Book Cover Design 101.1

With today's plethora of large chain bookstores and online bookstores,a book that is brilliantly written but lacks a good quality cover design will sadly remain unnoticed and undiscovered. So it is absolutely crucial, especially if you are publishing your own book, to have a book cover that grabs attention.

This article was written to help you create a book cover that looks as good as the professionals, with instruction on how to get started, get finished, and ensure a smooth printing process.

Eye-appealing covers essentially share the same characteristics:

Bold or complementary colors--primary colors work well together, other hues look nice if they complement each other and are not overdone.

Balance of layout--The eye is soothed and relaxed by the design, not strained. The elements are clean, not cluttered; the font is readable; the text is balanced in size and style to the graphics; and both text and graphics are harmonized with a focal point, enabling smooth eye direction.

General Cover Tips:

When setting up your cover layout, allow another .25" in from the trim guides to place all your elements. This will ensure enough allowance around the cover's edge and provide a more tailored look.

Use light on dark for dramatic effects (novels, spiritual, etc.) and dark on light for easy readability (self-help, how-to, business). There are always exceptions to the rule when you want your book to stand out with a certain color or theme.

For an interesting, eye-grabbing effect, try a subtle blended or patterned background.

People read left to right, top to bottom. Position your elements in appropriate levels of importance.

Give your finished cover the thumbnail test: Make sure it will look crisp and polished when reduced way down for display on online bookstores like Amazon. We've seen many, many thumbnail covers on that site that looked like mush because of poor color and font choices.

First the viewer looks at the front cover; then flips to the back to solidify his decision to read further. Draw him in with a catchy back header.

Visit a bookstore or your library and research as many book cover designs as possible. Identify what works, and what doesn't work for you. You can learn just as much from badly designed books as from beautifully designed books.

Don't center all the text on your cover or title page--this looks unpolished and unprofessional. Exceptions: poetry, recipe books. Left aligning and right aligning produce much cleaner lines.

Don't use more than three different fonts on your cover--this includes counting bold, italic, underline etc. variations as different fonts. This confuses the eye and sends a negative message to the viewer.

Create a bar at the top to put in any important info about your book - awards won, important testimonials, etc.

Put your title "above the fold" - somewhere in the top half of your cover.

Back Cover Tips:

1. The same rules of design apply to the back cover as well as the front. Again, peruse your bookstore for back cover ideas. Look for typestyles, colors, and copy styles you like and make notes.

2. This is a toughie: Unless you are well known in your field, or have written several books, do not place your photo on the cover. This will appear ostentatious and unprofessional. Trust us. There are many independent publishers who fall prey to their egos--and suffer

3. Try to solicit 3-5 good testimonials of your book from respected field individuals. This will give your book instant clout.

4. A typical softcover back cover consists of a short summary of your book, testimonials, and the author's bio. Leave at least 1" at the bottom for your ISBN barcode and your publishing info. Too much copy will lose reader interest; while not enough copy will appear unfinished and unprofessional. Try to maintain a good ratio balance of words to white space.

5. With a self-help or how-to book, include bullets in your back copy describing what the reader will gain from reading your book. You could use a header such as "In This Book You'll Learn How To" ... then list bullets beneath describing what the reader will learn.

6. For book jackets, a good base is to offer a summary of your book on the back, with 2-3 testimonials, and publisher info, then on the flaps have the author bio, maybe more testimonials, and contact info. Having copy on the flaps is optional. You will need to allow space for the flaps to wrap-around, so be sure to get exact specs from your book printer. A good default size for flaps is 3".

Spine Tips:

1. In a bookstore, most books are displayed with only the spine in view. So this area of your book has to look its best when competing with other spines.

2. A lot of books repeat the front cover graphic into the spine as a smaller version. This acts as a preview and helps to visually enhance the spine and attract the viewer.

3. With a thin spine, try setting the type vertically, so people won't need to tilt their heads to read the title.

4. Include your logo and/or business name at the bottom, 1/4" in from the trim edge.

5. Make sure you allow enough clearance room on the spine. Size your copy to fill a maximum of 1/2 of the spine's thickness to allow for the fold.You will need to allow space for the flap and spine wrap-around, so be sure to get exact specs from your book printer.

Most Printers Will Require:

1. Your cover and all graphics to be at least 300 dpi (dots per inch) for correct printing.

2. Your cover to be in .pdf format, 300 dpi.

3. Your trim area (the area around your cover) to be at least 1/8", preferably 1/4". This allows your printer to have some adjustment room.

In Conclusion...

Humans are visual beings--we look at faces. Cover design, simply defined, is a book's face. People do judge a book by its cover, so remember--your book needs to be polished and professional to attract attention. And if it is beautiful inside and out, it will be a success.

To a magnificent book!

Doni

Short note about the author

Angela Donelle (Doni) Underwood is a leading book cover designer and consultant who also runs a successful internet and software development company, PlanetIcon. Doni and her team have developed a revolutionary program that allows authors and publishers to design their own professional-quality book covers with ease, and without high-cost. Find out more at http://www.bookcoverpro.com.

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