

IDEAS FOR DISPLAYS

THE DESIGN PROCESS

Keep It Simple

What do I have to say and who needs to hear it?

Whatever the message might be, and whoever the audience might be, the visual must support and clarify that message. It doesn't matter which medium is used to convey the message. The principles remain the same.

Consider your audience carefully. Accommodate any peculiarities they present to you. Let's assume that you're designing a newsletter. If your audience is younger, the use of visuals increases your chances of delivering a message to this group not usually fond of extensive reading. If you're addressing retirees. You'll want to consider larger type to compensate for poorer vision. If you wish to reach scientists, graphs conveying data are useful. Though these approaches seem obvious, they are too often overlooked.

LEARN FROM GOOD EXAMPLES

So you don't know where to begin? Look around you. What advertisements catch your attention in the magazines you read? What visual image remains clear in your mind from this morning's paper? What poster stands out on a bulletin board? Study such examples of effective use of graphics. You can learn so much by observing techniques and solutions employed by others.

If your design and your visuals are clean, simple, clearly stated, and

harmonious with the message, then you're helping your audience.

You must assume that your audience doesn't understand what you're saying.

Keep everything very simple. Don't use visuals for mere adornment. Make them work for you. Don't overdo it, either. If one visual works in relating the message, you don't need more.

You'll notice how simplicity prevails. The poster with few words, well-placed and readable type, and with one strong, supportive visual is the one that works. The page that makes use of space, headlines and sub-heads, without too much text crammed into it, is the one you stop and read.

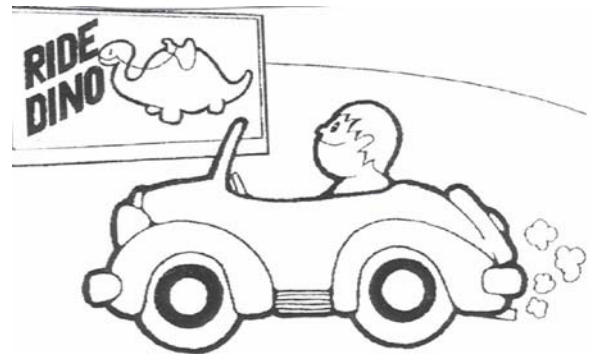


EXHIBIT DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Planning your exhibit

Exhibits are a way of communicating messages to large audiences. Exhibits provide opportunities for the communicator to interact with the device and the audience. If properly handled, they can be easily updated and used over and over again. There are transportation and assembly problems that must be faced with each presentation, but these are

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outweighed by the opportunity to present messages to large audiences at events such as mall and trade shows, festivals, fairs and conferences.

Exhibits are constructed from a large variety of materials. You should consider ease of handling, durability and attractiveness when constructing an exhibit.

Exhibits can include many different devices: print, illustration, photography, film, and television. Computer, interactive video, and others. Consider the appropriateness of each for your audience.

Most communication devices follow a set pattern, A to B to C when presenting messages.

Exhibits allow the viewer to begin anywhere and spend more time with whatever elements are the most interesting.

Information must be condensed for exhibit presentation since most viewers spend only a few seconds to several minutes in viewing exhibit information. If after a first quick look at an exhibit, the viewers are not aroused by some interesting item or items, they may move on to something else.

Exhibits are often staff, instead of offering only passive information, individuals can be assigned to the exhibit to provide additional information about the subject, answer questions, or hand out materials. Even when a passive exhibit is in use, someone must continually attend to its appearance.

In this new age of electronic media, attention spans are much shorter. We are in the midst of an information explosion, competing with many other forms of communications for the brighter, more animated, and more colorful than ever. If an exhibit is to be effective, it must be well planned, visually exciting and attractive, but condensed and direct. Only then can it

compete effectively for the viewer's attention.

PLANNING YOUR EXHIBIT

Purpose

The purpose for your exhibit is usually decided before the communication device is selected. Decide if the purpose is to

- ☞ Teach
- ☞ Show relationships
- ☞ Or promote

If the device is to be effective communication tool, one must closely examine the purpose for communicating.

If an educational exhibit is to be effective, it must convey to the viewers something they didn't know before viewing the exhibit.

You may wish to modify their behavior in some way, or influence their attitudes, or beliefs. Decide if you want them to take specific, action, change opinions, or just be aware of some new information.

Subject

Select a subject that has personal appeal to a large portion of your audience. Timing is also essential. For instance, a vegetable variety exhibit would interest more people before spring planting time than it would in the fall.

Choose a subject that is specific. A broad subject will be harder for you to cover adequately and more difficult for your viewers to comprehend. A simple subject is

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easier to design, particularly if you **limit the number of main points to three or four.**

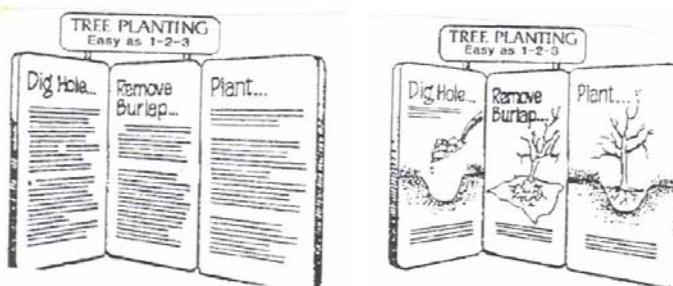
Be sure to include only material that provides a real contribution toward your purpose.

Look critically at the information, as your viewers will see it. Emphasize the main points of your subject and eliminate the details. Detailed information can be printed in a handout, or you may provide an address or a telephone number.

Audience

Decide exactly who your audience will be. Many of the decisions involving design will be affected by the age, background, educational level, and lifestyle of your audience.

Change your methods as your audience changes. Consider a different means of presenting information to younger groups than you would to older, more conservative individuals. Bright colors. Large graphics and more hands on materials may work better for younger audiences. Adults may prefer a more straightforward presentation. Generally, you can find several people who identify with a specified audience, and you can ask them for opinions on your design ideas before you go on.



More printed material or visuals, which will attract people?

Consider the location (s) where the exhibit will be displayed.

- ☞ What kinds of people will be there?
- ☞ What are their interests?
- ☞ How familiar will they be with the information covered in your exhibit?
- ☞ What can your exhibit do for them?

EXHIBIT DEVICES

Exhibits are intended to be different from newspapers, bulletin, and magazines. Messages should be conveyed in a visual manner. Use less copy. Viewers will not spend time reading large blocks of copy in exhibits. Consider handouts or a more visual means of conveying this information.

Live or real objects

Because of the convenience of obtaining, mounting, and displaying visual representations, we often overlook the possibility of using real objects. Live animals always attract attention. Plants other real objects are usually superior visuals.

Models

Whenever the size or visual limitations of a live or real object are prohibitive, a model may be helpful. A model can provide a miniaturization of a much larger object, or an enlarged version of a smaller object. A model allows the viewers to focus on the important parts by eliminating unnecessary details or visual obstructions.

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Photographs

Photo enlargements provide a realistic look at an object or a situation. The photos should eliminate distractions and irrelevant details and zero in on the areas that support the message to be communicated. This medium can condense large objects or enlarge small ones. Avoid having many small photos, use fewer but larger prints. Use mix of sizes for added design appeal.

Projected images

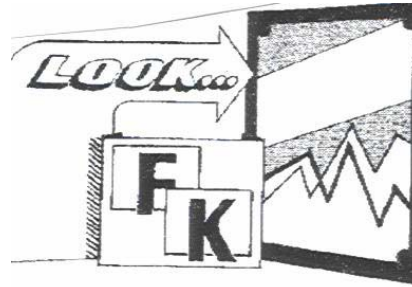
Motion pictures, slides, filmstrips, overhead transparencies, and television can be useful as exhibit visuals. Common sense must keep the designer from expecting the audience to spend much time viewing this type of visual. Just because the pictures are moving or changing, or they are accompanied by sound doesn't guarantee that viewers will spend much more time watching. Unless they have a strong interest in your subject, you can expect them to give your exhibit **only two or three minutes at the most**.

An important consideration relating to projected images is image size. While it may be desirable to have a large image, you'll find that the larger image size the less brilliant it becomes. Since exhibits are usually displayed in well-lighted areas, it's normal for the image on the screen to look weak unless it's kept fairly small (no larger than 18 inches), or unless you provide a canopy to eliminate the ambient light.

Computers

Using computers in an exhibit can add to the interest level. They can be programmed to demonstrate or teach certain parts of the exhibit, construct models, or show diagrams and graphs. Some programs can solicit a yes/no answer or lead viewers through a set of questions.

Computers attract attention, but may also narrow the audience since fewer viewers can work on keyboards or respond to monitors.



Large or unusual letters, words, shapes and designs can assist in attracting attention and communicating a message.

Illustrations

Again, knowing your audience is essential. Using this device, the creator can completely eliminate unwanted detail, exaggerate portions to provide emphasis, and communicate a message in its most basic form. While the appearance should be attractive, it's not necessary for the illustration to appear as a beautiful work of art. It may complement a headline or body copy, or stand alone to create its own message,

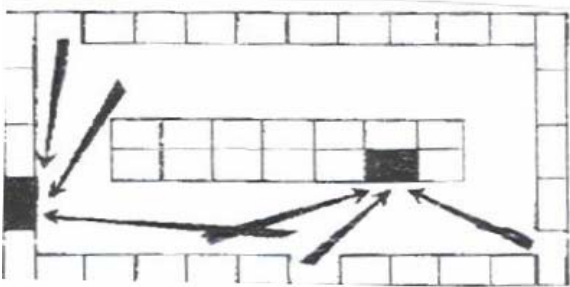
Other graphic visuals include large or unusual letters, words, shapes, and design patterns that assist in attracting attention and communicating a message.

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EXHIBIT DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Exhibit design and the message should be in balance. While an exhibit designer is interested in an aesthetically pleasing display, the most important point is to communicate. All elements should contribute to an overall design and message.

You as the designer should have some knowledge about where the exhibit will be located. The theme of the event and the nature of the exhibit location will affect design. The designer should consider assigned space, lighting, traffic flow and viewing distance.



Consider traffic flow and viewing distance. With large lettering and visuals, you can increase legibility and attract attention at a greater distance.

STAGE 1: INFORMATION GATHERING

The exhibit designing process begins by gathering relevant facts and conditions, or limitations about the exhibit:

- ☞ Its purpose
- ☞ The subject
- ☞ The audience
- ☞ Its location
- ☞ Resources you have to work with

Write them down. You usually begin with much more subject matter than a simple, direct design will allow. Organize it into some logical order so the viewers can follow easily. This information is boiled down into simple phrases or brief statements. Don't hesitate to delete information of lesser importance.

Make several attempts to create a short, catchy title that identifies the exhibit and gets viewers involved. Use the verbs in the active form, and be sure the audience can relate to and be invited by the title.

STAGE 2: ORGANIZATION

After you've condensed the subject matter into simple phrases or statements, you must then consider the opportunities to support, clarify, or explain them with visuals. Jot these ideas down on paper. Consider a variety of approaches for each visual, but aim for visual ideas that are simple and to the point. Say, for instance, that your exhibit would benefit from a visual that relates to horses. List a number of alternatives;

- ✧ A group of horses
- ✧ one horse
- ✧ half a horse
- ✧ a horses head
- ✧ a horses hoof
- ✧ a horseshoe
- ✧ a bridle
- ✧ a saddle
- ✧ a riding boot
- ✧ ---- the list can go on-----

Now put yourself in the place of your viewers. Which visual alternative is most appealing? Which best communicates your message? Which is the least complicated?

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STAGE 3: VISUALIZATION

At this point you begin to visualize how some of these elements relate and fit together. Sketch out your ideas, using pencils and markers. Asymmetrical, or informal, balance is usually more interesting than symmetrical or formal balance. Group your visuals and copy together to make points. Don't try to space them out over the entire background. Allow areas of negative space around groupings. The exhibit will look less crowded and negative space will tend to highlight the visual groupings.

An exhibit as does the printed page, usually reads left to right and top to bottom.

Now that you've sketched out a number of ideas, compare and select the sketches you like best and are the most effective. If you reach a point where you've run out of ideas stop and come back to the project at another time. Ask others for their opinion. It's easier to change at this point than halfway through construction.

Stage 4: IDEA ADOPTION

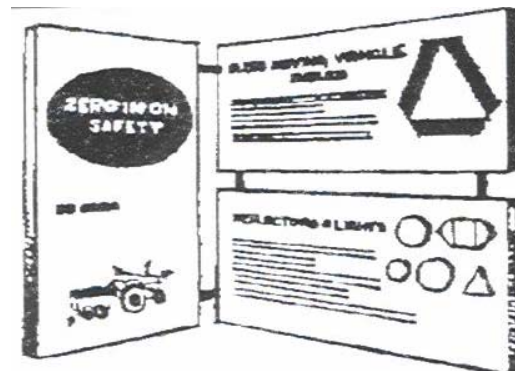
You may need to allow more time for digestion, and you may have to repeat these steps, or parts of them, several times before everything falls into place. When you feel your ideas, effectively communicate your message – with design elements united into a simple, pleasing unit – then you're ready for adoption. Now you may move toward constructing the exhibit, using the ideas you've adopted.

ATTENTION -GETTERS

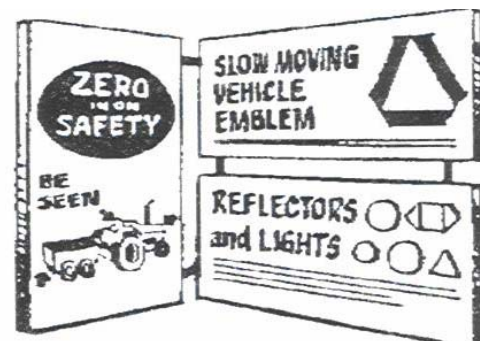
A good design unites the various elements in such a way that the overall appearance is attractive, inviting, and worthy of attention. If the viewers don't

bother to look at it, they won't get your message. A good choice of visuals can be interesting, but coupled with one or more "attractants" your exhibit can draw considerable attention.

Size: **Keep your visuals and lettering large.** If your entire exhibit is small, then you must limit your selection in order to keep them as large as possible. If surrounding exhibits have ½ "letting your have a considerable advantage if you use 1" or 2" lettering. This may also require that you use much less copy.



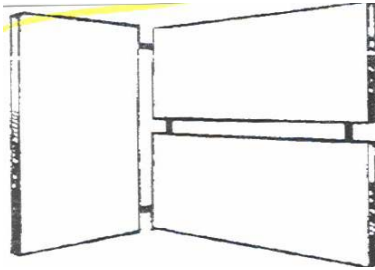
Lettering is too small



Larger letters draw more attention

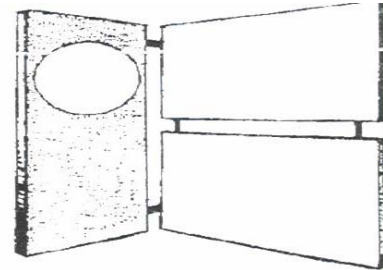
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SHAPE: Many exhibits appear to use only square or rectangle shapes. The use of a round, oval, or other unusual shape can draw attention. Backgrounds need not always have horizontal and vertical lines, even though they are convenient. Try to use the third dimension in your design. By mounting a two dimensional object like a photograph on a thick mat or foam board, and then placing it on the exhibit surface, your image will appear elevated from the background.



All straight lines,
rectangles and
smooth finish

←
Texture adds
interest and the
oval draws
attention
→



TEXTURE:

If most parts of your exhibit have smooth surfaces, it may be advantageous to add a rough or textured area/ this is easily accomplished with rough wood, corrugated paper, burlap fabric, and the like. You can give this effect by partially painting an area with aerosol spray or paint roller or by striping with a brush or felt tip marker.

COLOR:

Be cautious with colors.

Extremely bright background colors will detract from the visuals and other exhibit elements. Usually a continuous soft background color and one or two other brighter colors for lettering or grouping visuals are adequate. Bright colors can attract attention or draw interest to certain areas of the exhibit, but be careful how colors are combined and used.

COLOR CUES:

Your exhibit color choice sends a strong message about your company image. When adding color to an exhibit, try to keep these rules in mind:

(Source: Wagner Institute of Color Research)

RED: attracts the eye, is high energy and has a tendency to make people uncomfortable in a short period of time.

ORANGE: attracts the eye but conveys "cheap".

BLACK: portrays power

GRAY: encourages creativity but can be perceived as dirty.

BLUE: has a calming effect and encourages fantasy. However, in large amounts blue can put an audience to sleep.

SILVER – GOLD: and platinum indicates top-dollar products.

BROWN: is interpreted as informal.

WHITE: signals purity and honesty.

YELLOW: brightens but if used too much can cause attendees to be cranky.

GREEN: helps surrounding become more familiar and is associated with nature and money.

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ANIMATION:

Motors of many varieties can be used to achieve animation. These can be purchased at an electric supply center. Live animals also provide motion a usually get considerable attention when they are part of an exhibit.

LIGHT:

Make sure your exhibit is lightened well with about 150 watts per 4' by 4' area. While floodlights are used to light broad exhibit areas, intense spotlights can draw attention to specific exhibit areas.

Moving, flashing and blinking lights can attract attention, but common sense must dictate their intensity, incandescent lighting intensity can be reduced by using lower wattage bulbs or a rheostat.

EXHIBIT DESIGN TIPS

Consider the following suggestions any time you are working your way through the exhibit design process.

- **Be sure the design is basically simple,**

with few elements and much negative space, the most common error of exhibit design is too many elements are too much copy. Such designs can be difficult to comprehend any many give the viewer the impression of being cluttered.

- **Make certain that the exhibit “reads” well –**

left to right, top to bottom. The title, the visuals, the copy, and the overall design should have an obvious message with all the elements contributing to its communication. Does the exhibit accomplish the purpose that was intended?

- **Put yourself in the position of one viewer**

from your specified audience. Imagine the exhibit in its intended location. Is there a strong attention-getter? Does the message come through loud and clear? Is that message positive and worth your time?

EXHIBIT BACKGROUNDS

Exhibit made of metal and plastic supports, with cloth or other backgrounds can be purchased from a number of exhibit companies. Instead of constructing your exhibit you may want to purchase your exhibit and design and mount your visuals on these boards. Most companies make a lightweight, strong, and attractive display background that either comes with a carry case or will collapse to a manageable size. Cost can be prohibitive. Contact an office supply store for catalogues and prices.

Of you cannot purchase an existing exhibit, construct you own. Look at the following for construction tips and materials.

A wide variety of materials are available for use as exhibit backdrops. Before selecting one, you should answer some basic questions concerning the exhibit.

1. What will be the final size of the backdrop?
2. How small must it be packaged for transport and storage?
3. How heavy will it be?
4. How sturdy and durable must it be?
5. How easily can visuals be mounted on it?
6. What color should it be?
7. What are the necessary resources, such as initial cost and time preparation?
8. How often will it be used?

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Here are some commonly used materials:

Plywood, available in ¼", 3/8" and ½" tick 4'x8' sheets – heavy in weight.

Masonite, 1/8 " and ¼" thick 4' x 8" sheets – heavy in weight.

Plywood paneling, 3/16" thick, 4' x 8 ' sheets – moderate in weight and sturdy

Styrene and urethane foam, ½", 1" and 2" thick, 4' x 8 ' sheets – very light

Foam board, ¼" and ½" thick, 4' x 8' sheets – very light and good surface

Corrugated cardboard, various – very light, but surface must be coated.

Posterboard, 14 and 28 ply, 28" x 44" and 30" x 40" – light and good as a surface

Other wood, paper, plastic, and cloth materials are available. The preceding list includes those that are most widely used.

The requirements of your exhibit will guide your choice of materials. Limited storage space and smaller auto sizes increase the necessity for designing exhibits that are lightweight and can be squeezed into smaller packages. Foam board is a lightweight product that can be folded to pack into corrugated cartons or envelopes for easy transport and storage.

Lightweight paper and foam products can be easily used backgrounds for tabletop displays. They need additional support or framing when used on a larger scale.

Large, freestanding exhibit backgrounds may be constructed with any of the aforementioned materials provided they are

adequately supported. Plywood is sturdy when framed with 1" x 3" pine lumber, and sections can be coupled together with bolts through the framing. The reverse side (non-grooved) of plywood paneling makes a good surface. The grain can be filled, or simply sanded and painted with several coats. The plywood may also be finished with Formica.

LETTERING

Lettering brushes can create fine letters if you've developed the skill or can hire a professional. But often the available resources are prohibitive in costs or availability of skill. Tempera poster paints are easy to use and although they dry quickly, they are not waterproof. Poster paints are available that dry quickly and will withstand some weathering and durable but they have a glossy finish and need 24 hours to dry.

Speedball pens are more easily mastered than the lettering brush. These inexpensive pens work with many kinds of inks.

Art supply stores and office supply stores, offer an assortment of lettering. Transfer lettering, block or cut out letters, and stencils are available. Lettering machines area available that will create lines of type for titles. And words that make lines of type require a certain amount of skill and time. Practice and take time to make titles and copy look good.

Exhibit titles should have letters at least 3" in height, and a line thickness roughly one-sixth the height of the letters. Larger sizes are usually preferable. The lettering size in the copy of an exhibit should be no smaller than 1" tall.

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Letter visibility is affected by:

- Size. Use lettering that is as large as possible
- Line thickness. The boldness of the lines that form the letters should approximate one-sixth the letter height.
- Style. Choose a style that is bold, easily read, and not too fancy.
- Contrast. The letters shouldn't blend into the background. Use light – colored letters on a dark background and dark colored letters on a light background.

WORKING AN EXHIBIT

Many public exhibition areas become cluttered with disposable food and drink containers, handout literature, etc. Be sure that someone has the responsibility for keeping your exhibit working and the immediate area neat and clean.

Exhibits need attention in other ways also. Lightweight exhibits can be bumped out of alignment and display materials that are handled often need to be repositioned. Handout leaflets should be kept in neat stack and the supply replenished as needed.

Individuals assigned to work an exhibit should be prepared to answer questions concerning the exhibit subject and to provide information about the sponsoring organization. They should also be able to give food, drink and restroom information. It's often appropriate to have reference materials available to assist them in answering the harder or more technical questions. A pencil and pad should be kept handy so that requests that can't be filled immediately can be recorded.

Persons who work an exhibit should be neat and well groomed, appropriately

dressed, and properly identified with a nametag or other means. They should greet viewers, help them by answering their questions. This responsibility is demanding, requiring many hours of standing, while looking enthusiastic and fresh. Plan to enlist plenty of help.

SUMMARY

- Remember that onlookers usually view an exhibit for only a short time – from several seconds to several minutes.
- You must have an attention-getter and a quickly understood message in your exhibit.
- Decide first on your purpose, subject, and audience, and then design the exhibit with those things in mind.
- Do a good editing job, allowing only the most relevant points as part of the message
- Tell your story visually.
- Leave plenty of space in your exhibit; it shouldn't have that discouraging, crowded look.
- Select appropriate materials. It may be necessary to pack your exhibit in a convenient, transportable package, which must be reasonably lightweight.
- Keep the lettering to a minimum in quantity and large in size.
- Have the display set up on time. Keep it looking good throughout the showing.
- Make sure persons working the exhibit are clean and well groomed, enthusiastic, and above all interested and helpful.