

Face it - your body matters

By Gordon Woolf

Let's face it, we depend on the type we use in our publications, and many spend a great deal of time deciding on heading faces and styles.

Too few give the same consideration to the body fonts.

Many use Times, or one of its variations, simply because it is there - on the computer system and in all the laser printers. But are we using a typeface that is comfortable for our readers?

A young audience with good eyes, keen to read the content, will accept, maybe relish the reverses, and type over photos and line artwork which is seen in Wired and the alternative press. I've seen much that I like, but tired eyes have difficulty with it. Maybe that is the point - it is able to be read by the people it is intended for.

Our readers are those who read a newsletter or newspaper for information and pleasure, and a growing number have difficulty physically discerning type. An optician told me that most eyes start deteriorating significantly by age 40, and although people need a revised set of lenses every decade after that, few actually get them. What proportion of you readers are over 40?

Newspapers have tended to use larger text typefaces in recent times, even though modern presses produce type which is clearer than was produced by the equipment those in the bush press could afford in the times of hot metal.

In those days, acquiring a new typeface was a major investment, and many country newspapers took the castoff Linotype matrices of bigger papers. Now we have the choice of the world's typefaces for a few dollars each and a special purchase will cost under a couple of hundred dollars for a complete family (and there is no "wear and tear" on an electronic font).

Are you using Times? If you are, then I ask "Why?"

I hope it is because you have considered others, opting for a serif face because research states that it is easier to read in large quantities, and that you know it was designed as a newspaper typeface.

But did you know that it was designed for the very high quality newsprint used by The Times of London? Or that most major newspapers opted long ago for faces with bigger bowls, relatively shorter ascenders and descenders, and better defined serifs. Times fills in easily and the fine serifs do not stand up well to the multiple processes between artwork and press?

It is in widespread use because it is included (with minor variations) on just about every laser printer ever made, and, thanks to its inclusion in the almost universal print language of PostScript, in every imagesetter.

I asked a number of typographers for their recommendations for a newspaper font, to be printed on standard newsprint. Six came up with nine recommendations. I'll list them all in no particular order: Nimrod, Olympian, Rotation, Times Europa, Calisto, Melior, Stone, Lucida and Lino Letter.

While some are categorised as serif fonts, others are classified by the foundries as "slab serif". All have most aspects in common - widerset, with good variation between thick and thin strokes, but with no fine strokes, large bowls to letters such as e and a and relatively large x-height. X-height is the height of lowercase characters such as x which have no descenders or ascenders.

Some of those fonts you will have to pay full price for, but I've seen Lucida, for

example, in collections from Microsoft (though don't get it confused with some in the same series which were designed for other uses, such as Lucida Fax, or Lucida Sans).

One of the typographers I asked, Milo Ivir of Berlin, replied at some length: "What I recall from a couple of years ago is LinoLetter. The typeface is the result of a research project between Linotype-Hell AG (nowadays Linotype Library) and the Design-School (Schule fuer Gestaltung) in Basel. The project was guided by Professor André Guertler. The team examined all important 'newspaper-typefaces' used since the beginning of newspaper printing. They examined their readability and their rendering when printed. With all this information the team produced the LinoLetter family. The main characteristics of LinoLetter are the newly designed serifs, the visual differentiation of the characters/letters as well as the balanced contrast between the strokes and the white space."

Included are samples of the roman and bold face (it is available in roman, medium, bold and black, all with italic forms, and in versions with true small caps and old-style figures if needed).

Remember, I'm not saying you should use any of these fonts - but I am suggesting you consider them. At the very least, print out some samples of text you have previously run in typefaces you have. And remember that it is no use looking at them on the high quality paper you probably use for laser output, or on the paper output from an imagesetter. Try photocopying them onto the lowest quality paper your photocopier will take.

One word of warning. If you decide on a font which is not installed in your laser printer, you may find that printing each page takes longer. How much longer will depend on computer and printer memory, and there are ways around this such as downloading the new fonts automatically when you start up the printer (they then stay in memory until the printer is switched off). As an aside, I've seen some setups where the fonts are being downloaded for every page anyway, despite being installed on the printer.

Your decision on a typeface should also be accompanied with a decision on spacing. Are your spacing defaults still set to the defaults of the layout program you use. Again, if you have considered others and found these to be what you want, I have no criticism.

However, I have seen newspapers where the spacing used in, for example, PageMaker, was specified because the publisher wanted to match the output to their previous phototypesetting system. At the time, that made sense, because it was likely that a page would be pasted up from columns run on both systems.

But the phototypesetting machines have long been consigned to the back shed, and the wide letter spacing (important as it allowed equipment to get considerably out of alignment and still not expose into the space of adjacent letters) remains to this day.

Leading must be considered along with type size - some typefaces need additional leading; others have interline spacing already built in by the designer. So, a 9pt type of one face is not the equal of 9pt in another. Not even the distance from the top of an ascender to the bottom of a descender will be the same.

You may also consider spacing between paragraphs - maybe just a point or so will give an airy look to the page. I agree, but here we enter the area of economics.

You will want the bottom of each column to align - and that takes time whether it is done manually or via a script or other form of automation.

Consider a column of 50 lines of type which comprises 12 paragraphs in one column, and 14 paragraphs in the next. The type size, we shall say, is 9pt on a 10pt body. That totals 500 points in each column and they align neatly. Now introduce one point of space between the paragraphs, and we have 511 points in one and 513 in the

other. You must either add space to the first column, or turn a line from the second to the third and add eight points to what remains (this assumes you can accommodate that additional 11 points in the first and don't have to turn two lines from that).

The problem is exacerbated by intro paragraphs which run in a larger type. So be aware that if you want these aspects of layout (which are legitimate and can improve appearance), you may be paying for them in additional time taken to produce your pages.

Some layout programs cope with what is called "vertical justification" better than others. But in all it is a compromise and in some it is hardly attempted at all. The extra space needed has to added somewhere. Harking back to hot metal, the problem then was often solved by "carding", or adding pieces of card between every line until a column aligned with the longest column. In the more slapdash works a strip of type metal was used so space was added several points at a time to produce some almost ludicrous line spacing.

We will continue this discussion with comments on crossheads, subheads and headings... and the space around them.

\*For those using PageMaker, Gordon Woolf has a rudimentary "column balance" script for PageMaker 6.5 that he will send anyone who requests it. Send an email to [gordon@worsleypress.com](mailto:gordon@worsleypress.com)