

Tea & graphics: A relaxing review

I've often mentioned the value of doing regular reviews of your design. Failure to examine where you've been and what you've done makes it more difficult to decide where you're going and how to get there.

Here's a twist on the routine design review: I call it "Tea and Graphics," a fun name I came up with when I was an assistant managing editor in charge of the design of a 100,000 circulation daily.

The idea behind Tea and Graphics was to get designers (and others who wanted to be part of the fun) together every couple of months or so to look at the pages they had done. The only requirement was for designers to submit pages for review and comment by all who attended.

And it worked—designers left Tea and Graphics with a better sense of how well they were doing and with more and better ideas for the pages that lie ahead.

Ten tips for Tea and Graphics sessions in your office:

- 1. SCHEDULE** the sessions for every couple of months. More than that may be too much.
- 2. APPOINT** someone to gather pdf files from designers a week ahead of the session. Yes, they want their work reviewed but news designers are busy and may forget to submit those pdf files. A gentle reminder helps.



Even your best pages can be improved upon—with a little help from your friends.

- 3. BRING IN** some pizza and Cokes—or coffee and donuts if it's a morning session. Eats are a treat for some—and a draw for others.
- 4. DON'T FORGET** the video projector. If yours is a small paper and you don't have a projector, then show your pdf slides on a large-screen monitor.

5. GIVE IT TIME. Allow a couple of hours. Remember, this is supposed to be relaxed and fun. It's not a meeting...it's just a few people talking about design.

6. INVITE the entire newsroom. Reporters—even stringers—may have some fresh insights to share about how a story they wrote could have been better illustrated and designed.

7. KEEP the discussion constructive—we all want to know how we could have done something better.

8. ENCOURAGE response. If a pdf pops up and no one has a comment, you can always ask the designer what he/she was trying to accomplish with the page or package.

9. PICK A WINNER and award a prize. One of the pages you'll review is usually better than others. If two or three pages are tops, there's nothing wrong with calling it a tie and giving out multiple awards. The awards themselves can be something with value, like a \$20 gift certificate, or something fun like a propeller beanie.

10. TAKE NOTES and share them. Send a quick outline of key points that arose during the discussion. Not only does it serve as a reminder, but it can also help you raise the bar for your design.

Call it Tea and Graphics. Call it Pizza and Picas. Call it whatever—but call it every couple of months.



'101 HENNINGER HELPFUL HINTS is filled with so many good ideas. You'll find yourself asking: "Why didn't I think of that?"

Kevin Slimp
Director
Institute of Newspaper Technology

FREE DESIGN EVALUATION: Ed Henninger offers design evaluations—at no charge and with no obligation—to readers of this column.

ED HENNINGER is an independent newspaper consultant and Director of Henninger Consulting.

Offering comprehensive newspaper design services including redesigns, workshops, design training and design evaluations.

www.henningerconsulting.com
edh@henningerconsulting.com
803-327-3322