

## on: WHITE SPACE

From day one, the *advertising* gods have preached to us that one of the easiest ways to draw attention to your message is by utilizing white space. From day one, I think the *client* gods have preached to them to fill it. The space surrounding a headline, image or block of text is just as important as other factors such as appropriate use of color, type and graphics. Yes, there is a tendency to fill every single corner with text and secondary messages. “White space is evil,” seems to be the rallying cry. “Fill it with...” “It must be removed!” “Down with white space!”

The funny thing is that, most of us have been taught since elementary school to use white space. I remember how my teachers would always insist that we draw a 1.5" margin on the left hand side of every page. They drilled it into our minds, until it became a habit that many have been unable to break, even to this day – a good thing for those of us with lousy handwriting.

So why is white space so important? According to research, part of the reason is psychological, and part of it is physical: the text needs room to breathe. When text crowds all the way to the edge, it leaves us feeling crowded and cramped. Long passages of text, written edge to edge can actually tire the eyes.

By the way, note that white space doesn't always have to be white. It can be any other color. White space refers to any empty area (colored or white, opaque or transparent) that is devoid of text.

Studies and reports from “Ad Layout Matters” show

that the main reason for using white space is contrast. Surrounding a block of text with a lot of white space, can actually draw the reader in, especially in a crowded layout such as a newspaper, where every nook and cranny is jam-packed with information. Many newspaper advertisers make your job easier. Unsophisticated competitors ads are wall-to-wall information, reversed out type, huge logos and starbursts with a crowded headline (the actual offer and reason you bought an ad in the first place.) How much easier could it be to stand out on such a page amongst the competition?

*“Fight the urge to fill that open space and reap the rewards.”*

Like this text, for example.

You might find your eyes being drawn to the text above. That's the power of white space. Often times, in large newspapers, you will find full page ads with almost nothing else on the page except one lone sentence of text. You might think it rather silly, that a company would pay thousands of dollars for this full page ad, and then not take advantage of it by filling it with text, messages and fancy graphics. And yet, you find it impossible to skip that ad as you browse through the paper, try as you might. Succumb to the power of white space and contrast.

So the next time, you find yourself laboring over your next ad, think about white space. The first time you do it consciously, you might find it difficult. Fight the urge to clutter that space and you'll eventually get used to it, and wonder how you ever did without it.

