

Hierarchy Podcast

This podcast will look at creating a hierarchy of information in a design.

Hierarchy in general is a system of ranking and organizing things or people. Each of the elements in the system, except for the top one, is a subordinate of the other.

Organizations, such as governments, educational institutions, businesses, churches, are hierarchical organizations. In graphic design we will be talking about visual hierarchy, the arranging of typographic elements in a sequential order of importance.

Let's look at some examples done by professional designers.

The first example is a newspaper ad for Cox Business Services.

To develop the hierarchy of information in this ad the designers used size, weight and value of the type to develop a hierarchy of information.

Where is your eye immediately drawn? To the top of the page is my guess. Size and weight of the letters have actually created a graphic image. Using the mouse, as a substitute for the letter O is pretty clever and really makes this ad pop. This is a good way to create interest in a black and white ad where the main design elements are text.

The block on the right is the second group of information that is noticed. It's important for the prospective customer to see how much money they will save. The variation in size and weight makes this easy to read.

My eye then floats over to the left to the words speed and value and the words in gray. This list is easy to read and the bold at the top and bottom are evidently the two most important benefits that the customer will receive.

My eye comes back to the smaller type here and then to the phone number and web address which are very important and are centered on the page with a lot of white space to make it very prominent.

The logo is placed on the right again with white space around it so it is clearly visible.

And lastly we see the block of very small type at the bottom of the ad, which we will probably not read, but is necessary for the company to have as perhaps disclosure information. The small point size and tight line spacing create a strong block that anchors the rest of the information.

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The second newspaper ad was produced to advertise a new magazine. In this ad weight, size and line spacing are used to create a hierarchical system just as in the Cox ad, but two other elements have been added to create this hierarchy, color and font change.

The weight and size of the headline makes it stand out as being important but the color and the script font used for Careers Santa Barbara, the name of the new magazine, really overpowers that black headline and becomes even more important.

You can see that the dates are in bold and a larger point size than the information above it. This shows, as does the placement of Careers Santa Barbara, the new magazine name, that placement does not always indicate the importance of the information. The hierarchy in this ad is created using size, weight, color, font change and not placement.

So to recap, hierarchy is very important when designing and can be created using a variety of typographic methods as well as color.

Hope this was helpful and in the next podcast we will be critiquing some student work.