

design tips

Smaller ... but Smarter



Ed Henninger

By Ed Henninger

So, the boss just made some cuts.

Tomorrow, two of your friends will be looking for jobs. And one of them was an editor who did some of the page design for your weekly. It's now down to you and the sports editor to crank out pages every week – at least until the economy gets better.

Stuff happens. We can't wish it away. So now we have to show that we can work smaller ... but smarter.

We have to find some way to stretch our already-tight time so we can get everything done.

Here are some suggestions:

PLAN: Set out your schedule to give yourself plenty of time to design. If it used to take you half a day, start by allowing yourself a full day to get all those pages done. You can always shorten that time as you gain confidence and experience at doing more pages.

WORK AHEAD: You don't have to do all those pages on deadline, do ya? Surely there are some – perhaps the community calendar page or Lifestyles – that you can be working on days ahead of time. Certainly, there's no reason to hold onto the Opinion page until deadline day.

GET HELP: There's no sacrilege in asking the ad design staff for a little bit of help now and then. Perhaps they'll agree to clear away some of the pages that don't require much time, like the calendar or the church listings. And maybe they'd welcome the opportunity to help with an illustration when you don't have time to run out for that feature photo. The folks in accounting might be able to give you that chart you need to go with the city tax story.

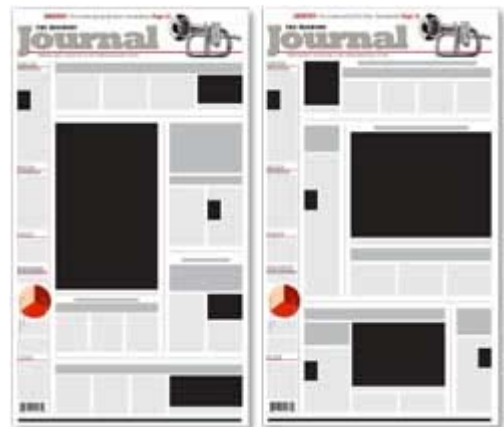
GIVE HELP: Look for ways you can help out, too: As long as you're out on that photo shoot, you might just be able to get a quick shot of that new business for the new ads the advertising department is planning on.

MODELS: For most small newspapers, there are only about a half-dozen different approaches to page 1. Create some models so you don't have to re-invent the wheel with every issue. Your page doesn't have to be designed exactly to the model, though. The idea is to give yourself a place to start – and models do just that. If you're interested in seeing ideas for page 1 models, contact me and I'll be happy to send some your way!

STICK WITH IT: This is not the time to search for new reporting methods and new design approaches. This is more like "hunker-down-in-the-trenches" time. Stick with what you know, but do it faster and better. No one – including readers – ever expects miracles from you. But they do have a right to expect quality, professional work, even if times are tough.

BE CONSISTENT: Give your readers the same newspaper from issue to issue. Readers want a paper that's readable, reliable and credible. And they depend on you to be a stable source of community news. Even if you have fewer pages with tighter space, they still want to find pages and content elements in predictable places.

Even in tough times – and even with a smaller staff – you can still do professional work. Yes, you're going to work harder, but the key is to also work smarter.



Page models can save you valuable time now that you have more pages to clear.

FREE DESIGN EVALUATION: Ed Henninger offers design evaluations – at no charge and with no obligation – to readers of this column. For more information, check the **FREEBIE** page on his Web site: www.henningerconsulting.com

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