

I AM CURRENTLY WORKING TO REVISE A REALLY "BAD" FLYER FOR IFPA ARTICLES IN TIP MAGAZINE AND IT HINGES ON THE USE OF VERTICAL TYPE. I DECIDED TO CROSS-OVER AND RE-RUN AN UPDATED ARTICLE ON THE USE OF...

# Vertical Type 2



I have been trying to revise a flyer that uses vertical type for the readers of TIP from the IFPA organization, and I tell you, it's not easy. Best solution? Trash the entire flyer and start over (which I will do in the November article). Anyway, I remembered this article from October of 2011 and thought it may be a good time to review the use of vertical type in flyers, ads, signs, anywhere!

My original encounter with this design use started when I saw the name *Mineshaft* on one side of their building (this is a very popular restaurant in the Hartford area). I guess I had never really paid much attention to it before because their logo and all other print media never uses the vertical format. I started to look for sources that talked about vertical type or "stacked" type, but it wasn't easy—and I pretty much came up with nothing!

V V M M  
e E i I  
r R n N  
t T e E  
i I s S  
c C h H  
a A a A  
l L f F  
t T

Readability is negligible as you have to look at each individual letter—you can't just read the word as a group. All letters are centered to avoid even more confusion and even making the letters all caps doesn't help very much. The problem is that our alphabet contains a variety of character sizes—skinny, wide and everything in between!

That adds even more distractions and problems. However, sometimes a small word, like the word "Sale" could be made to work. We deal with a lot of "Sales" in our ads, and never enough space so sometimes it may be a solution—not the best, but a solution. You must make it easier to read and turn it into a fixed-width face.

**S S** If you choose to use vertical type, upper case (capital) letters are easier to read because the x-height is somewhat similar, so we will start there. SALE in all caps has letters that are almost the same.

I increased the type size so it is easier to read and created a box around each letter to create the illusion of a fixed-width area. The background is now uniform and creates a defined space for each letter uniting the group.

A strong, simple typeface works the best for readability. Go as bold as you can and as large as you can.

I also think white type on a darker background (in the 3rd example the screens are 70% and 100%) also adds a bit more unity by creating a more cohesive element and enabling the group to be read as a "whole." This is where the idea of

"negative space" is critical, and should always be considered when laying out your design.

The aforementioned process would probably not work with longer words, ( S A L E can still be read as a group) because readability should be easy, not contrived, not cute, not an impediment... you *want* the message to be remembered. So when in doubt—*don't!*

## Another option...

OK... let's use the Mineshaft as an example. The customer wants the name of their business to be as big as possible and they want to place it in a one column ad. Fortunately, they only want a few words. What to do?

*Sorry, not my best but this ad is for demo and I do have to use vertical type!*

*See how difficult it is to read the name and it seems to be a jumble of boxes and text.*

*The name is set in Helvetica Neue Black, 28 point on 21 point leading with -5 letter spacing.*

**M  
I  
N  
E  
S  
H  
A  
F  
T**

*The best place for fun, food, family and friends. See our great menu offerings for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Located in downtown Hartford*

Address & Phone on two lines

**Restaurant and Bar**

## The following may offer a better solution!

*Rotate! To keep unity, I placed "Restaurant and Bar" under the name and moved the general text over just a bit.*

*The name is easier to read but still may not be the best.*

*Same typeface, but it's 34 point. Leading does not matter because the other line is smaller with -20 letter spacing, in reverse.*

**MINESHAFT**  
RESTAURANT AND BAR

*The best place for fun, food, family and friends. See our great menu offerings for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Located in downtown Hartford*

Address & Phone on two lines

The direction to rotate is up to you, but generally, it will look better if the baseline is facing the edge of your interface, in other words where headline and text interact. I also did a little changing of the general text area and narrowed the entire ad to create more dimension. "MINESHAFT" is now easier to read... granted a little head tilt is necessary, but it will be easier to remember the name.

## But wait, there's more...

Take a close look at the word itself... it can be "stacked" with the syllables, in this case "mine" and "shaft" (we got lucky!)

Keeping a similar look from the last ad, we keep the same point size for the name, but modify the "Restaurant and Bar" portion... a little smaller, less letterspacing and still placed on two lines.

The general text has remained the same in all three ads, just positioned a little differently. The size of the ads is the same, except where noted, but as you can see, there's a bit of difference in the looks.

## So which ad is the most effective?

*Back to Helvetica Neue Black, 28 point on 21 point leading with -5 letter spacing.*

**MINE  
SHAFT**  
RESTAURANT  
AND BAR

*The best place for fun, food, family and friends. See our great menu offerings for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Located in downtown Hartford*

Address & Phone on two lines

## The Bottom Line

Vertical type is difficult to work with. The best scenario is not ever to use it! That being said, you may be forced to at some point in your career. So go bold and see if you can add some unity by developing a visual fixed-width element, using a sans serif typeface... or passing the ad to someone else (yea, not gonna happen).

In western culture, we recognize familiar letter sequences and when we do, we are better able to recognize the word. Vertical type makes that a far more difficult task because we don't anticipate the next letter to "read" the word.

One of my favorite phrases is "impedes readability," when confronted with issues that actually impede readability! Feel free to use this phrase if the issue of vertical type arises!

## Until next month!

*I welcome your input and suggestions. A former art teacher, I entered the free paper publishing business in the early 80s. I write for IFPA, Community Papers of Michigan, and am still learning.*

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