**Introduction**

Creating visual information for advertisements that instantly grasps the audiences’ attention is crucial to any institution when marketing their product. Information design when utilized appropriately, can greatly enhance the communication mechanism that is being created by the designer to reach the intended audience. By applying the principles from the book *Universal Principles of Design* by Lidwell, Holden, and Butler, the designer can ensure that proper techniques are implemented in the design so that the information can be easily and efficiently communicated to the audience.

In my current position, I work in an academic department at a community college where promoting the department’s program offerings is crucial to increasing student enrollment. While in the department, I have created numerous flyers, brochures, and posters advertising new courses and programs for the department to attract more students. These advertisements have been displayed at open houses, plasma screens, and in high traffic areas throughout the College. The question that came to mind was were the universal principles of design being incorporated effectively in the designs to promote the department offerings.

After reading the book *Universal Principles of Design* and reviewing a recent poster that I had created to promote the department’s program offerings, I wanted to see if the principles were effectively utilized in the design, and could the design be improved. As I reviewed the design, I kept in mind a few questions: What is the purpose of the design? Who is the message for? Where will the poster be displayed? What kind of feeling or emotion, if any, does the design evoke? How were the principles being incorporated? After reviewing the poster, five universal principles of design were discovered to be incorporated in the design.

**Literature Review**

**Universal Principles of Design**

Designing an effective advertisement begins with the consideration of many factors for the designer. Identifying the purpose of the product and who the intended audience will be is important so that the designer will know what elements to include in the design. “The use of well-established design principles increases the probability that a design will be successful.” (Lidwell, Holden, Butler, 2010). By applying the proper universal principles of design to the elements in the work, the designer can convey attention to specific areas of the design and able to draw the viewer to the information quickly. Through the use of design principles, the designer can also bring out feelings of positive or negative emotions in the viewer. When the elements in the design are aligned according to the universal principles of design then the content, layout and design, and graphics are effectively communicating the message. The five universal principles of design that will be discussed in this research are color, highlighting, alignment, picture superior effect and consistency.

**Color**

“Color is used in design to attract attention, group elements, indicate meaning, and enhance aesthetics” (Lidwell, Holden, Butler, 2010). Color is the base of all design and can make the elements come to life and attract attention or can impair the function of the design. “Also evident when it comes to color is it that it is a crucial component of design and creates an emotional response by the people viewing it” (Donley, 2016). By using the proper color combinations on the color wheel, the designer can convey a warm or cool feeling in the design when viewed by the audience. Color can also create harmony by using different color schemes in the design that pertain to the information. The amount of color that is used should also be limited to what the viewer can process at a glance. “Generally, desaturated, dark colors are perceived as serious and professional; and saturated colors are perceived as more exciting and dynamic” (Lidwell, Holden, Butler, 2010). Though there is no universal symbolism for different colors or color meaning, the designer should always take into consideration the meaning of colors and combinations for the target audience prior to creating the product.

The importance of choosing the right color is helpful in that color sets the tone of the message and guides the viewer’s eye that presents a sense of direction and recognition that the viewer can identify and relate to. When creating a marketing design, according to Creative, Inc.,

…the most important thing to remember is that your design needs to speak to your prospective audience. What colors will draw their eye? What colors best represent the message you’re trying to share? What colors consistently represent your business brand? (November 21, 2013)

Being a visual society, great importance is placed on the visual presentations that people choose to view. The right color choice in a design will impact the viewer’s decision in subtle ways whether to have an interest in the advertisement or not.

**Highlighting**

“Highlighting is an effective technique for bringing attention to elements of a design” (Lidwell, Holden, Butler, 2010). The highlighting technique can be applied to an area of text or illustration. Typically, highlighting should be used at a minimum as designs can become engulfed with this technique and uneasy to view. Using color for highlighting can be very effective when used in conjunction with other techniques. Bolding, italics, and underlining titles or small captions are also common techniques but bolding is preferred as it brings the most attention to key words and ideas with less noise. Inversing works well with text to bring attention as well but should also be used in moderation. According to Newbold (2013), “Inverse text is type on a solid background (like white type on a black bar). Inverse text can be useful (in fact, it can make information pop out almost more than any other highlighting method), but it can also be an eyesore.” As a general rule, highlighting should be kept consistent and no more than 10% of a design should be consumed for optimal effect.

**Alignment**

“Alignment is the placement of elements such that edges line up along common rows or columns, or their bodies along a common center” (Lidwell, Holden, Butler, 2010). When elements of a design are aligned a sharper, more ordered design is created. Aligning the parts, allows the elements to create a visual connection with each other. In turn, allowing the viewer to easily scan through the document. According to Hortin (2009), “It tightens the design and eliminates the haphazard, messy effect which comes when items are placed randomly.” Although alignment can be achieved through diagonals, spiral or circular paths as well, more attention needs to be given by the designer so that the alignment is noticeable and that the elements do not appear disordered. By using highlighting, the designer can better reveal these types of alignment paths. Likewise, misalignment of elements can be used to attract attention or create tension in a design. For the most part, alignment should be kept in rows and columns and along a centerline.

The alignment principle is an integral part of a design in that it is the framework for all the elements and helps the designer to choose how and where to place the elements. “Taking advantage of strategic placement helps us to craft stronger and more compelling compositions and utilizing a grid system provides a standard guide for element placement” (Boudreaux, 2012).

When making alignment decisions, the primary consideration that should be taken by the designer is how the viewer will be viewing the design.

**Picture Superiority Effect**

The saying a picture is worth a thousand words may be true. “People remember pictures better than words, especially over longer periods of time. This phenomenon as we know it today, is called the Picture Superiority Effect” (Krum, 2015). Concepts that are learned by viewing pictures are more easily remembered than by text alone. By adding a picture with the text in an advertisement the viewer can associate the image with the text making the information easier to recall for future use.

When using the Picture Superiority Effect the designer cannot use a random image. The image must work together to reinforce the content. “Consider the inclusion of meaningful pictures in advertising campaigns when possible, especially when the goal is to build company and product brand awareness (Lidwell, Holden, Butler, 2010). Additionally, the effect of the technique increases when the audience is casually exposed to an advertisement and exposure time is limited. According to Hockley, n.d., “…pictures are more memorable than words because they are more likely to be encoded uniquely in memory since they have more distinctive visual features.” This type of technique can be used in all mediums of advertising so that recognition and recall of key information can be improved by the viewer.As the information becomes more complex, the results of the effect are weakened. Keeping the phrase simple that is associated with the text is vital.

The significance of utilizing the effect in a design is that research shows that viewers will retain more data since the human brain retains information easier when an image is included with phrases. “Hear a piece of information, and three days later you'll remember 10% of it. Add a picture and you'll remember 65%” (Medina, 2015). By including the picture superiority effect in the design allows the purpose of the advertisement to be embedded in their minds of the audience.

**Consistency**

Consistency is important in a design in that it creates a feeling of organization and makes the content more aesthetically pleasing so that viewers can easily interpret the information. “Consistency enables people to efficiently transfer knowledge to new contexts, learn new things quickly, and focus attention on the relevant aspects of a task” (Lidwell, Holden, Butler, 2010). Utilizing consistency together with other techniques such as typeface, color, and graphics helps to improve recognition by the audience. According to Zerwic et al,

Being consistent in font size and type, line spacing, alignment of graphics and text, and size of graphics not only helps present a unified style as a presenter or institution, but also allows the audience to pay attention to the information presented rather than to the style of its presentation (2010).

By including the institution’s logo in the design, along with the colors and font is vital since it brings attention to the advertisement in that the viewer already has an established knowledge and feeling for the institution. When the visual and typographical elements are applied uniformly then the design can be effective.

**Conclusion**

Certainly, the literature affirms that for a design to be effective in communicating the purpose clearly and efficiently to the intended audience the universal principles of design must be used accordingly. When the proper techniques are intertwined with the elements of a design, the designer has the power to bring attention to key elements and focal points of a design. By using images that are clearly linked to the text a more powerful message can be transmitted and embedded in the minds of the audience. Through consistency the design is organized and a sense of order is created and the viewer has a clear path to follow when viewing.

**Research Question**

The research question that is being answered is whether the universal principles of design were incorporated effectively in the information and computer technologies poster to promote the department’s program offerings in computer studies.

**Post-hoc Review (Analysis)**

The overall review of the information and computer technologies poster was found to be positive. By applying the universal principles of design, the designer was able to transfer the information to the audience effectively. For this review, the principles that were found to be utilized in the poster are divided into three categories of content, design and layout and graphics to discuss how they were incorporated.

**Content**

The purpose statement of the poster, “The Information and Computer Technologies department at Monroe Community College provides a wide variety of programs focused on computer studies” is clearly stated and aligned horizontally at the top of the design which gives viewers information instantly of what the poster is aiming to communicate. The content in the poster is clearly linked to the purpose statement and is relevant to the purpose in that the program offerings are listed with their descriptions for students to differentiate. The designer also includes essential information that students may need to know such as a brief explanation of the various degrees offered, and stating that portions of the degrees can be completed online as well. Contact information is also included in case the viewer needs more information or to take further action after reviewing the poster. All the information in the poster clearly has a purpose and there is no non-essential information to clutter the design.

**Design and Layout**

The **colors** that are used in the design are consistent with the institutions logo and branding which bring a warm and welcoming feel to the poster. Through the use of the brand logo and colors, the designer was able to bring a familiar feeling to the design in that the viewers are familiar with the logo and what the institution offers. The gold and black colors bring a bold, confident, and professional appearance to the poster. The white background that is chosen by the designer is also consistent with the brand guidelines of what the logo should be rendered on. Additionally, the white background choice allows for the graphics to stand out and grasp the viewers’ attention and allowing for easy readability of the text.

Through the use of **highlighting** the designer was able to specifically identify key points in the poster without overindulging in the technique. The key points in the poster, which are the program offerings, are highlighted by using the gold color that is consistent with the institution’s brand color. To add to the effect of highlighting, the designer also bolded the text in the program name headings allowing for separation of the various program descriptions. In turn, allowing for the viewer to easily scan which program description they would like to read about further. The same technique is also applied in the contact information making it easily visible to the audience. The subtle effect of the bolding and gold color highlighting intertwined together allows for an organized feel when viewed which also includes the brand color again for familiarity and uniformity.

The designer also utilizes inversion of text appropriately, which is another highlighting technique that allows for key information to stand out to the viewer. In the catch phrases, “50% or more” and “completed on line!” the designer inverts and bolds the text so that the pertinent information stands out and draws the viewer to the information. By enlarging and bolding these statements, the designer brings a sense of excitement and motivation to the viewer when read so that action may be taken on the message.

Furthermore, the **alignment** pattern that is used by the designer allows for the information to be well organized. By grouping the text and graphics in three columns with left justified text the designer gives the viewer a clear path to follow when scanning the poster. The three columns are immediately aligned below the horizontal line at the top of the poster which states the purpose of the design. The first column includes the main focus which is the program headings and descriptions grouped together with the newest program highlighted at the top of the list. By grouping the offerings in the first column and applying the highlighting and bolding techniques together, the designer subtly brings attention to the program offerings and is able to group the information together by means of a column.

In the second column, the designer strategically places the department name and College logo along with graphics in the center bringing attention to the viewer. By placing these elements in the center column, the designer is able to create a focal point with the images and text together drawing the viewers’ eye to the name of the institution. In turn, the focal point of the second column brings a sense of balance and easiness when the reader views the poster by separating the content in columns one and three.

In the third column, the designer includes content that allows for the viewer to take positive action on the advertisement by including contact information, and an image with text to invoke emotion and action. It is clear that the designer uses the columns effectively to organize the content of the design so that the flow is logical to the reader.

Throughout the design the **consistency** technique is evident in that the designer uses the brand logo, text and colors of the institution and is able to transfer them to the techniques that are used in the elements. By using the institutions brand logo, the familiarity of the logo is transferred to the viewer and the message that it is sending. The font that is used in the poster is consistent with the branding guidelines and proper line spacing is used throughout each section of the design. The designer is also consistent when using the highlighting technique and applying it to similar elements, such as program headings, to group them and create attention to key phrases. The size of the graphics are consistent with the size of each section and are not overwhelming when viewed. By having consistency in the design the designer gives the design uniformity.

**Graphics**

Through the use of the **picture superiority effect** the designer was able to reinforce and intertwine key phrases with images to embed them in the viewer’s memory. The graphics that the designer was able to incorporate in the design clearly reinforce the content of the poster in that the images engage and bring emotion to the viewer. The three images that are used in the center column along with the logo portray both male and female students and an image of the globe. The designer strategically includes an image of a female working in the field to bring attention and attract more female students to the computer studies programs. By including an image of the globe, the designer signifies and promotes that programs are offered online to reach diverse students across the globe.

Furthermore, the designer is able to bring out a feeling of excitement through the image in the third column by encouraging the viewer to take action. By adding an image of a female with her arms raised in excitement while using a laptop, along with the bolded and inversed color text “50% or more” and “completed online!” the designer is able to strengthen the message to the viewer causing them to take action and enroll in a program. Additionally, the female in the image is wearing a multi-color striped shirt which is easy for the viewer to remember. The designer has good use of the picture superiority effect so that the viewer can easily remember the stripes and connect the image with the message in their mind easier for later recall. Including an image of a laptop at the top of the column allows the viewer to link the image to the purpose statement. The images the designer uses are also clear and easily viewed from a short distance.

**Conclusion**

Not done……………….

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