

DESKTOP PUBLISHING

Following Peter Finch's useful guide in September on setting up a Writers' Circle magazine, here are some vital tips on production.

With a little imagination and a Desk Top Publishing package (DTP), you can enter the world of Rupert Murdoch. If you're familiar with Windows conventions, why not produce a newsletter for your Writers' Circle?

What is DTP?

DTP allows you to divide a page into sections or frames, into which you place text or graphics. As each frame is independent of the others, you have total control over its contents and appearance. By building the page in sections, you can combine an eye-catching masthead with bold headlines and pictures to reproduce the effects you see in magazines and newspapers.

Getting Started

If you're unfamiliar with DTP, the computer screen can look daunting. But fear not, as your package comes with a personal tutor, known as a Wizard or Page Pilot, to guide you through every stage. Once you have chosen the options you prefer, the computer will design the newsletter for you, filling the page with frames, images and a masthead. All you have to do is edit the text and graphics and type in your features.

Cue Cards, which explain the various techniques, are displayed on one side of the screen. Let them guide you until you feel confident enough to take over the design process yourself, when you can switch them off.

Designing Your Newsletter

Take some time to study the magazines and newspapers around the house before trying to design your newsletter. Study the layouts and get a feel for how publishers set out their copy. Remember that every picture, every headline, every block of text, is set in its own frame.

Perhaps the most important rule to follow is that **less is more**. Resist the temptation to use too many different fonts. Don't crowd the page with pictures or features. Try to strike a balance. And remember that space can be important too - you don't need to fill every square millimetre of the page.

Then, with pencil and paper, sketch out your ideas and the frames you will need to contain them. If you have several workgroups in your Writers' Circle, give each their own column. Include details of future meetings, reports on events such as garden parties, and perhaps a letters section. Aim for an identity.

By using the same style of headline for each section, you create a unity which binds the newsletter together.

To improve readability, use a sans serif font, such as Arial, which puts less ink on the page. Break up the text with spaces and lines, or separate out quotes in large, bold letters, inserting them between paragraphs as the newspapers do.

Creating the Newsletter

Everyone knows that size is important. Do you want a single sheet, A4 newsletter, printed on both sides? Or would you prefer booklet style - a sheet of A4 folded in half? Set these details in the Page Layout command, along with the margins. These will be shown as faint dotted lines on the screen page, delineating the area in which you can print.

Begin by inserting a Text Frame across the top of the front page for the masthead. Choose the font and size you desire and centre the name of your newsletter. Now experiment by underlining, using italics, or a shadow. Put a box or fancy border round the masthead, or white writing on a black background.

Finally, adjust the size of the frame if necessary by clicking on the 'handles' - the squares on the frame - and dragging with the mouse.

You now have your first frame. Pat yourself on the back and have a cup of tea before creating the main headline. Change the font and style if you wish. You're in control. Then add the frame for the main body of text. For that real newspaper look, why not have two or three columns? You'll find the command for this under frame properties. And for a professional look, justify the text so it has straight margins.

One of the advantages of DTP is the ability to superimpose one frame over another. This allows you to insert a picture to break up the text. Type to the point where you wish to insert a picture, insert, a new frame, and import a picture. Feel free to experiment as this is the best way of learning. Repeat the process until you have completed all the pages, and print.

Once on paper, you will soon discover any faults or problems. Lining up the frames to give you a straight edge can be tricky. Increase the size of the page image with the Zoom Control before lining up the frames. Though it can be fiddly, the rulers on the screen will take the guesswork out of the process. When you've finished, print out the final version, and prepare for the plaudits from your Writers' Circle.

If all this sounds simple, that's because it is. Once you're familiar with the techniques, you can create more complex layouts using watermarks, logos, and inverted text. Why not add a crossword? The manual and Help screens offer plenty of useful advice. Some packages are more intuitive, but no harder to learn. And if all else fails, summon up the personal tutor to do the hard work for you.

Having completed your newsletter, your desk top publishing skills can be put into good use. Why not design yourself a new letterhead for your stationery? With a sharp logo or some clipart, you can have compliment slips, fax cover sheets and business cards, all adding the touch of professionalism that is so important to the freelance writer. First impressions are crucial, catching the editor's eye with a stylish letterhead could lift your manuscript out of the slush pile.

Or why not enter the world of copywriting and produce brochures for local businesses, clubs and societies? Now that photographs can be developed onto CD, these can be imported into a brochure to complement the vast range of fonts and clipart at your disposal. With a colour printer and some high quality paper, the results can be highly professional - at a fraction of the cost of a commercial printer.

Which DTP Package?

The packages reviewed all produce professional-looking newsletters on a home PC, running Windows 3.1 or 95. AH are widely available, reasonably priced, and easy to learn and use. All offer a good range of features, such as personal tutors, detailed help screens, useful templates, text manipulation, import facilities and colour control.

Some packages haven't been included as they are professional products. Corel Ventura 6, for example, retails at over 200 and can be a bit of a struggle to get up and running. But it's packed with extra features and produces superb results if you are willing to put in the effort.



by Rob Crouch

Microsoft Publisher 97

If you use products such as Office and Word for Windows, then you will appreciate the familiarity of the screen and toolbars. Among the new features, is the ability to create Web pages at the click of a button. You can also save documents in a format that can be used directly by commercial printers, ideal for long print runs.

The manual offers an excellent introduction to DTP, complete with excellent design tips and ideas, but is light of detail. This shouldn't pose a problem as learning is intuitive. Beginners may be frustrated by some functions such as changing font, which only show on the toolbar when you click in a text frame.

With extensive clipart, fonts, and a thoughtful design gallery, Publisher 97 is an appealing system, retailing at around £100.

Serif PagePlus Home

With 100 design Wizards for producing all manner of home and business documents, PagePlus is a bit of a bargain at about £35. It comes with LogoPlus for manipulating text and producing logo-type graphics. Unlike the other packages, it has a Character Map, which allows you to insert any symbol you want into your document.

On the down side, PagePlus doesn't have the range of features found in the other packages. But, it's the simplest to use, and comes with a decent range of fonts, clipart and Photo CD images,

GSP

Pressworks

Quick and easy to install, Pressworks offers the most comprehensive range of help and tips for the beginner, imported files can be edited before inserting them into a frame, avoiding any overflow of text. The neatest feature, "however, is the Nudge

Control, which allows you to move frames in small increments instead of labouring with a mouse.

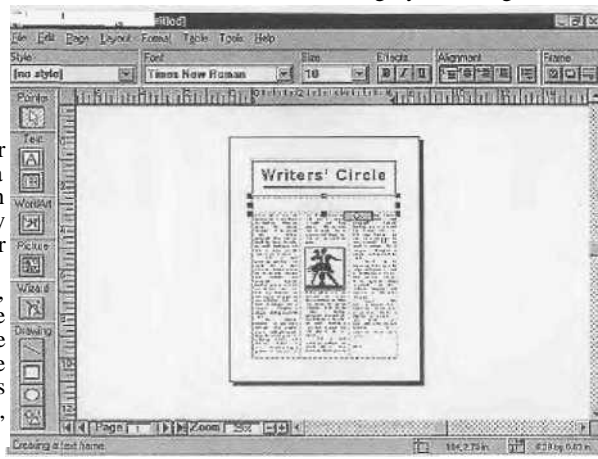
Though it has the 'busiest' toolbars of all the packages, giving the beginner more to learn, Pressworks offers plenty of help and tips, including a useful 'How To' section, making it a good choice for the DTP novice.

Pressworks 2.03, retailing at around £39, runs happily under Windows 95. The designed for Windows 95 version should be available by the time you read this article.

Other Packages

If you haven't upgraded to Windows, you can still bring desk top publishing packages to your computer. MicroStar produce a CD Rom called 'The Complete Desktop Publisher', which contains a number of shareware programmes to help you. Many of these, including Envision Publisher, operate under DOS, producing good results.

Being Shareware, you get the chance to try out the package first for a modest price. The version will be a cut-down program, or it will have the 'SAVE' command disabled. This is to encourage you to register and



The main story has been entered, and now a text frame for the headline is added

buy the full working version, which usually has more features.

Amstrad PCW owners can also chose from a number of packages such as microdesign, Newsdesk, Stop Press and Desk Top Publisher. However, due to the memory requirements of desk top

publishing, you may struggle if you have an 8256 or 9256 model.

Upgrading to Windows 95

While DTP packages for Windows 3.11 produce great results, they fall short of programs designed for Windows 95. The new DTP programs boast many additional features and enhancements that expand the possibilities and quality of the final product. To take advantage of these, you need to upgrade.

Perhaps the most under-rated improvement is the use of long filenames. Gone are the days of searching through cryptic 8-character filenames to find the file you need. With up to 256 characters to describe a file, you'll save hours of trawling through directories to find an old letter.

Installing new hardware, such as a sound card or a modem, is a doddle. Just plug them in and Windows 95 will install and configure them for you. And with the Microsoft Network, you can connect to the Internet without hassle.

Windows 95 is more stable, giving you improved performance and better protection should your PC crash. Hours of work are less likely to be lost as Windows 95 is rather good at recovering the file you were working on when your computer blew a gasket.

Apart from the many enhancements, such as use of the right mouse click, improved multimedia performance and features for the disabled, Windows 95 is becoming the standard system. If you don't have it, you won't be able to take advantage of the latest software, which will only run on Windows 95.

The best news is that you won't need to replace your existing DOS and Windows 3.1 programs as Windows 95 was designed to run them just as efficiently.

Despite the horror stories you may have read in the press, upgrading is handled smoothly by the Installation Wizard, which guides you through the process. With the option to store your original Windows 3.1 settings, you can revert back at any time. But given the improvements, the friendly interface, and the power to run today's beefier software, you won't want to go back.