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Critique of Brochure from Spongeorama’s Cruise Lines

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 Tarpon Springs, Florida, is home to a dock side stretch of little shops just waiting for visitors to browse the shelves for souvenirs. Along with these traditional shops filled with seashells, sponges and t-shirts are boat captains waiting to take you on a sightseeing tour to look for dolphins. Similar to carnival barkers, these seafaring men call out to passersby in the hopes of securing paying customers. People are tempted by promises of playful dolphins coming up to the boat and a show put on by sponge divers descending to the ocean floor to retrieve natural sponges.

 On a recent October trip to visit my two sisters living in Tampa, the three of us decided to drive over to Tarpon Springs and walk through the shops just to see what was there. During this outing, I picked up a flier that I thought would be a great advertising graphic to critique for this class. It was from a little kiosk-looking set up that resembled a tiki hut. The brochure was a standard tri-fold design with lots of color and big bold lettering. Closer inspection gave me quite a different opinion of the brochure.

 First of all, the front cover was a series of signs posted on a pole and listed the many opportunities awaiting paying customers. The list included dolphins, beach fun, shelling, exploring, and a narrated nature tour. What wasn’t listed was how much time was actually devoted to each of these activities. Did customers pay for more “beach fun” and less “dolphins?” That would certainly make a difference to me if I paid to take the tour. The tour times listed were set at 2 hour intervals. The tour name, Spongeorama’s Cruise Lines, and the list of activities were centered on the page in the traditional, but old style of alignment. While there was a nice gradient of colors from yellow to orange used for the text, the font sizes were too similar to even be noticed. There was hardly any text contrast here on the front page. A very tiny area in the upper right hand side of the cover indicated that customers would get free parking with a paid tour. If that was intended to be some sort of enticement, it needs to be larger so that it would stand out. A similar set-up was found on the bottom left hand side with a handicap symbol placed there. There was absolutely no white space on the brochure cover.

 The inside of the brochure was similar to the front in that every inch was covered with a fill cover, text or some sort of graphic element. It certainly looked like there was a lot to do during the tour. The problem with these pages is that the reader never really knows where to start reading first or what is the most important activity that is provided. If you look closely at it, these pages are supposed to be where information about different types of cruises offered by Spongeorama’s Cruise Lines. There is a two-panel wide photo of the boat, Yiannis’ Dolphin, at the bottom of the left and center panels. It is almost too big and seems clunky in the brochure. The right side panel has a nice aerial shot of the cruise’s route, but it too could be reduced in size. Shrinking both of these photos would allow more white space to be added for clarity among the different cruise options.

 Scattered throughout these interior pages are red cut outs that contain advertising points such as free parking and margaritas on board. The placement of theses cut outs tends to diminish the purpose of even having them in there in the first place. Proximity is definitely not one of the design elements begin used here. Grouping these items would make them stand out more and make the reader take notice. The tour prices are indicated in boxes. The problem with the prices is that it just looks like two clusters because there is no thing separating one type of cruise from the other. Although the regular cruise has a check box next to it, the limited cruise has a similar box with the only difference being slightly rounded corners.

 There is a great graphic of playful dolphins in the middle inside panel that almost gets lost among all the other area of information. The outside left panel has great cameo photos that would be better used elsewhere. The center back panel gives some historical information about Spongeorama Sponge Factory. It boasts that it is the “one and only original world famous since 1968.” That would be a great fact to have on the front cover. This panel also offers a $3.00 discount coupon that can be used at the Spongeorama Gift Shop if customers pay to see the sponge diving show.

 My recommendations for improving this brochure would definitely focus on clearing up some of the clutter and adding more white space to make it easier to read. The overall composition of the brochure lacks a focus that is critical to design success (Serafini, 2011). Using center alignment for the cruise name might be used if the list of activities was left aligned for a cleaner look. The different activities can be set off by a bullet in the image of a dolphin or seashell.

 I would place a small amount of historical information on the front such as “since 1968” in larger font to add a contrasting element. The graphic of playful dolphins in the sunset waters would look perfect on the front if the brochure could be designed on a horizontal axis instead of a vertical one. Attracting tourists, especially those with children, could be easily accomplished by a more predominant display of the dolphins. The cameo shots mentioned earlier serve as photographic proof of tour activities and are beneficial visual advertisements (Messaris, 1997).

 Throughout the brochure, the company phone number is listed seven times, some in text and some shown in pictures of the boat. I would limit the placement of the phone number to the front panel and possibly somewhere in the middle sections where cruise information is listed. It just seems like too much clutter with the number visible so many times. I don’t think that this is the best use of the repetition design principle. In one instance, “call to reserve your seat today” is listed above the phone number. This is a critical point that should be highlighted more and not buried within a lot of clutter.

 The inside panels should be filled with tour descriptions, times and prices that are left aligned for easier reading. More contrast should be added so that a distinction among the different tours is easy to pick out. I would definitely keep the photo showing people getting off the boat as it provides information about how customers will be accessing beach. I don’t think the other large picture of the boat is necessary. By removing that element, some of the other areas can be expanded and white space can be added to these pages as well. All of those red cuts outs could now be strategically placed on these pages in close proximity to the items they describe.

 I would move the aerial shot of the tour route to the outside center panel. People picking up the brochure would then be able to easily see just when the boat travels without having to open the brochure and look through the other items just to find it. I might reduce the size of the photo to fit in only half of a panel. In the area below the photo, I would left align a short list of cruise highlights such as:

* Dolphin Viewing
* Beach Fun
* Private Parties
* Special Events

 I would make the whole sponge diving show $3.00 coupon a separate item all together that could be easily inserted into the middle of the brochure. This coupon opportunity is like a bonus to customers, so I would treat it as something special. By removing the coupon from the main brochure, visitors could still have a nice keepsake of their visit to Tarpon Springs that can be placed in a scrapbook.

 The objectives of IT 567 are to know the design elements of Contrast, Repetition, Alignment and Proximity (CRAP), know when to use them, and more importantly, know when they are not being used properly. Along with classroom lectures, I have taken part in several webinars on design one of which focused on tips for making memorable designs. As was clearly lacking in this brochure, white space should not be seen as wasted space to be filled with even more content. It should be be used to offer the reader a brief resting place among the information being presented. Overwhelming readers will only detract from the purpose of the brochure. As is often mentioned during classroom critiques, getting the proper balance will lead to successful designs.

References

Messaris, P. (1997). Visual "literacy": Image, minds, and reality. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 53-59.

Serafini, F. (2011). Expanding perspectives for comprehending visual images in multimodal texts. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 342-350.

Brochure Images



