Everyone's Guide to

SUCCESSFUL PUBLICATIONS

How to Produce Powerful Brochures, Newsletters, Flyers, and Business Communications, Start to Finish

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Everyone's Guide to Successful Publications

How to Produce Powerful Brochures, Newsletters, Flyers, and Business Communications, Start to Finish

Elizabeth Adler

To my father

Matthew Alexander Fouratt

When I was small he said:

Look closely at the marigold.

Notice the pattern the seeds make

when the petals are gone.

How can this be an accident?

1912 – 1988

◆

Thanks

The thoughts and efforts of many people have gone into this book.
I sincerely appreciate each person's contribution.

- ◆ Pat Anderson
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And most of all, thank you, Richard Adler.

Preface

Once I had a job designing letterheads for a large "not-for-profit" institution. I did fancy letterheads, bold letterheads, dignified letterheads, and plain letterheads. The criteria for a successful letterhead was one that looked good *but not too good*, because if it looked too good, it looked too expensive.

As I worked on these good-but-not-too-good letterheads, I wondered if what I did to them really made a difference. Would it matter if I used red ink instead of blue? Was one typeface really better than another? Did it matter whether I used lines, pictures, or graphic squiggles? Was there anything I could do to that piece of paper to increase its impact? And if so, what?

Another time I wrote a column for a newspaper, and the same questions came to mind. What could I do to make the meaning clearer? Would it matter what format I used? Would interviews or quizzes or questions and answers convey the point better?

And I wondered about the people who looked at my design and read my articles. What were they like? Would they respond the same way I did? How could I make my work more interesting and comfortable for them? What marketing wisdom could be applied to the printed piece to make it more appropriate and appealing?

Gradually it became clearer that working successfully with print involves three parts: marketing, writing, and graphic design; and that the whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts. The whole is *communication*. And the important question about communication in print is *what works?*

So I took a job at a university research project because I wanted to find out what worked in print. There I had the opportunity to try out new formats for printed pieces, and get follow up data on their effectiveness. As this invisible field of "printed materials" emerged and became more and more visible, the importance of an *integrated* approach became evident.

Next I wanted to try out my theories of print communication away from the university, so I developed a print communication program for a corporate setting. All along I'd been going back and forth between the profit and non-profit worlds. In both I observed the people and the politics involved in developing printed materials. This exposure provided valuable insight into the process of producing printed pieces. It helped clarify what goes into making powerful print, and what makes it ineffectual. These observations are woven throughout this book.

There are as many opinions and approaches to developing and producing print as there are personalities to go with them. This book is based on my own day-to-day experiences as an art director, designer, writer, editor, and project director over many years. Trial and error is a good teacher. I have tried many approaches, and I speak confidently of the mistakes that can be made because I've made most of them. There is no single, set, or *right way* to do anything. There is just what works.

For the past several years I have been consulting with different kinds of organizations, and speaking on communication through the medium of print. I have met many people struggling to put out publications that were both effective and affordable. They often ask if there is a book that sums up this integrated approach to print. I didn't know of any, and tried to find one. After some serious looking, I realized there wasn't one. So I wrote this book. I sincerely hope you find it helpful.

Elizabeth Adler
Palo Alto, California
Fall, 1992

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Understanding the Medium

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Print That Works

Imagine this: On a large cluttered bulletin board your poster is the one that stands out. On a table full of brochures, yours is the one that gets picked up. In the daily stack of mail, your flyer is the one that gets read. Why? Because it catches the eye, it holds attention, and it's easy to read. People are impressed, persuaded, and inspired to act; they pick up the phone or a pencil. You get your message across.

Possible? Yes! Hard to do? No. Expensive? Not necessarily. It's more a matter of know-how than cost. Just as many expensive brochures get ignored as less costly ones.

Not that money doesn't help, it does. But only if you know what you're doing with it. The success of your printed piece depends more on knowing what is good and what isn't, and what questions to ask at each stage of development. The better you understand the nature of this medium, the better results you can expect to get from using it.

Who This Book Is For

If you use paper to communicate information, this book is for you. It doesn't matter what your printed piece is about—the same ideas can be applied to printed materials with any content, regardless of the topic. (I will use the phrases *printed materials* and *printed pieces* interchangeably throughout this book.)

It also doesn't matter how you produce your printed piece. Effective communication is not determined by the method of preparation. The same principles apply to developing strong printed materials whether you produce them the traditional way or on a computer.

Desktop publishers

Recent technological breakthroughs in desktop publishing have given many more people the opportunity to produce their own publications. The computer is now commonly used to prepare brochures, flyers, newsletters, reports, and many other printed pieces. Users often have no background or training in how to make their printed pieces effective.

Now that the first wave of desktop publishers are familiar with pagemaking programs, fonts, and electronic art, they are discovering that it takes more than dexterity with a mouse to produce a strong printed piece. The technical skills involved with desktop publishing are mechanical—they can be learned relatively quickly from books, classes, and friends. What is more difficult for desktop publishers to learn is

what to *do* with the technical skills once they've got them. That's what this book is about.

If you are a desktop publisher, you will be spending more time creating and producing publications than you will be learning how to use computers and software (hopefully!). Say the ratio of time you spend learning technical skills is 20%, and the time you spend employing them is 80%. It's what you do with that 80% that determines whether your message goes into readers' minds or into the trash.

The focus of this book is *the printed piece itself*, not any one of the fields related to it. So it doesn't matter how much (or how little) experience you have had in any particular area. An understanding of the medium involves more than just experience in any single aspect of it, such as writing, design, or desktop publishing.

Whether you are producing printed materials as part of a team, hiring a pro, or doing them entirely on your own, each situation is addressed. This book has been written especially for people in the following environments:

Corporate managers, administrators, and in-house publishing groups

The burden of putting out printed materials often falls on the "in-house" staff, especially as more and more offices get desktop publishing systems. Managers and administrators can now save time and money by producing their own printed pieces. In so doing they eliminate the hassles of depending on others for brochures, newsletter, and reports. *Everyone's Guide to Successful Publications* has guidelines, ideas, and suggestions for those putting out print in a for-profit setting.

Non-profit organizations

You may work for a local, county, state, or federal agency, or a hospital or medical group. Or perhaps you work for a school, university, museum or library, or it could be for a political organization, or you may volunteer your time to some organization. Most people in non-profit organizations are dependent on their printed pieces to communicate with their constituency. And most are interested in improving them, especially if there is a way to do so inexpensively. Whatever kind of not-for-profit service you're in, you need print that works.

Small businesses

If you have a small business or are starting your own company, you are probably well aware of the need for print to promote it. A good-looking letterhead, business card, billing form, brochure, and advertisements are all a part of keeping your enterprise alive and thriving. The more effective your printed pieces are, the more you'll profit.

Students

This book is for students in fields related to print, such as graphic design, writing, advertising, journalism, and communications. It provides a comprehensive picture of the entire print production process. It is also for students in fields that depend heavily on printed materials to communicate information. They include areas like marketing and others related to the public, such as public health, public policy, and public relations. As a matter of fact, whatever field you're in, the ability to communicate effectively in print is a real advantage.

The Invisible Medium

What comes to mind when you see the words "printed materials"? Chances are it doesn't send your imagination soaring. Compared with broadcast media, with newer modes of communication like fax machines

and electronic mail, and even with newspapers and magazines (a different order of print media), this catch-all category called "printed materials" often fails to elicit a certain—um—electricity.

That's partly because printed materials are a form of print that *works*. "Works" in the sense of "work horse"; of getting a job done. Printed materials are the brochures, newsletters, flyers, proposals, booklets, and reports that keep the day-to-day business of this society humming. They are the everyday link between organizations and the people they serve. Printed materials are the pieces that inform, describe, solicit and advertise; they notify, inquire, remind, and instruct. Printed materials are hard working, but they usually don't evoke much excitement.

And strange as it may seem, I believe this is partly because of the dull-sounding phrase *printed materials*. The development of the medium has been hampered by the lack of something better to call it. In spite of their continuous use by every business and organization, and in spite of the billions of dollars spent on them, nowhere, to the best of my knowledge, are printed materials studied seriously *as a medium*. I know of no place devoted to its understanding or improvement.

Universities offering advanced degrees in communications, for example, offer them in film, television, radio or journalism, but not in "printed materials" (journalism focuses more on newspapers and magazines than on flyers and brochures). It is also possible to learn about writing or design, but these areas are not studied primarily to facilitate communication through printed materials. Printed materials are almost always secondary to something else.

So as printed materials rarely have center stage or the full focus of attention, the potential of this invisible medium often remains unexplored and unrecognized. Printed materials are, nevertheless, print that *works*, and this time I mean "works" in the sense of *being effective*. The focus of this book is the medium of printed materials, how they work, and what makes them effective.

Here, printed materials are untangled from other disciplines and other media. The booklet, the brochure, the catalog, the flyer, and the newsletter are of central interest, and are respected as powerful means of conveying information. In this context, we can look at the printed piece from every angle, and see what makes it succeed or fail. If we are to use this medium to its full potential, we must be able to envision possibilities that go beyond the familiar parameters. The printed piece is a powerful tool for those who know how to use it.

An Integrated Approach

Everyone's Guide to Successful Publications is about communicating effectively in print, and that comes about by the successful integration of writing, design, and marketing. The key word here is *integration*, because it takes skills and knowledge from several disciplines to make a printed piece really outstanding. With an integrated approach, insights from other fields can be applied to the printed piece to increase its power to communicate. A lot can be learned from psychology or marketing, for instance, about how to make the printed piece more appealing.

An integrated approach calls for print producers to think differently about the way they develop their printed pieces. When writers think more about how their words are formulated to *look* on a page, for example, what they write makes the printed piece stronger. When designers concern themselves with *communication* as much as they do with aesthetics, the piece they design is more likely to fulfill its purpose. When print project directors give thought to marketing and the way they package their information, the piece has more impact. And when everyone involved looks at the printed piece as a vehicle for delivering information, it will be more likely to do so. As McLuhan said, "the medium is the message."

1 What Is "Print Media"?

Sometimes printed materials are referred to as "print media." "Media" is defined as a means of communication that reaches the general public. So all vehicles of communication such as radio, television, film, newspapers, and printed materials are "media" ("medium" is the singular). This book focuses exclusively on the medium of print, and on printed materials specifically (that is, anything that comes off a printing press with the exception of newspapers and magazines). Thirty different kinds are described in Sidebar 2.

print (print), *v.t.* **1.** to produce (a text, picture, etc.) by applying inked types, plates, blocks, or the like, to paper or other material either by direct pressure or indirectly by offsetting an image onto an intermediate roller. **2.** to reproduce (a design or pattern) by engraving on a plate or block. **3.** to form a design or pattern upon, as by stamping with an engraved plate or block: *to print calico.* **4.** to cause (a manuscript, text, etc.) to be published in print. **5.** to write in letters like those commonly used in print: *Print your name on these forms.* **6.** *Computers.* to produce (data) in legible alphanumeric or graphic form. **7.** to indent or mark by pressing something into or upon (something). **8.** to produce or fix (an indentation, mark, etc.), as by pressure. **9.** to impress on the mind, memory, etc. **10.** to fingerprint. **11.** to apply (a thing) with pressure so as to leave an indentation, mark, etc.: *The horses printed their hoofs on the wet grass.* **12.** *Photog.* to produce a positive picture from (a negative) by the transmission of light. —*v.i.* **13.** to take impressions from type, an engraved plate, etc., as in a press. **14.** to produce by means of a reproduction process: *to print in color; to print unevenly.* **15.** to make an image by means of ink, chemical action, etc., as type, engraved plates, etc.: *This type is too worn to print cleanly.* **16.** to write in characters such as are used in print: *He'd rather print than use longhand.* **17.** to follow the vocation of a printer. **18. print in,** *Photog.* See **burn** (def. 32). **19. print out,** *Computers.* to make a printout of. —*n.* **20.** the state of being printed. **21.** printed lettering, esp. with reference to character, style, or size: *This print is too large for footnotes.* **22.** printed material. **23.** a printed publication, as a newspaper or magazine. **24.** newsprint. **25.** a picture, design, or the like, printed from an engraved or otherwise prepared block, plate, etc. **26.** an indentation, mark, etc., made by the pressure of one body or thing on another. **27.** something with which an impression is made; a stamp or die. **28.** a fingerprint. **29.** *Textiles.* **a.** a design or pattern on cloth made by dyeing, weaving, or printing with engraved rollers, blocks of wood, stencils, etc. **b.** a cloth so treated. **c.** an article of apparel made of this cloth. **30.** something that has been subjected to impression, as a pat of butter. **31.** *Photog.* a picture, esp. a positive made from a negative. **32.** any reproduced image, as a blueprint. **33.** *Motion Pictures, Television.* a positive copy of a completed film or filmed program ready for showing; release print. **34. in print. a.** in printed form; published. **b.** (of a book or the like) still available for purchase from the publisher. **35. out of print.** (of a book or the like) no longer available for purchase from the publisher. —*adj.* **36.** of, for, or comprising newspapers and magazines: *print media.* [1250–1300; (n.) ME *prent(e)*, *print(e)*, < OF *priente* impression, print, n. use of fem. ptp. of *preindre* to PRESS¹ < L *premere;* (v.) ME *prenten,* deriv. of the n.]

An integrated approach to printed materials also calls for a look at the *whole process* of print production, step by step, start to finish. Producing a printed piece requires attention to many things. You have to deal with the budget, and know something about the people to whom the printed piece is going. You need an angle so your piece can get and hold attention. You have to get it written, designed, produced, and distributed. And some understanding of the nature of the medium is useful, along with knowledge of the environment into which it goes.

Everyone's Guide to Successful Publications is about communication. Everything you do to a printed piece either *enhances* the communication, or becomes *a barrier* to it. How you organize the page, the words you use, the colors, the type, and the paper you choose, the illustrations you include—these are the elements that determine the success of your printed piece.

Ways to Use This Book

This book has been carefully planned to be used in a number of different ways. Here are some of the possibilities:

As a magazine

You can skim through *Everyone's Guide to Successful Publications* like a magazine. Or glance through the five pages at the end of this chapter. They have an overview of thirty kinds of printed materials. Look at the pictures and read the captions, or read the sections that catch your attention first or interest you most. You'll be drawn to the parts that address your needs.

As a quick reference

There are 80 sidebars in this book. They have gray screens and consecutively numbered tabs to make them easy to find. Sidebars cover a wide range of

topics related to the print production process, from the very beginning (like *Getting Good Help*, Sidebar 9), to the end (like *Ways to Distribute Your Piece*, Sidebar 79). Most contain practical and immediately applicable information. If you need a good opener for a piece you're writing, for instance, Sidebars 26 and 27 suggest possibilities; if you need color ideas for a two color printing job, Sidebar 52 lists many; if you are about to check your piece on the press, Sidebar 76 has a checklist of what to look for. Sidebar 74 has questions to ask printers; 78 has tips for working with them.

For specific information

You don't have to read this book cover to cover. It has seven parts and twenty-five chapters (see the table of contents for an overview). If you are a writer, for example, and you want to know more about design, you can go directly to that part, and read the seven chapters on design. Or you can go directly to Chapter 12, dealing with layout for writers. If you need to select a paper for your printed piece by tomorrow, you can read just the chapter on paper.

If you want some guidelines for evaluating a logo or ideas for ways to come up with one in a hurry, the *Logo Evaluation Checklist* (Sidebar 64) or *Quick and Easy Logos* (Sidebar 61) will help. If you need some clarification on type or inexpensive ways to illustrate a piece you are doing, see *Understanding Type*, page 201, or *Art and Photography*, page 241. If you are producing a brochure to describe your organization, *How to Write a Basic Brochure*, page 157, lays out the steps, and takes you through them. This is one of four chapters in Section 4, *Writing for Printed Materials*.

As a planning tool

You can use this book as a routine planning tool. Reading through the section called *Getting Organ-*

Kinds of Printed Pieces 2

Thirty kinds of printed materials are listed below (placement in these categories is not hard and fast). See pages 9 through 13 for a description of each one.

Business Papers

- Letterheads
- Labels
- Memo Sheets
- Business cards
- Forms and invoices
- Notepads

Information Pieces

- Brochures
- Booklets
- Manuals
- Articles
- Tip sheets
- Menus
- Newsletters
- Directories
- Catalogs
- Data sheets
- Programs
- Binders

Promotion Pieces

- Ads
- Posters
- Post cards
- Flyers
- Calendars
- Ad specialties

Task-Oriented Pieces

- Proposals
- Reports
- Invitations
- Questionnaires
- Presentation folders
- Fund-raising letters