



Putting on the style

Gordon Laing goes typetastic and puts fonts on the presentation catwalk with a style to suit any occasion without being over-dressed. But beware of font overload on your resources.

This month I'm returning to our old friends, fonts. Yes, I've been away from the subject for a while so it's time to have another look. Rather than delve into formats and character maps, I thought it would be worthwhile to go back to design basics and consider which typefaces are best suited to which tasks. But first a little graphics news.

The big story this month is the unbelievable release of Adobe Illustrator 7 for Windows! Yes, the high-end drawing product we all thought had been abandoned for good on the Windows platform has made a surprise reappearance in a brand new version. It has been brought up to date with the Mac, too.

As if that weren't enough, Adobe has also announced new versions of its Streamline tracing utility, and Dimensions, its wonderful 3D modelling tool. And equally surprising, they're both available for Windows as well as Mac. I'm particularly excited about Dimensions as it is one of my favourite graphics apps, and this is its debut on the Windows platform.

At the time of writing, Adobe wasn't entirely certain how it was going to package, bundle or price the three products, and at the press announcement

we suggested that in a Corel-style move, Dimensions and Streamline should be available separately but both bundled free with the larger Illustrator. Somehow I doubt this will happen, but thanks to the magic of magazines, publishing and staggered printing, we have a full review of Illustrator and its new companions in this very issue of PCW. Remarkable!

What's your type?

A wise person once said: "Typographic arrangement should achieve for the reader what voice tone conveys to the listener." No matter how powerful the written words with which you are dealing, the font style, the type size and the arrangement of these words on the page can make or break your message.

If you want someone's attention, huge characters may not necessarily be the best approach. An enormous amount of empty white space with tiny type in the middle may be more striking. A long line of text may bore or confuse the reader, who will end up looking elsewhere. Try playing around with the leading (space between lines of text) and the kerning or tracking (space between individual characters), both of which can make a difference to how your type looks.

How about the fonts themselves? Most of us have more fonts than we know what to do with, so many people end up trying to get their money's worth by fitting as many varieties on a single page as possible. Unfortunately, not only does this end up looking like a proper dog's dinner, but often, the actual type styles chosen are totally unsuitable for the message your words are trying to convey.

A quick lesson in style is to try to stick to the least number of fonts as possible on a single page. For variety, use different weights from the same family: set a headline or attention-grabbing text in bold, for example. Take the Helvetica, Arial or Futura families for instance, which consist of many different weights of type, from stick-thin to the fattest, boldest characters you've ever seen. Because they're based on the same shapes, they work well together.

Once you've toyed with the idea of trying different weights of the same font, you have to decide what style of font you're going to go for. Should it be official-looking, ornate, twirly, messy, quirky, neat or abstract? This, of course, is down to what you've written and the kind of response you want from the reader. A company report shouldn't really be in anything other than a nice, respectable font, whereas a party invitation is the ideal place to try out all those letters made from sausages and bananas. On the other hand, a serious message in a trivial font, or vice versa, can offer a striking contrast that is almost guaranteed to start people thinking.

The best advice is to try many combinations until you get the effect you are looking for. It is also a good idea to show it to other people in order to judge their response — which is often unexpected!



Adobe Illustrator 7 remarkably arrives for Windows, and is reviewed in this issue

Suitable	Not so suitable
Annual Report	Annual Report
Cool Designs	Cool Designs
It's party time!	It's party time!
Mushroom flan	Mushroom flan
TRENDY RECORDS	Trendy Records
I hereby resign	I hereby resign
Final Demand	Final Demand
I love you	I LOVE YOU

It's a matter of taste what fonts you want to use for which effect, but the above may give you some ideas of occasions when one may be more suitable than another. From the top: • The Annual Report of a large, official company should probably be set in a serious font like Times, as opposed to the Orange font, which looks a little trivial. • A cool design company may want to use a trendy font such as Meta, rather than conservative-looking Times. • If it's party time, you can wheel out wild fonts like Twang and avoid the somewhat staid Palatino. • The handwriting-styled Elli is perfect for food descriptions, whereas plain Helvetica just sits there. • Dolce Vita was used by the trendy record label Talkin' Loud, which wouldn't be seen dead using New York. • When it's time to resign, a sober font like Palatino, perhaps italicised, would be better than Mekanik — unless you're a type designer, of course! • No-one likes receiving final demands, which is why Courier, looking like a machine, is more suitable than the rather pally BrodyEF. • The phrase "I love you" should never really be typed, but when it must appear in print, a nice script font like Pablo (based on Picasso's own handwriting) would be far better than the rather sinister-looking TapeType. (All these fonts are available from FontWorks.)

Type trouble

Type can cause you trouble even before you start using it. I'm talking about the actual font files themselves and what they are doing to your precious system.

Many graphics applications offer a generous quantity of free fonts which you may, understandably, decide to install... after all, they are free. However, all font information sits in your system files, which occupy precious memory.

If you've got hundreds of fonts and are wondering why you keep getting all those "out of memory" messages, then you may

want to embark on a bit of Spring cleaning. Many utilities, including Adobe Type Manager, allow you to organise your fonts into groups.

Sometimes there's the facility to disable fonts, too, which could benefit your system's performance.

PCW Contacts

Any questions or problems? Contact Gordon Laing at the usual PCW address or email graphics@pcw.co.uk.

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