
Simplicity by design

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There is an increasing need for rapid and responsive promotional campaigns in support of library projects in order to communicate changes and to promote awareness of library products and services. The promotions team, formed as part of a staffing restructure at the university library at the University of Portsmouth, undertook an almost budget-free rebranding last year to produce an attractive new in-house design style for promotional posters, signs and social media posts. It could be developed and repurposed with a minimum of effort.

DESIGNING THE STYLE

It was decided that all visual library communications would be based on the principles of simplicity, flexibility and reusability. Heavy demand early on for immediate promotional campaigns meant there was no time to produce a set of templates. Instead, an outline structure and themed colour scheme were drawn up to guide the creation of all such designs. Specific designs were then developed by adapting and repurposing as required.

MANY DESIGNS, ONE BASIC LAYOUT

Starting with boxes and circles – the simplest elements to rearrange – the new style sought to strengthen the association that already exists between functional service areas and particular colours. All library promotions were to share the same underlying structure: headline message with an image below, with other supporting messages alongside and below if necessary. Drawing on motifs used in the university's marketing design style, the straight lines and box-like feel of early designs gave way to more flowing layouts, with curves, waves and discs of colour that proved to be attractive, asymmetric containers for supporting messages.



Figs 1–2 Designs have developed from straight-edged boxes to curves

RE-USE, RE-DESIGN, RE-PURPOSE

After each version of a new poster / social media post had been produced, the content was removed and a template version showing the layout of elements was saved for future re-use. The templates were designed to be re-used with a minimum of effort. The use of simple structural elements allows layouts to be rapidly rearranged,

and reflected vertically or horizontally. The position, colour and size of shapes can be altered, thus producing very different layouts with familiar motifs.

Respect your workspace



Please no food in the Silent Study zones

Cold food only please

Fancy a hot snack?
Try our café or 3rd Space

You know you have spent way too much time in the Library when...



Please make sure you sleep regularly (at home) during 24/7

**24/7 returns
Monday 13 January**



Until your exams end

Open for you 24)7

Near your limit?



or know someone who is?

Help is always at hand

Your Library
using Library products and services
finding information
evaluating and using information
referencing

Figs 3–6 Template rearrangements based on one underlying layout

They can be reshaped and resized easily so that the same poster design can be adapted to good effect using standard methods for optimal presentation on various visual communication channels, including plasma screens around campus, the library blog, Twitter stream and Facebook page. Blocks of white space or bold colour framing the top and bottom of a large central image allow designs to be easily moved or resized. The shape

can be changed from the A-size ratio required for printed posters to the square ideal for Facebook. Positioning the main message above the image and sizing both to fill the upper two-thirds of the template means that these more important parts are always visible in the square version embedded in a tweet, without the client having to click to view the whole image. This underlying structure allows two arrangements of a design to be used

for a diverse range of layouts for dissemination through different communication channels.



Fig. 7 A-sized poster arrangement



Fig. 8 Social media sized arrangement

SIMPLICITY BY DESIGN

The promotions team took the most commonly used poster layouts, simplified them slightly, then made the ready-to-use layouts available to other teams as Word and PowerPoint template files; place-holder images and text show where to add text and stock images.

Using MS Office software offered several advantages. It is familiar, the template files allow staff to produce multiple copies of the original by

simply double-clicking on the file icon, and every document and slide produced from them has the branding colours available as 'recently used colours'. Specifying each of the branding colours by RGB code in each template file before it was saved meant that all the documents and slides produced from them also include the full branding colour palette under 'recent colours' every time the shape fill, shape outline and font colour options are used, ensuring that the exact branding colours are always used.

The use of familiar software and templates encouraged rapid uptake and achieved near complete consistency across all library signage overnight. The development of the standard functional sign format from a promotional poster design means there is no sudden change between functional and promotional signage.

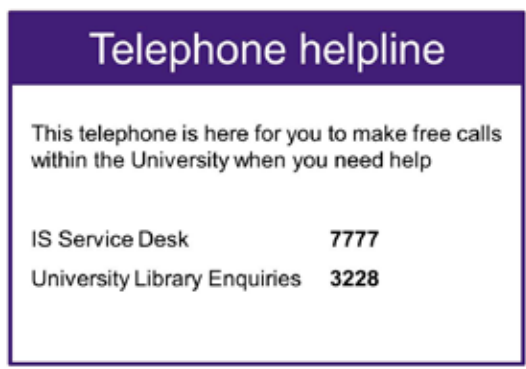


Fig. 9 Functional sign giving information

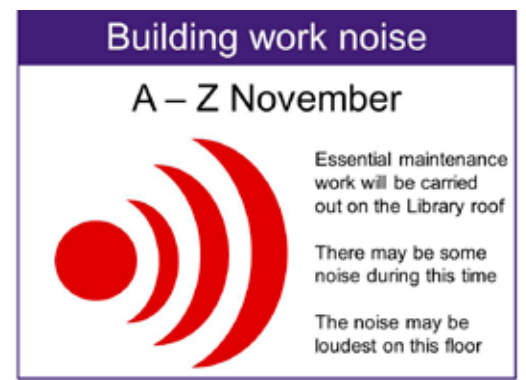


Fig. 10 Functional poster raising awareness of change

OFFICE STANDARD

PowerPoint became the standard software for all designs to be shared between teams because Microsoft Office was the only program familiar to those who need to produce functional signs, and potentially to create simple posters. PowerPoint and Word template files are surprisingly powerful tools for producing simple but striking poster designs.

ASSOCIATION BY COLOUR

The colour palette helps link and theme promotions for different services. Colours were chosen from the bright ones already used in the library. The green of the shelving represents resources, the deep yellow of a popular booklet for distance learners promotes the availability of products and services from anywhere over the internet and the orange from the quick access computer section represents instantly accessible on-site services. The only new colour was fuchsia, which was used for client-facing services. It was chosen to harmonise with the purple and lime green of the new enquiries desk suite and complements both the blue from the library entrance sign, traditionally used for library-specific promotions, and the purple used for institutional branding.

EVOLUTION AND PROJECT STYLES

The design style has developed even in the short time since it was introduced, and a specific project style has been created for a large refurbishment project. This project-specific motif helps identify promotional communications relating to it, and its sudden disappearance from social media channels will help draw attention to the formal completion of the project. The techniques developed have given rise to more complicated infographics, campaign posters and visually appealing handouts.



Fig.11 Project branded poster



Fig. 12 More complicated poster design



Fig. 13 Example of promotional infographic

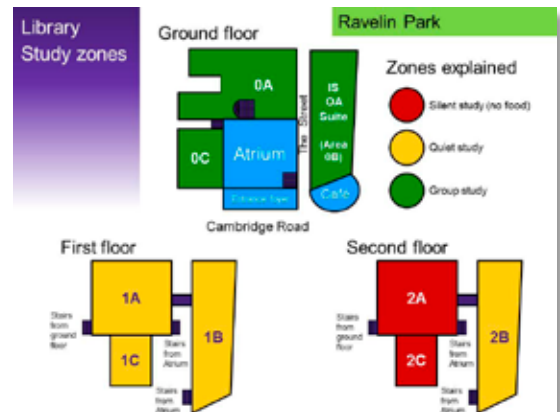


Fig. 14 Example of handout

We are now developing new and more sophisticated templates and techniques using ever more sophisticated software, but the successful design principles used early on continue to help in the rapid, responsive creation of new posters and social media images with a clean, minimalist feel.