Taking Up Space

Body copy punctuation

As I see it, technical publications are usually full of text. Besides elements, such as subheads or columns previously discussed in this column, there is body copy punctuation that could spruce up a publication and make it easier for the reader to navigate through your text. I maybe getting a little picky but these are still elements that make a good piece of typesetting sing. They may be items that you have heard designers preach about again and again, but I still see these problems.

1. Watch out for typewriter punctuation

A professional publication should not use ", ', or -- but use ", ' or —. These are inch marks (") or feet marks ('), not open or closed quotes or apostrophes. This (--) is not an em dash, this (—) is. By the same token (-) is not an en dash, this (–) is. Finally, three dots with the period (...) is not the same a proper ellipsis(…). Check your software programs for the way through either keyboard manipulation or checking a preferences box that these elements will appear correctly.

2. Hang puncutation

This guide applies most in pull-quotes or left justified headlines. In the following example, the letter B seems careless indented, but should be indented like the line below.
"Brian—the graphic designer with a beard—has his office in downtown Toronto.
"Brian—the graphic designer with a beard—has his office in downtown Toronto.

3. Eliminate unnessary punctuation

Punctuation often clarifies the meaning of the message. This can also be done graphically and therefore eliminate the punctuation. Look at this example:

To:	John
From:	Sue
Re:	Overdue invoice
Date:	May 23

It could be

To	John
From	Sue
Re	Overdue invoice
Date	May 23

4. Add unnecessary emphasis

Avoid formatting punctuation before or after text set in bold, italic, or bold italic. The formating makes the text stand out already. Punctuation should relate to most of the sentence, not the emphasized word or phrase.
Example:
Brian *(the man in the hat)* is a graphic designer.

Brian (*the man in the hat*) is a graphic designer.