

THE BLAZE GUIDE TO DEMYSTIFYING DESIGN



Design that sets your brand on fire!

KNOCK OUT!



Good design helps drive awareness, attraction, and action. It influences the perception of your business and enhances your marketing materials, encouraging views and readership.

Design is a big deal!



NIFTY

Today, there are options far beyond professional design software. You can access apps on your phone or use plug-and-play solutions online. You can get designs in a jiffy from sites like Fiverr or hire your 16-year-old niece who needs the dough.

Surely, we can agree that owning and completing the online tutorial to use your QuickBooks software doesn't make you an accountant... and the same is true for design software so it's a peachy idea to learn some fundamental design principles.

Whether you do it yourself or hire someone else, you need to know the basics so you can direct the designs promoting your business or personal brand. It is also helpful when providing feedback if you have an understanding when (and perhaps why) something doesn't look "quite right."

Good design helps you get the gig, ya dig?

FIRE UP!

Every time video has arrived on the scene, it has changed the way people view the world. Make your mark with videos that are a blast to create and view (so more people do)!

* LIGHTEN UP

Fire up your video with good lighting, and lots of it. Natural light is best, and face your light source when you film!

Soft or “flat” light is better as it doesn’t cast a shadow. Experiment to find what lights you up.

* KEEP IT CLEAN

Clean up that background! Not only of clutter, but of distractions. Use a solid color background (even with a sheet, if you must) or use your own working environment.

* STEADY-EDDY

Get off shaky ground and anchor your shot, even if you are using your phone. Don’t hold your camera if you can avoid it.

* ANGLE IT

Add visual interest by cutting from one angle to another. Shift by at least 45 degrees when you change perspective to create contrast.

* RIGHT-O

Turn your camera (or phone) the right way for your preferred channel. A vertical (up-and-down) shot is perfect for TikTok, Reels, or Facebook Lives, but if YouTube is your game, it’s not the same. Be sure you shoot horizontal (landscape, sideways) for that and for broadcast.

* FRAMED

Leave room in your image area to add flare like words, emojis, or other enhancements to tell your story. You don’t want captions on your forehead or even worse, across your mouth.



These tips razz my berries!

SWELL DESIGN ELEMENTS!

VISUAL (Focal Point)

Say more with less by using a strong image as your focal point. Whether a selfie or an interpretation of your Rock Star Customer, images are quickly and easily interpreted, assisting your viewer, visitor, or reader to relate. Illustration and creative typography can replace a photograph for this element.

HEADLINE (Purpose)

This short and sometimes pithy or clever summary is the purpose of your ad. It is the quick-read transference of knowledge to your audience. This main message is the verbal hook created to invite your viewer in. These are not recommended for social media graphic posts unless the image itself is used only to stop traffic and convey meaning. Always use verbal reinforcement if the image seems disconnected from the desired communication.

WORDS (Body Copy, Offer, or Narrative)

Not always necessary (especially accompanying video, in social media images, or on cover pages) and always integral to your website or to enhance SEO, Google My Business, brochures and other materials to educate prospective customers. Your body copy or narrative is helpful in informing your audience about your brand, product or service.

OFFER (Call to Action)

What do you want your viewer to do? Decide the objective of the promotional message and make it clear and concise. The easier your offer is to understand and execute, the more likely your potential customer will respond with your desired outcome. Remember to avoid being too salesy with your offer and consider limiting your offers when posting frequently on a singular channel.

SIGNATURE (Logo)

Try to avoid using your logo as your headline at the top of your advertisement or post. This is your design's prime real estate as it is where scrolling eyes hit first and to capture their attention, it needs to be about them, not about you! Think of it like a letter...you want them to leave the space with their last thought being of your brand, so use your logo as your signature and sign off with it.



LESS IS MORE.

The small-space advertising of today makes it super important to communicate more by saying less. When people are viewing (and scrolling by) on their mobile devices, show-stopping design attracts attention. Limit words on slide decks and write concisely on websites likely to be viewed frequently on mobile devices.

It's the Most!

Babs agrees!



EUREKA!

DESIGN FOUNDATIONS.

Things you should know:

These basics may not win you any awards right away, but they will ensure you have some foundational understanding as you DIY your own designs.

EYE FLOW

A scanning reader's eye will follow a Z pattern if not redirected by solid design principles, so a beginning designer's best practice is to follow the automatic eye flow: Place your headline or focal point at the top (top left if you want to grab attention at first glance. It is the best real estate and first look.)

Then capitalize on the last point of the Z (lower right corner) with your signature (logo), call to action, or thought you want your viewer to leave with. Copy-heavy design (like a blog post) tends to lead the reader into an F-pattern versus the regular Z. This is because (in English and Spanish, at least) we read from left to right and then on to the next line. Keep your most important information or capture at the top of the F.

The use of lines in your design can assist in redirecting eye flow without distracting the reader or disrupting the design. Remember, lines can be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal. They can also be straight, curved, freeform, or zigzagged and they don't have to be solid... they can be broken or implied. (Like Babs pointing to this section from the opposite page!)

SPACE

So much to consider once you have determined the size of your design and how it will be used! You've probably heard the terms white or negative space, balance, symmetry and asymmetry, proximity and alignment, for example.

Let's start small and make it easy:

Set your design up for success with a "law of thirds" grid. This helps you mimic the golden ratio without having to be an advanced designer. With a grid template, you can easily balance your design whether symmetrical or asymmetrical. It will help you place elements in pleasing proximity and alignment without having to check each rule of a list.

White space increases readability and elevates a design... more air makes it feel more sophisticated, valuable, esteemed. Filling every nook and cranny elicits a feeling of variety and high inventory.

HIERARCHY

Find your focus and use size, color, texture, and/or dimension to emphasize it over other items or simply to draw attention.

This is especially important when the design is larger, more complex, or needs to communicate a lot. You may want to highlight different items of text for emphasis or greater readability. In a blog or on a process web page, for example, you will want to draw attention to your entry points. Use design to draw a visitor or viewer back into your content with emphasis, usually with size and weight, or color.

Visual hierarchy showcases different elements based on their importance, either to draw the eye or let it wander. It helps the viewer flow through the design and content in the order you desire, much like a department store directs you to higher priced merchandise.

You can also draw the eye with contrast in color or font by boosting or reducing it.

UNITY

Using a repetitive element or treatment can be one way to build unity in a design and there are other ways to accomplish this, too. Using a theme or complementary vibe in elements to pull your design together is a simplistic way to create unity or try using photographs from one shoot or a single subject from different angles. You may also try filtering imagery with a common color.

Shapes can help build unity as some theories suggest your audience makes sense of a design by grouping the elements together rather than seeing them individually. This is especially true with interesting and appropriate shapes.

DO



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IS
Peachy!

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for 15% off



DON'T

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NEVER:

Never use comic sans or papyrus typefaces. The internet will make a laughing stock of those who do.

Never use a script, cursive, or calligraphic font in ALL CAPS. They are intended for continuity and flow and when used in all capital letters, that continuity is interrupted and provides your audience with a reason to leave your message.



GET A CLUE!

I don't trust Bobby... you know the boy who is always using Papyrus.

Yeah, someone that uses Papyrus isn't trustworthy. Is he the same guy who uses all caps with cursive fonts?

No, you are thinking of Wally.

Oh, I thought Wally was the one who designs with Comic Sans?

They all get me worked up into a hissy fit!

◆ Rockin' Rules

Be accurate! Spelling, punctuation, and grammar are the easiest things for your audience to use in discounting you and your products or services. Make it legible. If they can't read the font, it won't matter what it says.

Keep white space to the outside of your design as a negative border. Avoid rivers of white space running through your design (remember proximity) as they redirect the eyes to follow the river off the page.

Limit font usage to two typefaces in any one design, unless you are a gifted and well-trained designer. When pairing fonts without reference and suggestion, use a hierarchical thought process to choose.

Limit color usage and stick with no more than three colors. One secondary or tertiary color can be used with your colors from your primary brand for contrast, emphasis, or emotional layering. Avoid color discord and check your color choices with a free tool online, if you're unsure.





◆ TIPS

Scale your photos proportionally. Nothing screws up a design like a stretched and distorted image.

Align your text! Whether justified, centered, “rag right” (justified left with a natural flow on the right) or wrapped, ensure your text is readable! Too often, when designing, we ignore the message in favor of making the design look cool. A snazzy design does nothing if it doesn’t help support the message you want to communicate.

Don’t ‘borrow’ images from the internet and don’t mess with raster-based images. A pixelated or copyright-infringed post is frustrating—for you and your viewer. News flash: Creating your images in Adobe Photoshop is a surefire way to get raster-based images that will have pixelation when resized. Instead, use a vector-based image like those created in Adobe Illustrator for crisp imagery. See our directory of royalty-free image sites at blazeexperts.com/blog/free-stock-photo-and-image-directory/

Be consistent within each design and throughout all of them. A common element, typeface, color combination, etc. can help infuse your brand into a series, campaign, or promotion which boosts recognition.

Use the rule of thirds and the rule of odds to create balance in your design.

Ya dig?





KEEN

SOCIAL TIPS:

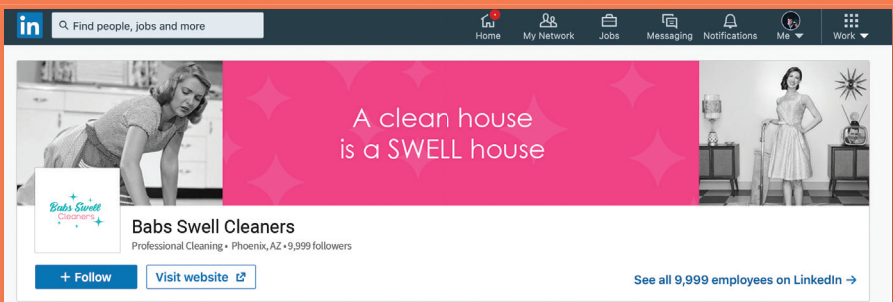
For social posts, follow the engagement trend of the channel you use. On Instagram for example, use type only to stop traffic and convey a thought as engagement tends to be higher for photo-only posts. For LinkedIn, use an attention-grabbing headline when appropriate and on Facebook, use show-stopper headlines intended to encourage narrative readership.

Keep your cover design elements away from the profile "photo" space.

On LinkedIn, avoid that lower left sixth as that is where your photo shows and on LinkedIn, it's about YOU not your company.

For Facebook, your personal profile showcases your photo in low center, so design appropriately. Your business profile, however, moves your photo almost off the cover to the lower left so you have more flexibility.

Twitter features your photo in the lower left corner, similar to LinkedIn so design accordingly.



Design done right!

NO SWEAT!

We're cranked to provide these tips for emails

STICK TO THE SUBJECT

Yes, you want it to be a click magnet so they open it but if the subject is unrelated to what's inside, you'll lose 'em. Make it match!

SHORT IS SWEET

People are busy! Don't expect them to read a novella in an email because the most you'll get (if they open it) is a skim. Stick to one topic and don't add in additional information. If you have more than four paragraphs, you can still edit. It's perfect when you can no longer take anything out and have it make sense.

LOOKIN' GOOD!

Think about your layout and use your content as a design element—don't think of what you communicate as an afterthought. Stay on-brand with your colors, voice, and tone, incorporating interesting or unique visual elements that add meaning, increase understanding, or communicate your message visually (like a graph). Design your email signature with live links so your reader can contact you any way **they** want, not necessarily how you prefer.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Consider a succinct, text-only email sometimes. A short 10-word email, presented as an invitation to learn something, participate, or take advantage of an opportunity is a good idea, if not overused.





AVOID THE TRASH

Avoid quotes, even famous ones, that could be offensive to the recipient.

Send it from a real person. No one likes receiving emails from a generic donotreply@domain.com email.

Make it responsive. More than 70 percent of people will trash an email they receive that isn't easily viewable on their mobile device.

Avoid emojis and too many exclamation points as they may be misinterpreted.

HIGHLIGHTS

Use bold type, headlines, graphics, images, icons, and bullet points to highlight important points for the skimmer and invite them back into the copy.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Personalize your emails (not just with their name automatically inserted). Be relevant and thoughtfully ponder timing for your audience. Segment your list to make your content resonate, and anticipate your subscribers' needs.

DON'T OVER-PROMOTE

Even as the ultimate goal of your email marketing is to grow business, focus on establishing and nurturing a relationship with your audience for maximum engagement and response.

AUTOMATE

Email automation increases efficiency and conversion while allowing you more time to do the important things you need to be doing in your business.

TEST

Test the important elements of your email campaign and measure the results so you can learn and adjust to the nuances of your audience and increase impact over time.

Aren't these the ginchiest?

FOR A WEBSITE THAT'S A KEEPER!

**There are three things a website needs to do immediately.
Everything else is gravy.**

3 KICKS:

1. Show me I'm in the right place - make it about ME, the site visitor, and what I want from you. Resist the urge to use top real estate, above the fold, to show and talk all about you.
2. THEN, tell me about you and what you do so I can get to know you, like you, and eventually trust you.
3. Tell me how to hire you. Make it easy on me and do it the way I might want to reach out, not necessarily the way you want me to make contact.

We hope you're as jazzed as we are to bring you this information. If you found it useful, let us know with a quick review online!

If you are ready to move past do-it-yourself marketing and work with us, visit blazeexperts.com to set up your complimentary consultation to see how we can support you.

It's been a blast!



A Branding Agency

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