' attention?

Rick Hendershot is based in Conestogo, Ontario, Canada. He publishes the Linknet Network a series of more than 35 websites and blogs that offer low cost advertising and link promotion opportunities to website owners. **http://www.small-business-online.com**