Some General Thoughts on Learning Desktop Publishing

Kent Forrest   (PUBLIC DOMAIN DOCUMENT)
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- **Where to begin?**

    Just as teenagers often want to "skip" the basics to "get to something meaningful" so do most adults hurry into desktop publishing without the essential Macintosh skills. It is not uncommon for people to call me and say "I need to learn desktop publishing by next Monday to turn out a 50 page brochure and I have one day to learn it." Well - good luck.

- **What is a reasonable period of time to learn Desktop Publishing?**

    DTP (Desktop Publishing) is the integration of text and graphics into an electronic software environment. Much of your success will depend on how well you understand the various programs which created the information/data for your DTP program and, most importantly, the Macintosh Operating System.

    Let's have a pop quiz on your basic Mac skills.

1.   When was the last time you referred to the instruction manual which came with your computer? Do you know how to use the index?
2.   Why is it important to understand the purpose of the System and Finder?
3.   How do you load DAs (Desk Accessories) and Fonts into the System?
4.   What is the difference between LaserWriter Fonts and ImageWriter Fonts?
5.   Identify the LaserWriter Fonts?
6.   Can you save files under HFS (or better yet - can you find them after you save them?)
7.   What is the purpose of the "Chooser" and "Control Panel" DA? How do you use them?
8.   What is the "Clipboard"? the "Scrapbook"?
9.   What is the difference between object- based and bit-mapped graphics? Can you use at least one of them fairly well?
10. Can you use the "Installer" disks which came with your computer?
11. Do you know what is the most current System and Finder available? What version are you running on your computer?
12. Do you know the basics of any word processor (selecting and editing text, Cut, Copy, and Paste, and the use of rulers and tabs, alignment, etc.)
13. Can you copy disks/files between folders and other disks?

    If these sample questions seem completely "foreign" to you I can guarantee that DTP is going to take you much longer than you expected.   Not that you cannot learn how to do it but it will seem frustrating when your lack of basic knowledge is

interfering with your creative goals.

I would suggest about three months to "work" and "play" with the basics above. Then, and only then, would I throw myself into a PageMaker™, Ready•Set•Go4™, Ragtime II,™ or whatever.

- **What if I can't wait that long?**

1. Sign-up for a couple of workshops on the basic skills at a local university, users' group, community school, or educational consortium.
2. Subscribe to any of the popular Macintosh Magazines - such as "MacWorld","Macazine", or "MacUser". They are available at most popular book stores.
3. Use the computer EVERY day. If the computer is located at work check it out and take it home for the weekend.
4. Force yourself to work through the accompanying manual. You may have to read it several times for it all to sink in but all the basic skills are thoroughly described. If you are on a "network" secure the AppleShare User's Guide from the System's Administrator. You may want to read the Apple LaserWriter manual as well.
5. Make a conscious effort to learn a new skill every day.
6. Find a "resource" person. Someone who is a practiced user who won't mind answering the simple questions over the phone. Make every effort to locate the answer in your users manual first. A rule of thumb is "Ask three people - before me."
   If the person you are calling makes "her/his" living by consulting make sure you have a clear understanding if there are "charges" for the question time. If the questions are "free" don't keep someone on the phone for a long period of time.
7. Check with your printer before you start your project. Paper sizes and quality, inks, colors, folds and/or staples, all could a real difference in your projects appearance, expense, and final success. You will also find that other people have deadlines for projects as well as your own.

- **Do you have any last advice about DTP?**

  Yes. Try some of these ideas:

1. Collect examples of other peoples work. While you might not "copy" their format it is often useful to see what skilled "designers" can accomplish.
2. If your initial designs seem like a total disaster take it to a commercial artist or layout designer for assistance. If your ego is frail this job is going to leave you with lots of bruises.
3. Start small. Try a small document before the college catalog.
4. Save frequently. When you invest a great deal of time in the layout of a publication the last thing you need is disk or file failure. Don't scrimp on the number of backup disks. You spend thousands of dollars on your system and countless hours on

your project. Saving a file only on a hard disk or on a single micro floppy is "bad management".

Likewise if your project is in constant "evolution" you may want to return to an earlier stage of production if something went wrong or there were later changes. For that reason you would label a disk for each day of the week. Each day you would save your file with a different title name, date, or suffix.

     For example:

     Sample file.6/18

     Sample file.6/19

At the beginning of the next week (or whenever) you could "erase" or replace the old files with new ones.

5. Protect your copies. Don't leave them out where other people could walk off with your work or possibility damage the files.

6. Strive for consistency. Make sure you have used the same font for the body of your text throughout your publication. When you "import" text from other sources the font attributes are imported as well. Sometimes you don't notice the differences until the printout. If you have to change a font later in the publication you will discover that it could be a critical factor in your layout.

7.   Print frequently. I have never seen anyone make an outstanding publication from a "single" attempt. Desktop publishing is akin to the "spreadsheet" of the financial world - it allows you to play with infinite possibilities of "What if...".

While the LaserWriter Printer is NOT a copy machine and should never be used in that manner - it does not cost more than .04 a copy to operate. If your time is worth anything at all the cost of a print-out is marginal. If it is any comfort remember that over 90% of all the moving parts in a LaserWriter Printer are in the cartridge. I have had contact with dozens of LaserWriter owners and I have yet to find one who needed a "single" service call. The Apple LaserWriter printer is certainly a workhorse.

8. Buy or check out from a library professional books dealing with publication design. The most frequent criticism of new desktop publishers is the lack of design principles such as the use of font sizes, white space, alignment of text to graphics, graphic sizes, etc. All of these issues can only be learned by experience - others and your own. Magazines like "Publish" show monthly examples of design feast and famine.

9. Proofing your publication is essential to your final product. You will discover that regardless of your "college" education you can't do it all "well". Even professional publishing houses have editors to proof other editors. Have someone else "proof" your final copy - they are bound to see things you don't.

10. Always use tabs to align text or numbers on a page. Desktop publishing is NOT always (What You See Is What You Get) - WYSIWYG - (pronounced Wiz-ee-Whig). The resolution on the screen is 72 dots per inch (dpi.). The resolution of the LaserWriter printer is 300 dpi. While it might seem simple to convert one screen dot (pixel) to 4 laser dots you will notice there are a couple of dots left over (288 vs. 300). Different programs handle those extra screen pixels better than others.

11. Give yourself and others enough time to hand in their work. Press people to honor deadlines and try to keep them yourself.
12. Use laser quality paper for your final printout. It will increase the transfer quality of your publication to other media such as offset printing. Laser paper costs between $6.00-$11.00 per 500 sheets. The cost of paper is incidental to your project costs (namely labor).
13. If you're working on a big project be sure you keep an extra laser cartridge on-hand. Toner cartridges seem to vary in their output especially when new. There is nothing more annoying than printing out 200 copies, run out of toner, insert a new cartridge, and discovering the output does not match.
   I always suggest to "break-in" the new cartridge when you get it. Sometimes it takes a couple of hundred copies before the output is the same as the last cartridge. Than replace the other cartridge and put the new one back in the box until you need it.
15. Think of your audience above all. Your message will be most effective if you plan for their needs (whether information, persuasion, entertainment, or whatever.)
16. Do your text entries in a word processor and not in a page layout program (it is normally very slow). If you are used to "style" sheets in a word processor be sure those attributes can be imported into your DTP program.

If you have other suggestions or comments you would like to add to this list drop me a line.   Best success and "Happy computing!"

Sincerely,
Kent Forrest
226 Wenneker
St. Louis, MO.
63124
(314) 991-5096
GEnie: K.Forrest