

Tabloid Design: Small is Good, Too



Ed Henninger

By Ed Henninger

Newsprint costs being what they are, more and more publishers are toying with the idea of switching to tabloid format.

Some still feel that a tabloid has less integrity and that readers just don't believe it's a "serious" newspaper. Reader feedback, however, shows that they're fine with a tab format as long as the journalism is credible.

Readers also like the fact that a tabloid is physically easier to read: It doesn't take as much space on the desk in the morning and it's easier to fold and handle.

The design issues with a smaller format derive from the fact that it is...well...a smaller format. But small is good, too.

Some suggestions:

1. Even though you have less space on a page, you can still carry a dominant photo. It means you'll have to write tighter...again.
2. You can still carry teasers on page 1, but they have to be kept tight so you can have maximum space available for your front page news packages.
3. If you want to keep valuable page 1 space for stories and photos only, consider creating an inside teaser/index package for page 2. If you can give this package strong visual impact – perhaps by adding a teaser to an upcoming feature or two – you can probably find an advertiser who's interested in buying onto that page on a contract basis.
4. Create a template that calls for a four-column standard. This approach allows you to set up and sell modular ad sizes. Of course, this may require some chats with advertisers over the change in their ad sizes. Some may take extra hand-holding and convincing.
5. Five column design is possible on open pages. On those pages where you're going for a softer, feature look, three columns can work well.
6. Consider flush left type for your text. Properly set, it injects some needed negative space into your design and obviates the need to concern yourself with the word-spacing in text wraps.
7. Sequencing is an important issue to consider for a tabloid – much more important than in a broadsheet, which has the advantage of separate sections. For example, should your sports pages go toward the back, in front of classifieds – or do you place your lead sports page on the back page and go forward to other sports pages?
8. A broadsheet may have the advantage of pullout sections but a tabloid has something that may even work better for you: A centerspread. Take those two pages smack in the middle of the tabloid and try something special with them. In one of my tabloid designs, we made it the daily feature package, much like the front of a broadsheet living section.
9. How about a pullout section? With a tabloid, you can do that whenever you want (make sure you promote it properly on page 1). Readers will find the occasional pullout a treat.
10. Don't forget the design of your classifieds. The temptation may exist to go to six or seven classified columns, especially if you're selling by the line. But take care to not run classifieds so narrow that you create improper letter spacing and word spacing.

To most readers, a tabloid approach is just another way of doing things. Do it right and they'll thank you for it.

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