

Talking Heads

Creativity, Not Cash, Key to Successful Promotional Materials

WIFVV was pleased to present Michelle Demers as our guest speaker for Talking Heads last November 28. Michelle is known in the community for a variety of talents, among them her crackling writing style, creative and cost-effective flair as a graphic designer, and critical eye when editing, formatting, or revising scripts. Michelle is the co-editor and designer of this, our quarterly newsletter, as well.

The workshop focused on two areas: professional design and printing, and do-it-yourself techniques. Regarding the first, Michelle discussed the importance of pre-planning to minimize cost: when hiring a designer, the more focused you are about your needs the less the designer has to waste time guessing, the less money you have to spend. Michelle also shared some industry lingo and educated us about questions to ask of a designer and what issues we need to understand when budgeting. For example, full color CMYK printing is expensive because a plate and film has to be made for each color (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, Black), while using a spot color from the Pantone library reduces costs (eg., this newsletter is made up two colors, black and Pantone 328). So if you're needing to cut costs, don't expect to print out a one-sheet with a full-color photograph on it for the same price as one with one-color type and a grayscale picture.

For those capable of designing for professional output, Michelle discussed the pros and cons of alternate printing techniques such as paper plates and Onyx technology, both lower-priced than metal plates. She also gave an excellent example of how discussing your project with your printer can save money: for the Shoot Out brochure, Michelle's printer gave her advice on how she could combine both pages into one to minimize the printer's costs and therefore ours. The result was over \$150 shaved off the price.

But what of those with neither the funds to hire a professional designer nor a few grand to buy the software and equipment needed to design things ourselves? Michelle showed examples of materials designed in the much lower-priced Microsoft Publisher and even some designed in Word 7.0, then printed out using laser and color ink-jet printers. While such programs have limitations and can't be used for professional output—and Word can be downright frustrating to design with—both have capabilities that can be exploited with a little patience and practice by most of us (though talent is another matter). Michelle offered helpful tips and information on specialty papers, creative uses of color laser photocopies, and even how to “antique” your own paper for those historical projects. What was emphasized in the workshop were ways in which we can use our creativity to counter our lack of funds and at the same time use this as a way to advertise our ingenuity as well as the project itself.

All Michelle's examples illustrated how she combines both her writing and design talents to produce cost-effective yet successful promotional materials. Because she possesses both skills, producers have a variety of options from just having their own proposals proofed or polished, to layout and graphic design, all the way to having her both write and design the whole thing from scratch.

Michelle was so organized and well-prepared—she had linotronic films, color charts, designs, software techno-geek advice, illustrations, etc...it was really terrific and we all learnt so much. I'll definitely hire her over any high-priced professional out there who doesn't know the industry. She is savvy, smart, and really talented.

Violetta Lapinski