BASIC PRINCIPLES OF BUSINESS CARD DESIGN Business Cards.Org

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IT'S ALL IN THE PRINCIPLES

Designing your business card should incorporate the four basic principles of design: **alignment, contrast, proximity, and repetition** (Williams). Bringing these design principles together within the small space of a business card is just the beginning of the productive business relationships you will establish. See Figure 1—Basic Principles of Design.

Figure 1—Basic Principles of Design

ALIGNMENT

Strategic alignment of text and graphic elements provides a visual connection for the reader. Alignment denotes unity and connectedness to your information. Use interesting alignment to create a specific look. Choose from left, centered, and right alignment.

Make Visual Connections

Using strategic alignment principles can give your business contacts a visual connection on impact. A visual connection is achieved through proper text and graphic alignment. Every element of a business card should connect with another element. The human eye naturally follows an invisible line where text and graphics are aligned on the card.

In Figure 2—Alignment, the scattered alignment in the first business card example is not unified. The text is difficult to read over the image. The contact information is hard to find. The design is messy and unbalanced.

 The right justified alignment in the second business card example is clean, shows an invisible line for the eye to follow, and gives a sense of unity and organization. The text corresponds with the image and the information is easier to read.
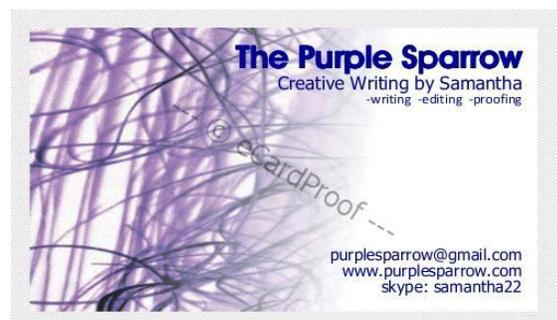

Figure 2—Alignment

Strive for Unity

Achieve unity and balance. Good and interesting alignment of business card elements can ensure unity. This in turn leads to organization, a key qualification of a successful business. Use alignment to create a "look" for your business card, whether it is professional or casual.

Proper Placement

When considering the placement of your business card elements, try to identify other elements to align with! They do not have to be next to each other to align with each other. Placing text and graphics strategically give an effective visual connection. Recall an artist's "rules of thirds" whereby off-centered placement of elements produces balance.

Alignment Don'ts

- Don't use more than one type of alignment (left, center, or right) per business card unless it enhances your design.

- Don't place elements anywhere and everywhere.

- Don't always use centered alignment. Try using various left and right alignment styles for a more interesting look.

CONTRAST IS KEY

Perhaps the most effective way to enhance your business card is through contrast. Contrast happens when element styles differ. Style elements should be similar, or completely different! Anything in between may result in chaos. To achieve perfect contrast on your business card, work with these style elements: colors, form, size, weight, and white space.

In Figure 3—Contrast, note the difference between the business card examples. Example one includes few variations or contrast, while example two comes alive with a change in every style element including the colorful sunflower image.

Figure 3—Contrast

Contrasting Style Elements:

Let's take a look at the contrasting style elements and what they refer to in terms of creating a well-designed business card:

- **Colors**. Contrasting colors can be obtained with images, typefaces, and backgrounds.

- **Form**. Form refers to shapes in typeface.

- **Size**. Size refers to sizes in typeface.

- **Weight**. Weight refers to thickness in typeface.

- **White Space**. White space is the unused space between business card images and text.

Using Color

Remember the color rules. Warm colors such as reds, oranges, yellows, and lighter greens leap forward while cool colors such as blues, violets, and blue greens recede from the eye. Cool colors can often be effective in business card design. Just a little color can go a long way. Finding the balance between background and foreground color is essential to your design. Use color combinations with caution, but create a striking contrast. By nature, we are attracted to warm colors, but cool colors create contrast.

Combinations of Colors

Use one of these combinations of colors when designing your business card. See Figure 4—Color Wheel.

- **Complementary Colors** are those across from each other on the color wheel. Use one as your main color and the other as an accent color.

- **Triads** often create some excitement and interest. To form triads, select a color and then every fourth color. For example, the triad for Violet-Red includes Blue-Green and Orange-Yellow.

- **Split-Complement Triads** are a little tamer. To form split-complementary triads, select a color, point to the color across from it, and select the colors on either side of it. For example, the split-complementary triad for Blue-Violet includes Yellow and Orange.

- **Analogous Colors** are those next to each other, sharing the same undertones.
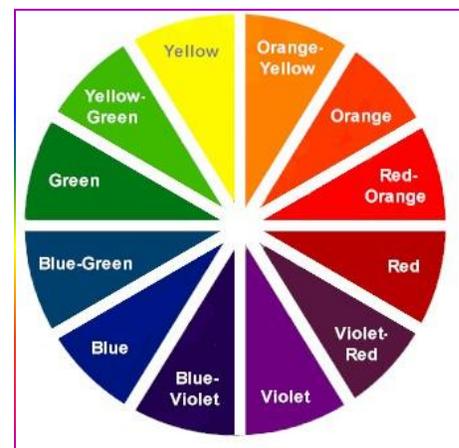

Figure 4—Color Wheel

Form

Form refers to the shape of the letters in your typeface. You can obtain contrast in the simple switch between lower case letters and upper case letters. Although using all capital letters is not recommended, they can be used sparingly to show contrast (see this guide's second level heading, for example). A number of typefaces have a Small Caps option that creates an interesting contrast.

Other form variances include slanted italic letters versus free-flowing script letters and serif typefaces (those that have little hooks, or serifs, on the letters) versus san serif typefaces (those that do not). A common serif typeface is Times New Roman, while a common san serif typeface is Arial. The typeface used for this text is a san serif typeface called Calibri.

Size

Size is clearly the difference between large type and small type. It is important to be brave in contrasting type size. If your title is 16pt, your subtitle or following text should be as many as four to six points smaller, or larger. Using the right size for the title of your business card is one of the important formatting choices you will make. The business card is small, but the typeface can be large. Adjust type size between 10pts and 20pts before deciding on the best size. Make contrasts count when selecting type sizes.

Weight

Weight refers to the thickness in type styles, generally called light, regular, bold, or extra bold. Similar to size, be brave in contrasting weights. When you select a typeface, look for these weight options for an effective title and following text. You may need to display your business card using many typefaces before you obtain the visual effect you are looking for.

White Space

White space is the space in between type and images. A balance of white space is important in the formatting of a perfect business card. Too little white space results in overcrowding, which is displeasing to the reader. Too much white space looks empty. Placing elements with appropriate white space before and after are critical to the design. Don't be afraid of empty space. With web complementary pages that display your business information, you may not need to include all of this on your business card. White space—although not always white—can give a clean, professional look to your business card.

CONSIDER PROXIMITY

Proximity is all about grouping related items together to form relationships. This means placing title elements, business language, and contact information in separate blocks within your business card. The title elements usually include titles, subtitles, and taglines. The business language may include a list of features or highlights about yourself or your business. The contact information includes everything from e-mail addresses and web sites to phone numbers and mailing addresses. Images that surround these blocks of text are also critical to a successful design.

Rule of Thirds

Recall the rule of thirds (see Proper Placement). In Figure 5—Proximity, the business card example shows the title, name, and tagline elements are in the upper left third of the space, the address and telephone are in the lower left third of the space, and the web site and e-mail address are in the lower right third of the space.
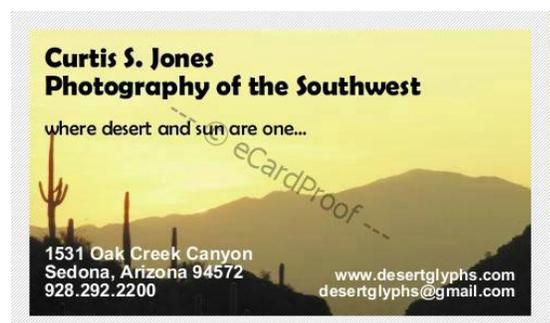

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Figure 5—Proximity

Organizing

Related elements are grouped together for readability, organization, and visual balance. The groupings are also placed strategically around the related graphic for readability and visual effect.

By listing your related items in close proximity, the business card appears organized and easy to read. The reader knows where to look to find the information they need. Using plenty of white space is another key to organization. Organized information is also easier to recall.

Grouping

Groups are usually formed automatically when proximity is a factor in your business card design. By using groups, you can easily follow the rule of thirds. Once related items are close together, deciding where to group them on the card is easy. Using the business card layout designs on the businesscards.org web site, grouping is done for you. You simply need to ensure the groups are related.

Proximity Don'ts

- Don't forget the rule of thirds!
- Don't fill space unnecessarily!
- Don't use too many elements; rely on web sites if available.
- Don't put non-related elements together in a group.

REPETITION RULES

There are the rules of repetition, and repetition rules! For a unified and visually appealing business card, it is important to repeat aspects of your design. Design elements that may effectively be repeated including images, type, lines, bulleted lists, bolding, shadows, formats, and colors. These elements strengthen.

Consistency

Think of repetition as consistency, and consistency leads to organization, which leads to success! In Figure 6—Repetition, the business card example repeats the same typeface for the title, the subtitle, and the contact information. The only contrasting typeface is used in the tagline. There is also repetition in the business name as associated with the image. Remember, an appropriate image is most often associated with the surrounding information.

Figure 6—Repetition

Visual Interest with Repetition

By repeating the elements in your business card design, you create visual interest. If your business card is interesting, your business contacts will look at it. If it is boring, it may land in a pile with other boring business cards.

Think of the visual interest in adding an accessory to an outfit—a necktie, a scarf, or jewelry. You are perhaps creating more interest by accessorizing the clothing you are wearing. However, if you over-accessorize you may appear to many as looking "gaudy."

Tying It Together

Look for ways to create repetition. Look for images that are related to your business or to you! Find typefaces that complement. Think in terms of themes. What typeface, image, color, and format will complement your design? Make it a package deal. It is another effective way to impress your business contact.

Repetition Don'ts

- Don't over-repeat!

- Don't clutter!

- Don't repeat yourself into confusion!

WHERE TO START

Start with something you like. An image may be worth a thousand words, if you have found something that makes a connection with your business concept. Once you have an image, branch out from there. Select the alignment, contrast, proximity, and repetition options that match your image.

If you don't have an image, start with colors. Select colors you like, based on the color wheel tips, and then find an image that matches those colors and also matches your business concept.

WHERE TO FINISH

Display your business card design in every layout possible. Experiment with type, lines, colors, shadows, rules, spacing, and graphics...at least! Typefaces and sizes can change the look of your business can in an instant. Don't be afraid to rev it up a little, but select the right options to do so! Make an impression, but keep it sharp.

SUMMARY

Alignment

Alignment of text and graphic elements provides a visual connection for the reader, demonstrating unity and connectedness in your information. Use interesting left, right, and centered alignment to create a specific look. Create a line for the eye to follow.

Contrast

Contrast translates to type, lines, colors, shadows, rules, spacing, and graphics…at least! Contrast offers an opportunity to make your business card stand out. The human eye is drawn to contrast. Contrast creates visual interest. Be bold and professional in selecting these contrasting elements.

Proximity

Elements of the business card that are related, such as phone, e-mail, and web address should generally be grouped within close proximity. Non-related items should not be grouped. By physically grouping related items and separating non-related items, the business card appears not only organized but also easy to read.

Repetition

Using repetition in colors, typefaces, graphics, and other elements can strengthen your design and add to the visual interest of your business card. Find a strategic balance in repeated elements, but not an overwhelming one. Repetition can show connectedness and unity in your design.