



Ink Matters

A quarterly newsletter from EasyRead Copywriting™

Spring
2003

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Target Your Market with Illustration

When you add a graphic to your written document, are you enhancing a single message or telling a story? Kristine Johnson from Cognition Studios explains the difference.

“A graphic is a simplified symbol used to quickly relay a single message, like a computer icon or road sign. An illustration, on the other hand, tells a story—one image that communicates on multiple levels.”

She points to a particular asthma illustration as a classic example: a boy in pajamas using an inhaler. The dominate message is the use of a medical device. The secondary mes-

sage is that he has allergies. You know this because named allergens make up the fabric pattern in his pajamas. In the background of the illustration is a lung. “This illustration is one image with multiple levels of communication that tell a story,” says Johnson.

Most people will look at a picture before reading the text. An effective picture strengthens text and simplifies the message, she adds.

Three things you should consider when adding an illustration or graphic are:

1. Look at your text. Some information can only be told through a

graphic. Example: a bus schedule.

2. You want your reader to learn from what they see. Does your graphic teach?
3. Make sure your picture matches the tone of your message.

When you illustrate your text, you not only increase comprehension and retention, but you also make it possible to reach a wider audience and cross cultural barriers. “This trend is called ‘crossing borders,’” says Johnson, “and you see more and more examples in the marketplace as our communities diversify.”

You can contact Cognition Studio at <http://www.cognitionstudio.com>.

More “Easy to Read” Tips

1. Use positive statements.
2. Justify your left margin; use a ragged right margin.
3. Make need-to-know information obvious & up front .
4. Use dark fonts on a light background.

Write It Easy to Read

Writing information so it’s easy to read is not about dumbing down the information. It’s about clear, concise communication.

What follows are two writing examples: the first is the original text followed by a revised version. Concise writing saves time, money, and space.

Original text:

Students of Everyday Mathematics are exposed to a variety of processes and procedures. These provide students with the opportunity to select and develop individual strategies and problem solving skills within their own comfort range while at the same time working to their full potential.

Revised text:

Students of Everyday Mathematics work in a supportive, hands-on environment as they learn how to solve math problems. They apply learned skills at their own pace, while being encouraged to work at their full potential.

More than 27 million Americans over the age of 17 cannot read well enough to understand a poison warning or instructions on an aspirin bottle.

—National Council on Patient Information and Education

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Kristina Anderson has been in the freelance writing and editing business since 1990. Her wide range of experience includes managing retail stores, volunteers, and nonprofit programs. She works with health promotion publishers, health providers, nonprofit organizations, literacy organizations, marketing agencies, educational institutions, technical companies, corporations, book publishers, and authors. Her expertise includes writing for low-literacy and limited English-speaking audiences and assessing readability and literacy levels of printed materials.

Kristina works at home in Seattle's Central District. She lives with two dogs, one cat, and her wonderful, entertaining teenage son, Pepper. She's a voracious reader, book award juror, community volunteer, and not a master gardener, but she loves it anyway.

Keep in mind...

- ⇒ Be concrete and immediate with your written message. Most people think in terms of what's relevant *right now*.
- ⇒ Your audience may not need easy-to-read information, but they'll appreciate and profit from it. And so will you.
- ⇒ Afraid of offending your audience with simple information? Don't be. Write it easy to read, then direct your audience to more in-depth information.

Tips for Group Testing:

- * Chose a convenient location with parking.
- * Provide reimbursement or incentives, such as good food and beverages.
- * If you are working with a multi-cultural audience, provide interpreters.
- * Limit the testing session to two hours.

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Testing Materials: Get Inside Your Customer's Head

When you develop sales materials, do you second guess what members of your audience do with them? Do they read and take action, or toss and move on to the next piece of mail? One way to increase chances they'll read and take action is to pretest what you've written with your intended audience. It can save you time and money, especially if done early.

When developing materials, businesses usually have an idea about their audience's needs and wants, and how they access and assimilate information. Testing, however, can offer further insights into how they think, how they learn, what is meaningful, and what is relevant.

Testing is often an involved process, but it doesn't need to be. You can conduct a small focus group (7-10 people) or one-on-one surveys that provide invaluable insight—without spending a lot of time or money.

Before you test:

- ◇ Decide what information you want to learn and what you will do with what you learn. This will help you ask the right questions.
- ◇ Make sure participants represent your audience.
- ◇ Create a list of open-ended questions. Ask "What will you do with this information?" rather than "Will you use this information?"

- ◇ Test ease of use as well as content. You want your audience to easily access your message.
- ◇ Consider how you will disseminate the materials. Use the media that will be most effective for your audience.

Look to members of your audience to tell you what works and what doesn't work, and listen to what they say. They are the experts, and their characteristics should influence each step you take as you develop your materials.

For questions about, or help with, testing materials, contact Kristina at kristina@easyreadcopywriting.com.

For further reading:

<http://www.talkingquality.gov>;

<http://ncrel.org/info/notes/fall02/step1.htm>