Typography III: Creative Layouts – Type and Images in Web Design

This article builds on the first two articles in this short series on typography and web design.

In the first article, five historic font families were dissected and examined. Design elements were introduced in the second article to show how typography works within layout schemes on type-heavy websites.

This week, I'll zoom back in on individual characters, words, and phrases to see how these elements are used with images to create specialized layouts that don't require heavy use of body copy.

Layouts

Web design layouts are fairly restricted, because we work with a limited format. This format – the computer and its graphic capabilities – also restrains our layout choices to styles like the **3-column CSS** or grids designed by HTML tables (oh, sure – include the 100% across-the-screen layout; I'll return to that in a second).

Additionally, codes constantly change, with upgrades for accessibility and, one would hope, for new layout possibilities. While we can dream on about expanding computer capabilities, we will probably never achieve the freedom that print designers enjoy with their choices of papers, inks, and design size formats.

However, we can push the envelope a bit when we design sites that beg for something different. For instance, a few award-winning layouts use typography and images as visual cues, rather than copy-heavy layouts used by news sites.

One example being Show Studio:

Show Studio

The reason the image above looks so wide in this screen-shot reduction is because the website flows past the 100% frame width. We need to scroll to capture all the images and all the typed links. Does this matter?

Obviously this doesn't matter to a lot of viewers, because this site was a **Webby Award** nominee for 2003 and 2004. If you take a glance at the source code for the Show Studio homepage (**VIEW > SOURCE** or variant thereof, depending on your browser), you see that the code is linked to a CSS stylesheet, and the designers threw in a few JavaScript rollovers, etc. to jazz things up a bit.

The code is one thing, the visual is another. We know when we click on this site that we are not in a space that informs us about local weather, international news, or that brings us long-winded satires on elections in foreign countries. I complained last week about body copy that seems to wrap around my head when it's designed to fit a 100% screen width. However, visuals offer another communication alternative that might fit that 100% screen width and beyond, like Show Studio.

But, how do we know when and where to push that envelope?