Considering Poster Design and Presentation

Contact: miles.benton84@gmail.com or m.benton@qut.edu.au

This tutorial is intended to stimulate interest and awareness in the design aspect of posters – be they scientific or otherwise. It is by no means gospel or complete, as I myself am still learning much. This is really just a series of lessons (many learnt the hard way!) and tips that I have gathered over the last few years. Hopefully you'll come out of this learning something yourselves – even if it's just that PowerPoint is not the best piece of software for creating your posters...

Software:

Choice of software can make life much easier (or harder!), so spend some time thinking about what it is you are trying to achieve.

Open source software (free software): These programs can be freely downloaded and installed on any computer (windows, mac, linux), there are numerous tutorials and helpful forums and mailing lists to get you started. Both Inkscape and Scribus have rich tool sets and can be used to produce results which rival those of the "professional" packages – all for free!

- Inkscape
  http://www.inkscape.org/
- Scribus
  http://www.scribus.net/
- Open Office Draw
  http://www.openoffice.org.nz/

"Professional" Software (not free): Many people would have heard of Abobe Photoshop – well they also make design software in the same vein. Both Indesign and Illustrator are industry standards – as such they come at a price. 30 day trials may be downloaded if you want to play with them.

- Adobe - http://www.adobe.com/downloads/
  - Indesign
  - Illustrator
- Microsoft Publisher – if you have MS Office you most likely have Publisher.

And then there's...

- Powerpoint... the bane of the scientific poster community. It does what it's made for well, making slide show presentations. For posters avoid like the plague, I've listed many other options for a reason. If you absolutely must use Powerpoint, you have been warned.

About poster design:

Planning your poster before actually sitting down and working on the computer saves a lot of time later on, and will almost always lead to a better looking final product. Reading others experiences and taking on board tips and tricks allows you to expand your repertoire and should make the process more enjoyable.

Betterposters – *"Academics use posters to present research, but their posters are often ugly, with tiny text, confusing layouts, and dubious colour schemes. Better Posters is about making posters informative and beautiful."*

- http://betterposters.blogspot.com/

Other useful sites which talk about the dos and don'ts of poster design and creation:

- http://www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrin1/posteradvice.htm
- http://www.writing.engr.psu.edu/posters.html

Colour management:

Working out a colour scheme at the get go will keep elements within your poster uniform and aesthetically pleasing. Limit yourself to only a few core colours (3-5 is a good general rule) and try and keep a continuum with the colours contained in your figures – it is ideal to design/redesign the figures with the chosen colour palette in mind, however this at times will not be possible/practical.

If you are unsure which colours work well together you can use colour wheels to generate a set of complementary colours:

- http://colorschemedesigner.com/
- http://www.colorpicker.com/

Paper sizing:

Know your measurements. It is important to know what size of paper your final poster will be printed on – and you should determine this before you start! All software packages will allow you to set up page size – it is also import to determine which units you will be working in (I find mm the easiest and set this before I start).

Paper size charts:

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paper_size
- http://www.printing.ie/media/images/a-size.gif

Some examples:

Looking at others work and critically evaluating it is a great way to learn – think about what is done well, what could be improved upon? Create a list of techniques and attributes of posters that you could possibly employ into your own design.

Scientific Poster Repository

- http://posters.f1000.com/

Google Image Search – is a great place to view and critique many examples of poster design (be they scientific or otherwise). Use search strings such as poster design, scientific poster design, etc etc.

Having fun (and general ramblings):

Remember there is no right or wrong way to design a poster; everyone has different tastes and preferences.

- Life is much easier when you have all the elements of your poster ready before you start working in your chosen software. Have the bulk of your text written, have your figures ready, and grab a pencil and sketch out some possible layouts.
- Don't be afraid to play around with your design, try something and see if it works. Bounce ideas of people and ask them to comment on your ideas and designs.
- Try to limit the amount of text on your poster, get your point across in a succinct way that will invite interested parties to ask further questions.

Mainly remember to enjoy yourself – you've done all the hard work in the lab/research, now it's time to present this to others. Have fun with it and try to get your ideas and results across in a way that grabs the audience and makes sense.