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Obvious and Obscure

Ways To Cut Publication Design & Production Expenses



LYNN RILEY DESIGN

**Designer Secrets:
32 Obvious and Obscure Ways To Cut Publication
Design and Production Expenses**



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Save On Design And Production Costs

Many associations outsource the design and production of their publication. The most significant savings are often found in the choice of a vendor, which is why we've made this number one.

1 Outsource Your Design and/or Monthly Layout and Production

When it comes to outsourcing the design and production of your publication, you have many choices. Big firms, small firms, and freelancers – each has advantages and disadvantages. The most important way to evaluate your choices is by exactly what you're getting for your dollar.

Big firms often dazzle you with a complete array of services. And for you, it may indeed be the right choice. But many associations have found that going with a big design firm does not mean you get better quality or service. In fact, sometimes you get lost in the crowd.

Listen to what one association publisher had to say about their experience at a big firm:

“ When I first faced the question of launching a new magazine, the challenges were enormous, and many constraints were tied to the dollars and cents I could spend. A small firm came to the rescue, not only by leading the rapid development of an elegant publication design, but also by guiding me in finding ways to create and produce the publication more cost effectively than I could have imagined. Their expertise in both print and electronic media helped me to save time and money by streamlining our workflow, using different source material, and drawing in other tricks of the trade that only come with experience in design and corporate value rooted in customer satisfaction. This proved to me that small companies can excel in both cost and quality when they truly listen to their clients. ”

—*Philippa Benson, Director, Education & Author Services, The Charlesworth Group (USA)*

Many association publishers who need a publication redesign find that a larger firm has the portfolio and track record they're seeking. That can indeed be a wise investment, even though the initial cost is high. But once the redesign is complete, it may be more cost effective to go with a smaller firm (or even a freelancer) for the month-to-month production of regular issues. Freelancers or smaller firms can take the template (or recreate it) and easily follow the page layout and type styles to maintain the publication's branding.

2 Always Get Quotes From Multiple Designers/Firms

It can be tempting to go with the first quote you get, but it's well worth it to get at least three. It's an eye opening experience. You may be quite surprised to find that some vendors are less expensive than you expected, while others may be more. Make sure that every quote specifies exactly what services you'll get for your money, how payments are handled (and how that will affect your cash flow).

3 Make Sure Copy Is Final Before Sending It to the Designer

Make every attempt to finalize all copy before sending it to your designer. If there are multiple stakeholders in the copy, make sure they all sign off by a specified deadline. After that, make it clear that changes will only be approved if there are glaring inaccuracies. Once the design process is underway, every copy change will cost you. Proofread, proofread, proofread. Spending money on a proofreader is often a wise decision that can save mistakes – and money – later on.

4 Help the Designer Help You

Everyone's preferences are different. That's why it's so important to provide examples of what you do and don't like. This will give the designer a better idea of what you're envisioning. It will also help avoid endless revisions and "I'll know it when I see it" syndrome. Whenever possible provide art resources, images, and samples to the designer so he doesn't waste his time and your money creating concepts that are sure to be rejected. And, if you just don't like "forest green," it's best to mention it early on.

5 Supply High-Res Charts, Figures, and Graphs

If you can provide charts, figures, and graphs, as opposed to having your designer create them, you can save a chunk of change. Ask your designer for some guidelines before creating them yourself. What fonts and colors should be used to complement the page layout? Should shading be used behind the bars or pie chart? What should be the thickness of line weight? How about dimensions for each chart? Submit the final graphics in high-res format (vector eps or 300 dpi jpegs).

6 Be Flexible

Allow your designer the freedom to make changes in order to make your project work. You will be able to veto the changes, but any good designer who has been listening to

your needs will only make changes that improve your project and save time and money.

7 Always Get a Written Estimate Of the Total Costs

Don't hire a designer based on hourly rates without knowing how many hours are going to be charged. The designer should be able to give you a reasonable range of hours. Non-designers often fail to realize just how much time the process really takes. If you give the designer carte blanche, you may end up with sticker shock. While many designers charge by the hour, others charge by the project. The advantage of going with project-based fees is that you'll know exactly what it's going to cost. It doesn't matter how many hours it takes the designer to do it. When going with project-based fees, however, make sure you have a clear understanding of what is (and is not) included. And of course, get it in writing.

8 The Do-It-Yourself Option

If you have a zero budget then do it yourself. This option isn't optimum, but it is a way to get what you need. If you have some proficiency in page layout software (Quark or Indesign) consider hiring a designer to set up templates and provide layout guidelines for you so that you can produce your own newsletter. This is a way to achieve an acceptable quality for every edition, but pay only for the initial set up.

9 Arrange Your Own Printing

When your designer acts a liaison with your printer (which is how it's normally done), he or she is compensated in some way. Usually, it's reflected in the hourly charges or in a markup on the printing costs. Ask your designer how much you would save if you did it yourself. You'll need to put together the job specifications, solicit bids from various printers, evaluate them, and then talk with the printer directly.

10 Provide Your Designer With a Creative Brief

A creative brief is a document that details everything the designer needs to know to complete the job. In the brief, you'll want to include the following elements:

- A description of the target audience (demographics)
- The take-away value of the publication to the readers
- Who the competition is
- What sets your publication apart from the competition and what makes it distinctive in the field
- Your branding, and how you want it handled throughout the publication
- The production timeline and milestones
- Formatting approaches
- Anything else you can think of that the designer needs to do his or her job

11 Stick to the Schedule

Poor planning and delays can mean paying rush fees to bring a project in on time. Develop a schedule early on and stick to it in order to stay on budget. If planning is not your strong suit or you just don't have the time, ask your designer to map out a production schedule for you.

12 Get an Annual Contract (or Renegotiate An Existing One)

If you know you have X amount in the budget allocated for design services in a year's time, ask for a contract. This is a win-win. Often a designer will reduce overall production and design fees in exchange for the guaranteed work. Often (but not always) the contract is in the form of a retainer. With a retainer, you pay the designer a certain amount monthly, and get a certain number of hours in return. Your hours are use or lose, but for many associations a retainer arrangement is often less expensive than an in-house designer and can yield more finished work.

13 Run the Numbers on In-House Staff vs. Outsourcing

One good budget exercise to go through every couple of years is to weigh the costs of in-house staff versus outsourcing. While hourly fees paid to designers may seem higher than the wage you pay in-house personnel, you also have to factor in the costs for benefits, equipment, office supplies, space, and other overhead costs. Many associations keep a lean staff, who they can keep busy at all times, and outsource projects above and beyond that amount.

14 Make Use of Lower Cost Talent

Interns and college art students can be a rich source of talent. That's what Lisa Moore, Editor-in-Chief of the *Wildlife Professional* has found. "Our small nonprofit publishes a 96-page, full-color quarterly magazine with a tiny staff of three plus one young intern," she says. "A recent college graduate, our intern is an absolutely essential and equal member of our team. She produces excellent work on a very low salary in exchange for invaluable experience in her chosen profession. We save money, she gains skills and enhances her resume, and we all win. The only drawback: we'll miss her terribly when she moves on to graduate school!"

Such arrangements are a win-win for the interns (or students) and the publication. It costs less, and the interns gain valuable experience. Design and writing aren't the only areas in which to seek out young talent. Consider students for photography and illustration as well.

Save On Printing Costs

15 Reduce Page Count And/Or Frequency

Paper and printing services are expensive, and there are two ways to save. You can publish less frequently, and/or you can reduce the page count per issue. Reducing the frequency of publication can be tricky, especially for publications that are supported by advertising. Balancing ad revenue against printing costs is nuanced, and sometimes there are no clear answers. In addition, some advertisers who like to advertise frequently can balk at a quarterly publication schedule when they used to run ads monthly.

Cutting back the page count is often less risky. You cut back from 96 to 80 pages, save money, and the readers often don't even notice. To prepare for a page cutback, survey your readers to see what sections they seldom read; eliminate those sections. Although reader surveys cost money, the knowledge you gain from them can pay off in big savings.

16 Get Quotes from Multiple Print Shops

It pays to shop around! Printers vary wildly on their prices; much of the price difference is based on the type of presses or equipment they use. One print shop that has the best price for a newsletter run of 3,000 may turn out to be the most expensive for higher quantities of 20,000. Another printer that's the least expensive for a 4-color magazine may turn out to be surprisingly high on a 2-color publication. Printers who specialize in certain types of projects may be more cost effective. They also may be less cost effective. That's why it's so important to shop around. For extremely low quantities, look for a printer with a digital press; you're likely to find them the most cost effective.

17 Use a Print Broker

A print broker helps you to define production problems, develop job specs, and figure out what you need. He or she can then identify a printer who will be able to print your project at a good price. If you have in-house resources to manage the process, or if your designer acts as your liaison, you won't benefit from the services of a broker. But if your printing needs are complex and cost above \$10,000, a print broker may be able to save you both hassle and money.

18 Use Standard-Sized Pages

Sticking with established standards saves you money. The two main standard page sizes are 8.5 x 11 inches (known as *journal*) or 11 x 17 inches (known as *tabloid*). If you want something non-standard, it will cost you extra. If, for example, your publication requires a 10 x 15 inch page, the printer will have to use 11 x 17 and cut it down to size. You still have to pay for the larger paper size, plus the extra labor of trimming it.

19 Avoid Bleeds

A full bleed means the ink goes all the way to the edge of the page, with no white border. To achieve a full bleed, the printer uses an oversized sheet so that the ink extends to the very edge of the document dimensions and still allows an additional margin. The additional margin is needed so that the sheet can be fed through the press, but must then be trimmed off. Needless to say, this is expensive.

20 Don't Order Better Paper Than You Need

Consider the brightness, weight and feel of the paper and decide what grades will yield the maximum impact without breaking the bank. The purer the white, the more contrast there is between the paper and the ink...hence the higher price tag. Costs also increase with the weight of the paper. For instance a 70 lb. sheet costs more than a 60 lb. sheet. Paper with coatings such as gloss, matte, silk, and dull gives a publication a sophisticated look. Colors pop and photos and illustrations tend to stand out more on coated paper...but again, it comes at a higher cost.

21 Reconsider Your Binding And Covers

Binding is another cost factor. Newsletters are typically saddle stitched (with staples in the center) or unbound (with the pages folded tabloid style and laid inside each other). If your newsletter is saddle stitched and doesn't have too many pages, you may be able to get away without it altogether.

Magazines, however, do require some type of binding. Perfect binding, which is an adhesive based binding that gives the magazine a spine, is more costly than saddle stitching. Depending on how many pages are in your publication, you may be able to switch from perfect binding to saddle stitching.

When it comes to covers, a self-cover can be a cost-effective way to go, as long as the paper stock is heavy enough, such as a 50-pound gloss. If you've been using a heavier cover stock (80 pound, for example) with a lighter weight paper stock on the interior pages, switching both cover and interior pages to 50-pound stock gives you the best of both worlds. You'll probably save money overall, the 50-pound cover stock looks great, and the interior 50-pound paper stock will give your publication a more luxurious feel.

22 Sell Ad Space to your Co-Workers

By coordinating promotional campaigns with other departments, you can save on the association's overall printing budget. For instance, instead of printing a separate four-page brochure promoting your annual meeting, consider selling four pages of real estate (at a reduced rate) in your magazine to your Meetings department. It's a win-win all around.

23 Pay Immediately

Many printers offer a small discount for customers who pay up front or immediately upon receiving the merchandise. Always ask.

24 Give Your Subscribers an Opt-Out for Print Material in Lieu of a Digital Publication

With the advent of mobile devices and pad technology, more and more people every day are opting to get their content electronically versus print. If your association produces a digital publication, give your members an option to receive the digital publication only. You can save a bundle on printing and postage this way.

25 Replace Part or All of a Publication With an E-Newsletter

These days, almost all associations communicate both in print and electronically with their members. Many print publications have electronic supplements in the forms of email blasts and e-newsletters. Evaluate your communication strategy to determine if you're doing all you can to cut back on print publications. For instance, if you're publishing both a magazine and a newsletter, you may be able to convert the newsletter to electronic format only. If you're publishing just a magazine, you may be able to cut back the number of pages and supplement with an email newsletter. Be sure to take advertising sales into consideration so that you don't lose ad revenue.

26 Ask Your Printer How To Reduce Costs

You don't know what you don't know. That's why it's so important to bring your printer into the loop. He or she may have some ideas you never thought of to save you money. Always ask.

Save On Editorial Costs

Editorial is probably the single most important aspect of your publication. If you don't have good content, it doesn't matter how dazzling the design is. Here are some hints for keeping editorial costs down.

27 Use Freelance Writers

Assigning some of the editorial content to freelancers versus hiring permanent staff to do so can be more cost effective for some associations. Many publications find the best solution is a combination of having staff handle much of the writing and outsourcing the overflow.

28 Use an Experienced Editor

A good editor will be able to clearly communicate article assignments, and ensure that what comes back from the writer is well written, logical, and consistent with the publication's voice and point of view. Many publications find it more cost effective to outsource the position of Editor in Chief than to have someone on staff full time.

If your publication uses industry professionals to contribute articles, an editor is essential to good finished copy. As professionals, they're passionate about their work ... but they aren't always good writers. They can fall into the trap of conveying too much detail and taking too long to get to key points. A good editor can help to direct the contributors, and edit or rewrite their contributions to better fit the publication's style.

29 Limit the Number of Reviewers

If your publication's practice is to send articles around for everyone's feedback, you may want to reconsider this practice. With multiple points of view, an article can soon lose its sharp focus if everyone's feedback has to be accommodated. If you're using a freelancer, this can drive up the hours that you're charged for. If you must ask for input from multiple reviewers, direct their attention to particular areas that may need their attention. Then have one point-of-contact who evaluates all the feedback before sending it on to design. This will save everyone time, ensure a more consistent voice, and can help save money in the long run.

30 Use a Copyeditor and/or Proofreader

Proof, proof, and proof some more. Copy editors and proofreaders free up editors for higher-level tasks. By making sure grammar, punctuation, and spelling are correct before you send the content to the designer, you'll save on costly changes later. Typical proofreader/copy editor rates range from \$20-\$40 per hour. That can be a bargain if you avoid costly mistakes, and it's an inexpensive level of quality control for your publication. Always get an estimate of how many hours the vendor expects the project to take.

More Savings

31 Join a Publishers Association

Membership has its privileges. Two associations to consider: Association Media and Publishing (for association publishers) and ASAE (for association executives). You'll have access to information, trends, and tools that will help you in planning and publishing your magazines and newsletters. You'll be able to network with other professionals in the industry. Colleagues are usually more than willing to share expertise, trade war stories, and learn from each other.

32 Sell Advertising or Get a Sponsor

If you don't already sell advertising, now is the time to consider it. It doesn't have to take over your publication; you decide how much or how little you're comfortable with. But the bottom line is this: display ads or classifieds help offset production costs. Think outside the box for sponsorships. Perhaps a paper company, for example, would be willing to donate or provide at a discount recycled paper, in exchange for a mention in your environmental magazine.

How Much Does Publication Design & Layout Cost ?

{ REDESIGN } Because design requires a higher skill set than layout and production, rates will typically be higher. Here are some rough guidelines of what you might expect to pay per hour. For a redesign of a 72-page print publication, the range of hours can swing from 30 to the upwards of 200 hours or more depending on the scope of work required. If you're quoted a project fee instead of an hourly rate, you can see whether or not it falls into the typical range.

The EVP's Nephew: \$10-\$25/hour. You get what you pay for.

Freelancer: \$30-125/hour. Expect to pay more for experienced freelancers, especially ones who specialize. A low hourly rate suggests someone with little experience.

Small Firm or Studio: \$60-\$150/hour. This is often the "sweet spot." A small firm can handle more tasks in-house than a freelancer, has more internal resources, and often has very experienced designers on board. The overhead in a small firm is far less than a large firm, thus the lower costs.

Large Firm: \$90-\$250/hour. Larger firms often offer services you don't need, but that broad-based appeal is what also drives up overhead and thus, the fees that you pay. Compare portfolio work between large and small firms; often, you'll see no difference in the quality of work.

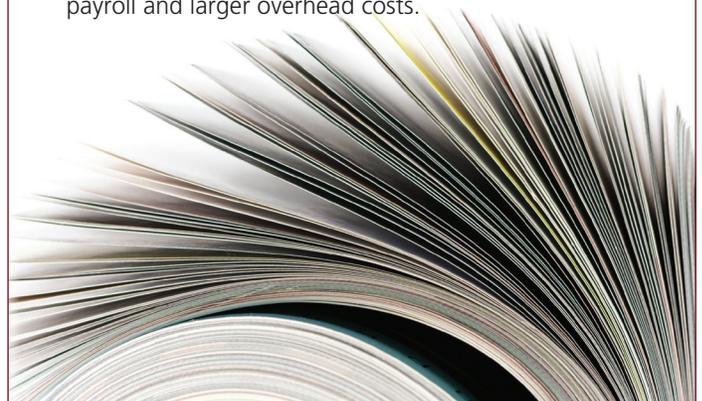
{ LAYOUT & PRODUCTION } Many firms or freelancers will charge you less per hour for layout and production of a regular issue than they will for design. For layout and production of an 72-page print publication, estimate a range of 25 to 60 hours. If you're quoted a project fee instead of an hourly rate, you can measure it against the given range.

The EVP's Nephew: \$12-\$20/hour

Freelancer: \$30-\$75/hour

Small Firm or Studio: \$50-\$100/hour

Large Firm: \$80-\$200/hour. If you need ongoing layout and production, large firms are not the best place to look. Much of your fees are going to subsidize a large payroll and larger overhead costs.



ABOUT LYNN RILEY

Lynn Riley graduated in 1990 from Penn State University with a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts. Her first job was working for a small design studio in Wilmington, Delaware. After marrying her husband she relocated to Maryland and accepted a position as assistant art director for the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers in Washington, DC. Three years later she became the art director for The Society of American Foresters, producing their monthly magazine, quarterly newspaper, and conference promotions, supervising a team that included a production assistant and freelancers.

In 1998 she started Lynn Riley Design. Her small firm works exclusively with associations and non-profits within the Washington, DC-metro area and extending from coast to coast. Lynn Riley Design has won numerous awards for magazine and annual reports, including the Apex Award for Publication Excellence (2008 and 2011); 2008 MarCom Awards; and the 2009 Eco Award for Excellence in Environmental Communications.

She lives with her husband of 20 years and two sons on Maryland's Eastern Shore.



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