



Layout and think of the screen

DTP packages excel when it comes to layout processes, says Gordon Laing. You could be Web publishing on-screen, too.

Elsewhere in this issue (page 82) you'll find our annual group test of desktop publishing software, ranging from the budget to the high-end products. There's no reason not to join in with the DTP extravaganza: go forth and purchase... never been a better time to buy... and so on. But why should you bother? What exactly can you do with DTP?

The obvious answer is publishing on the desktop but have you ever stopped to wonder what this means? According to the dictionary, publishing is to divulge, to announce, to put forth and offer for sale any article such as a book or newspaper.

A desktop publishing application won't write, or correct your words, or make your pictures — let alone print, distribute and

sell the final product. But it will considerably ease the other processes; primarily, those involving layout.

No more poisoned pen

Before computerised desktop publishing, layout involved taking individual metal type characters and arranging them one by one to make up the story. Strips of lead were fitted between rows of type to separate them, hence the term "leading" (pronounced ledding).

Other techniques involved manually cutting out and pasting pictures and type, almost in the manner of a poison pen letter. In either case, if you wanted to change something, to fit or cut the copy, you had to physically rearrange the elements.

Surely the computer could make this easier? Following initial dabbings on proprietary systems, desktop publishing — laying out pages on desktop PCs — arrived in the mid-to-late eighties.

To be perfectly accurate, Paul Brainerd, President and CEO of the company then known as Aldus, coined the term "desktop publishing" for the company's pioneering Macintosh layout product, PageMaker.

PageMaker, along with PostScript, and sophisticated digital type from Adobe, as well as Apple's easy-to-use operating system, set the Macintosh up as the graphics platform of the future.

Several versions of PageMaker later, newcomer Quark took the high-end DTP lead with XPress, and the battle for supremacy — and more importantly, the standard — has been raging ever since.

Both products, along with many others, are now available for Windows on the PC platform; indeed, current versions of the two heavyweights are cross-platform compatible and pretty much identical.

Adobe and Aldus merged some time ago, forming a graphics giant. Times change but one thing is for certain: electronic page-layout on desktop computers is here to stay.

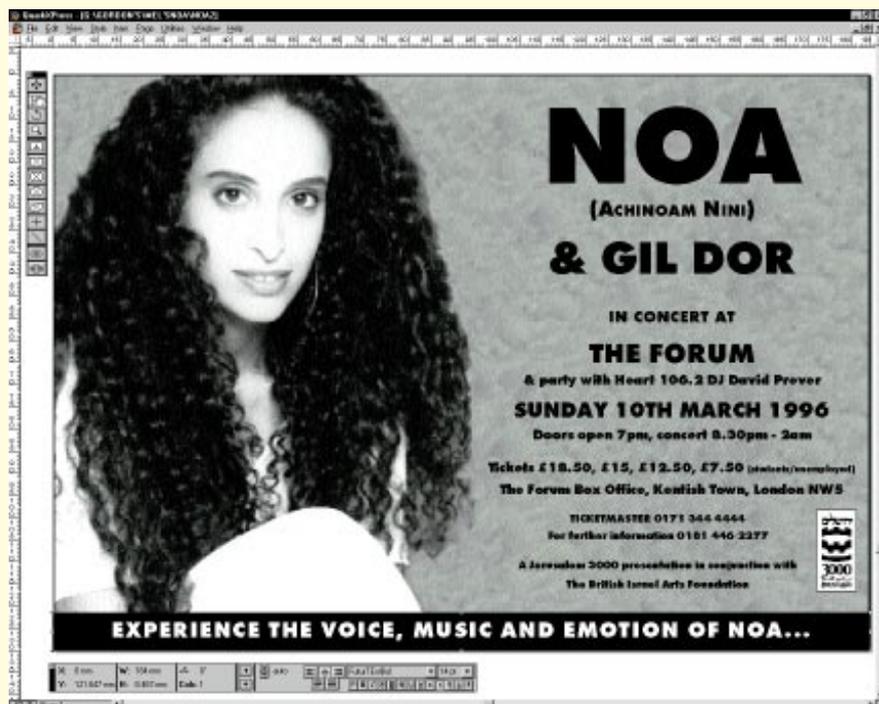
The best thing about DTP is the ability to move matter around with great ease and speed: if you think that picture would look better over there, move it. Want something bigger or smaller? Adjust it to your heart's content.

It's a wrap

Best of all are the often sophisticated text wraps around other objects, allowing you to easily adjust the other elements until the text fits the available space.

Designers of the old school might argue that this haphazard approach results in rushed layouts without any thought or planning. When you are physically pasting elements or setting metal type, there's no messing about. You have a good, long, think about the design before the tools come out, and usually come pretty close to what you're after, first time around.

My advice to DTP users is to always plan your more complex, or important, layouts on paper before ploughing ahead with carefree abandon. But it's good to know you can bang out quickies if you



Left is an advert I designed for a music event, featuring a Photoshop retouched portrait and background, overlaid with type placed in Quark XPress

need to, and that mistakes aren't the end of the world.

DTP or WP?

So DTP is literally layout on a computer; but do you really need a dedicated DTP application to produce your work? The answer is often no, since many word processors offer enough facilities to do the desired job.

Most WP packages these days allow you to create multiple columns and place pictures with basic text runaround. You generally get a fair degree of typographic control, too. If you're producing a modest brochure, booklet or newsletter, chances are that a competent word processor would fit the bill.

As your designs and aspirations develop, however, you'll yearn for the ultimate control which only a dedicated DTP application can offer. Once you've precisely adjusted the spacing between lines of text, or even the characters themselves, you'll never want to go back.

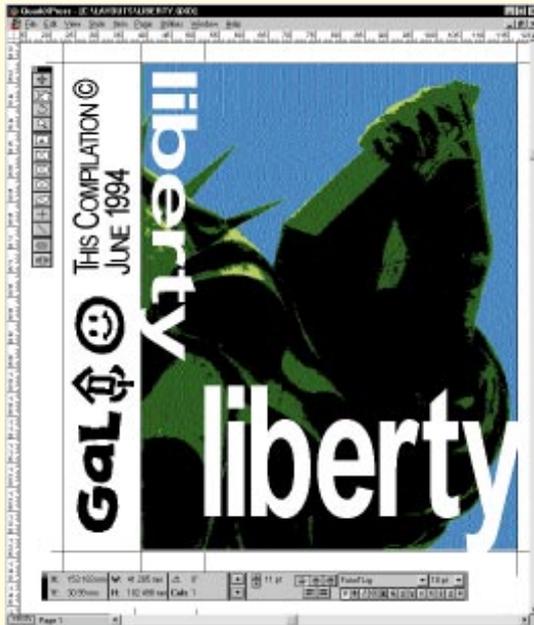
Then there's printing. Outputting on your local laser or inkjet may be fine for some purposes, but if you want to produce colour separations then you'll need something a bit more sophisticated. The basic differences between a WP with simple layout facilities and a proper DTP application are control, advanced facilities and an interface designed specifically for the job.

DIY DTP

Once you've decided what tool you're going to use, the question "What can I do with it?" springs to mind. Perhaps the most obvious use for DTP is on a regular publication such as a newsletter, magazine or newspaper. This is an area where DTP excels — you can set up templates just waiting to be flooded with text in the right places.

Last month I looked at ways of setting up lists of regular text styles and libraries of often-used elements, which along with templates considerably ease the layout process on a regular title. These features also allow you to maintain consistency within a publication.

Although most DTP applications offer excellent



This is what I do with my DTP package (Quark XPress for Windows 3.32). Above is a cassette inlay, featuring a photo I took on holiday. Directly below, a CD inlay, featuring a load of textures I shamelessly took from an Autodesk CD. Below, the second spread of January's Graphics & DTP, featuring someone else's far superior work



facilities for navigating multi-page documents, a great deal of layout is performed on a single page. Posters, invitations and greetings cards are all common single-page projects to which DTP's tools are ideally suited; there's also the consideration that most word processors cannot create documents much larger than A4. Tightening up letter and line spacing is particularly important for the large type sizes commonly found in such single-page documents.

A happy event

The next time you throw a party, host a family event or change your address, how about designing the announcement or invitation with your DTP package? I *would* also mention designing your own greetings cards, but some live in fear that I will reproduce my now infamous Christmas card image in these hallowed pages (*surely not* — Ed).

There's no need to stop at posters and cards: labels and inlays are ideal DTP-fodder. Why not make up a template for cassette or CD inlays? Or how about a set of templates to cover all the labelling areas of a video cassette. Properly designed and printed labels look great on tapes and allow you to make the most of limited space without the need to write around manufacturers' logos and model numbers.

Incidentally, you could try to emulate the typestyles on logos if you want to maintain the branding. After a little experimentation, I discovered that Sony is written in a style not entirely dissimilar to horizontally-stretched Times — try between 150 and 200 percent wider than normal.

On-screen publishing

While DTP will continue to be used for paper-based projects, the future will feature an increasing number designed to remain on-screen. The two main areas are CD-ROM and Internet Web publishing. Designing and creating layouts specifically for on-screen use requires a few additional tools and considerations but otherwise most of the principles are the same. Technical considerations include the



Font of the Month

Baskerville Old Face

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
 abçdèfghijklmnöpqrstuvwxyzß&1234567890



the subject of on-screen publishing, where what you see is literally what you get, in the very near future.

Just my type

As I was writing this month's column, a new type CD arrived: Fonts Just in Time 6.0 from Linotype-Hell. It comprises the entire Linotype, Berthold Exclusives and Elsner & Flake libraries; that's over 3,900 fonts. In fact, there are so many of them that the original, mixed PC/Macintosh disc of version 5.0 has been abandoned in favour of a disc for each platform.



size and shape of the document, along with the working resolution. Most CD titles are designed to work on a 640 x 480 pixel landscape-shaped display. Internet Web pages tend to wrap

lines of text up to the border of the windows and scroll downwards until the document ends. In the manner of fitting to a fixed-size background they are subsequently not always masterpieces of design.

An important technical consideration of Web design is the time it takes to download the page or access the information. Great big colourful pictures may be wonderful for other projects, but they'll only slow a Web site down.

Any on-screen project also has a resolution consideration: since the document is viewed on the screen, there's no need for picture resolution to be any higher than that of the display (normally 72dpi). Then there's small type, which at 72dpi may be illegible. This is where anti-aliasing techniques come into their own. They increase apparent resolution by strategically placing dots of a colour and shade intermediate to the background and foreground, around the outline. Black text on a white background would feature grey dots in the steps between one row of pixels and another; when viewed at a distance, the result is much easier to read.

Hands On Graphics and DTP will cover

Along with the fonts there's a variety of utilities, including a fabulous one for the Mac which demonstrates QuickDraw GX fonts. The disc is free to Linotype-Hell hardware users, or £5 to everyone else. As a taster, Linotype-Hell has unlocked 12 typefaces for free. My favourite is the classic, Baskerville Old Face, which was the obvious choice for Font of the Month (above).

Baskerville Old Face is credited to Edmund Fry in 1768, although the original Baskerville Book was designed by John Baskerville 11 years earlier. It would be interesting to see what these designers would make of today's technology, and whether they'd bother with products like Fontographer.

PCW Contacts

I'd love to hear your graphics-related tips, tricks or suggestions. Write to me at the PCW address on Broadwick Street or email me as gordon_laing@pcw.ccmil.compuserve.com

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