

Word Processing, Desktop Publishing Use Different Tackle to Catch the Big Fish

You're out to nab that trophy-size fish. Should you use the deep-sea tackle and power cruiser, or take the Lloyd Bridges stealth approach with your four-band spear gun?

The answer, of course, depends on which system is the best for you. While both methods can catch fish, the hunting styles of each and the *types* of fish that can be caught realistically differ greatly. The same is true of layout-capable word processors and desktop publishing programs.

There is a temptation — one promoted by product marketing — to pick a "total solution" for a range of tasks. There is, of course, rarely such a solution. Depending on your needs, a sophisticated word processing package may be sufficient for your "publishing" needs, but perhaps you need a word processor for some tasks and a desktop publisher for others. Or maybe you need everything to be fully desktop published. To know how and when to apply which tools, consider the task you've set out to do.

Publishing has three basic editorial components: content editing, copy editing, and copy fitting. In

content editing, you don't pay attention to point size, typeface, leading, and other formatting, since these are irrelevant to the task at hand. You do, of course, pay attention to basic character formatting — like boldface and italics — where it's used to enhance the content (by stressing meaning). In copy editing, you check grammar, spelling, and style, and you add coding (or style-sheet tags) to indicate headlines, bylines, and other visually distinct text elements. In copy fitting, you make the text fit the space available while preserving its meaning.

Whether you have a staff of one or 100, you'll want to perform these tasks separately: If you're editing for meaning, simultaneously proofreading for spelling errors will likely result in one or both tasks being compromised.

Desktop publishing programs assume that you use a word processor for the content and copy editing. They make no pretense of being editing programs. It's after these steps are completed that you must decide whether to involve desktop publishing in your layout and production or to stay with your word processor.

What differentiates a desktop publisher from a word processor is that publishing is the merger of verbal and visual presentation. To be effective, you must merge the two forms of presentation interactively and synergistically. The crucial factors are layout type, number of elements, the need to do copy fitting, and fine typographic control. You must decide how crucial each area is — whether you are publishing or merely producing a document.

In a memo, basic formatting is all that's needed for layout: paragraphs, underlining, spacing — in short, what typewriters have done effectively for more than a century. In an internal newsletter, a word processor's rudimentary layout features are probably sufficient, since you just want a prettier version of what you used to do on mimeograph or copy machines. In a manual, the layout is usually sequential and straightforward, and fine typography is not a major consideration. Again, a word processor is probably fine, although large manuals would benefit from a document processor that can handle cross-references and multiple chapters. In an advertisement, annual report, subscription newsletter, or magazine, you'll want high-quality design and production.

For this last category, you must use a desktop publishing program. Layout-capable word processors, even WYSIWYG engines such as Ami Professional or Microsoft Word for Windows, simply don't have the layout and typographic controls fundamental to both the verbal and visual presentation. NBI's Legend does a reasonable job of straddling the two categories, as it was designed and sold originally as a desktop publishing program and then remarketed as a high-end word processor. But integrated packages such as Legend must sacrifice certain higher-end features or else they become so top-heavy that they are extremely complex to learn and use (see, for example, IBM Interleaf Publisher).

A desktop publishing package offers much more sophisticated multielement control. A newsletter or magazine is composed of several text and graphics elements; the capability to manage multiple threads of text and the graphics associated with each thread is crucial. Something you publish (not merely produce) is not a sequence of stories where one ends before the next begins. Instead, text begins on a page and in a position determined by both its size and relative importance to the other elements, and text jumps to a different page and position, also determined by its size and relative importance. This issue of *InfoWorld* is an example of such multiple threads and files. When you start having a half-dozen or more elements that weave throughout the publication, a desktop publisher is the only way to go.

The third area distinct to desktop publishing is copy fitting, into which come arcane features like tracking and widow control. Most magazines and newsletters must fit onto a certain number of pages, based on press, design, and budget requirements. You can't have a 33-page magazine — it must be in multiples of at least four pages, and typically in multiples of eight. And you probably have ads to fit your text around (you can't shorten or lengthen an ad to make your layout work); and you can't leave parts of pages blank because your copy is too short or just drop text because it's too long.

One of the first things you do is scroll through your layout and start killing widows and tails. A

widow is the last line of a paragraph that appears at the top of a column. It is considered unsightly because it is shorter than the other lines in the column and creates unwanted white space in an area that should have none. Some people accept widows if they are at least half the width of the column. A tail is the last line of any paragraph whose length is only a few characters — “few” is a subjective decision. It is both unsightly and wastes a precious line.

You eliminate widows and tails by rewording text more concisely and by tightening the spacing selectively (tightly tracking) in preceding lines in the hope of getting the tail text to move up to previous lines. Tails and widows can easily occupy 5 percent of an article's length, which can be enough to get your text to fit. You can also add widows and tails by loosely tracking text if your article is a tad short for the space, although this is less common. If the copy is much too long to fit with these techniques, you must go back to the word processor and re-edit it to make it smaller.

This copy fitting requires typographic controls available only in high-end desktop publishing packages such as Xerox Ventura Publisher or Quark Xpress (for the Macintosh). It also requires *editable* WYSIWYG capabilities (not just a full page view that can be seen but not changed), since it's crucial to see the effects of your copy fitting as you do it. The only packages with editable WYSIWYG modes in this comparison are Ami Professional, Legend, Describe, and Word for Windows.

Copy fitting is both an editorial and a design task. An editor must be involved in rewording text, and a designer (or typographer) must be involved in ensuring that the text's appearance is not marred by excessive tracking.

The last area is the art of typography, which only desktop publishing programs truly provide. Unfortunately, this important publishing component is usually the first to be ignored by newcomers to desktop publishing. If you look closely at a magazine, whether *Scientific American*, *Vanity Fair*, *Time*, or *InfoWorld*, you won't notice how well the spacing between letters and words help carry you along from paragraph to paragraph. You also won't observe how the typography reinforces both the overall feel of the publication and the feel of the content. The fact that you *don't* notice these things during normal reading is a tribute to the typography, just as not getting confused or bored while reading an article is a tribute to the writer and editor, and not finding grammatical or typographic errors is a tribute to the copy editor.

The crux of this discussion is that a word processor is not a desktop publisher, and a desktop publisher is not a word processor — and there is virtually no need for either of them to be the other. Perhaps some day someone will offer a program that lets you tackle content editing, copy editing, layout, typography, and copy fitting adroitly. But even then, the tasks will be done separately, whether by different people or by one person performing each task in turn. Layout is a component of publishing, but it by itself is *not* publishing. Whether you choose to solo on a word processor or to bring in desktop publishing power depends on which publishing components you need for the job at hand.

— Galen Gruman

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