

Taking Up Space

Taking Up Space is an occasional column written on graphic design issues by Brian Grebow, BG Communications.

I don't want to read a grey page!

How many times have you seen a page that looks “grey”—a daunting block of text? In this column, I suggest five ways to remedy this design blight.

1. Try putting the text in columns.

Line lengths of over 90 characters (dense copy) can become very uncomfortable for the eye to read. Instead of keeping the copy in one column, try using two or three. Make sure the space between each column is wide enough so that text from one column doesn't appear to merge with text from the next one.

2. Use more leading.

Leading is the blank space between text lines. Different fonts and styles (bold, italic) require different amounts of leading. Usually, a desirable amount of leading is the type size plus 20%. More leading will give the page an airy feel, but don't use too much.

3. Use subheads.

When designing subheads, take advantage of different type sizes, styles, serif fonts, and sans serif fonts

to make the page more attractive. If appropriate, add hanging indents with attractive bullets to help show the reader what's important.

4. Use graphics.

By graphics, I mean more than pictures. Graphics can also mean rules (lines), boxes, reverse type, screens, and so on. Graphics, like subheads, add depth and “air” to a tightly packed page.

5. Use text that is flush left, ragged right.

Flush-left, ragged-right text (often called ragged right) gives a simple, open look to a document. Recent studies indicate that this format enables the eye to return to the beginning of the next line more naturally. The text should not get too ragged, though, so apply some judicious hyphenation.

