

The Design Article Part 1 of 2

That Featured 5 Brochures, Did 1 Small Makeover, and Had a Very Strange, Casual Headline

by HENRY RUDDLE

Excluding actual friends, whom do you remember most vividly from school – the class clown or the straight-A wallflower? The 99% with normal haircuts, or the Don King or Yul Brynner emulators? Those who

mumbled their way through oral reports with their heads down, or the kid who acted like the emcee of the Miss America Pageant?

You know the answer. Face it. Your brain doesn't have the patience or space to store information about stuff

that blended into the background. Only people, things or events that resonate are remembered. That's why your season brochure must either evoke a strong emotional response or give its audience something specific to hold in their memories.

At right, the Virginia Stage Company makes its brochure memorable by using very specific numbers.



Above, the Atlanta Opera chose to pun with the word "heart" throughout its season brochure. Perhaps a bit overdone, but memorable.



312 Hours and
13 Minutes
of Applause

Tricks of the Memory

Many things will trigger a memory response – what they have in common is that they are *specific*. When a reader's brain processes the memory you created, there will be no mistaking it because there's only one memory like it.

For example, try using **numbers**, as I did in the headline to this story. The teaser copy on the **Virginia Stage Company** brochure for 1998-99 begins with "1,459 costumes." In all, it mentions "26,126 lights," "2,476 curtain calls," "312 hours and 13 minutes of applause" and – the *coup de grace* – "12 reasons to subscribe."

The headline to this article also uses what I call a **square peg** approach – making itself memorable by not seeming to fit the normal pattern.

Puns can work. The 1999 season brochure for the **Atlanta Opera** makes puns off its "Follow Your Heart" cover headline. Macbeth is "heartless"; the Romeo and Juliette story is "heart-breaking"; *La Boheme* is "heart

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wrenching”; *Samson & Delilah* is “heart stopping”; and the plea for donations asks patrons to “open your heart and help make the passion possible.”

Visual imagery hits your target audience on a visceral level. The trick is to make sure that the audience can associate the images with your organization. Stark photography in the 1998-99 brochure for the **Missouri Repertory Theatre** brochure does the trick. Fuzzy-edged, complex, color photos are still in vogue, so seeing a black-and-white, high-contrast close-up of two hands to advertise *The Miracle Worker* makes an impression. The cover could have used something better, but several inside shots are exciting, such as the corsage for *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* and microphone for *WMKS Radio: Where Music Kills Sorrow*.

MRT’s stark photo idea also saved a tidy sum on printing. It’s a two-color printing job, with a dark blue used for some headlines and to make duotones of the photos, adding visual depth and texture. Four-color process printing would have cost 50-60% more.

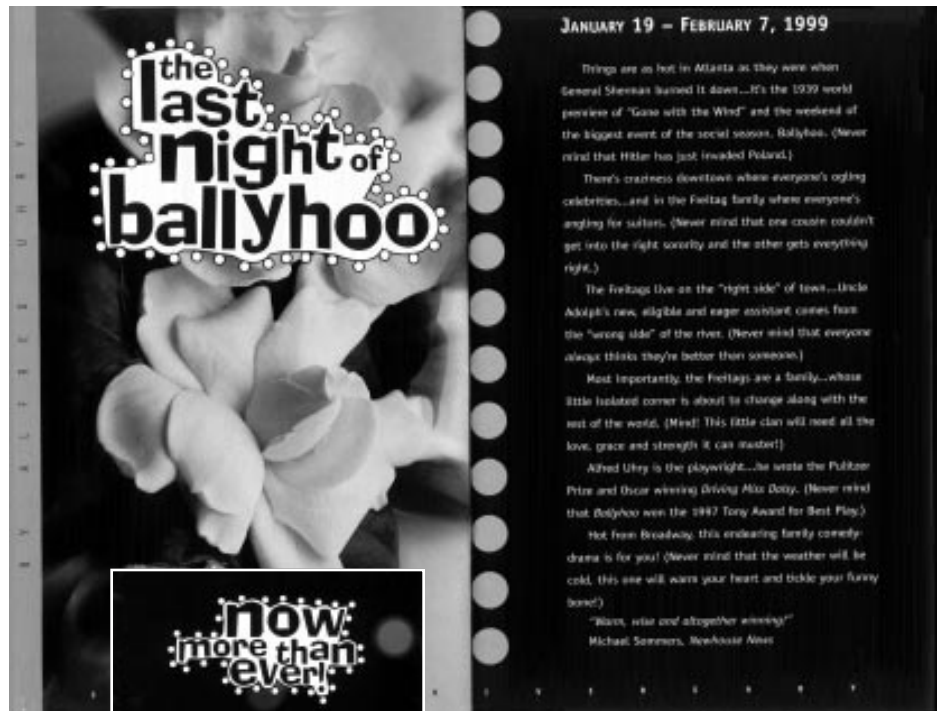
A direct **emotional appeal** did the trick in the **Lexington Philharmonic** brochure for 1998-99. It featured on the cover five cute babies with the

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instruments their parents play. The sappy plan gave Lexington many opportunities for follow-up photos of the performers with their children, as well as three pairs of relatives who perform together for the orchestra.

By the way, from a printing standpoint, Lexington’s brochure is diametrically opposed to MRT’s. It looks black and white, but it is printed

Continued



Above, a typical photo/promo copy spread from the MRT program, with reversed-out text in keeping with the high contrast photos.

Left, the cover of the MRT program featuring stark photography. A better photo should have been used.

Below, the expensive-to-print Lexington Philharmonic baby brochure.



The Design Article

Continued from the previous page

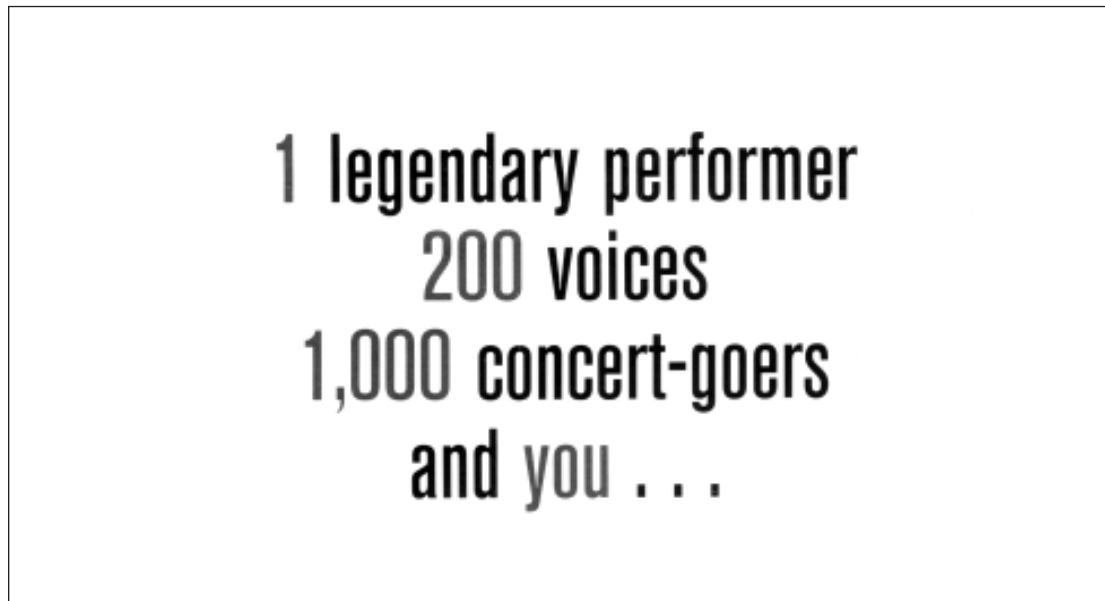
four-color process, with a spot varnish. An extremely similar appearance could have been achieved with a two-color

printing job using duotones as MRT did, along with either a less expensive flood varnish or glossier paper, saving 30-40% on printing costs and 50-60% on prepress costs for a similar project.

The **Minnesota Chorale** used the number approach in its mailer for "God's Trombones" (a difficult title to

forget) with the headline of "1 legendary performer, 200 voices, 1,000 concert-goers and you..." on the cover panel. Unfortunately, it didn't make enough out of the numbers visually, and didn't list the intriguing title of the concert on the cover or mailing panel. ■■

Here's a suggested format the Chorale could have used to make better use of a good idea.



The number-oriented cover to a Minnesota Chorale mailer advertising a performance of "God's Trombones."

One example of how design might have made the numbers more memorable. Significantly, it uses the number 999 instead of 1,000 because it is a more memorable number and to make room in the audience for "you."



Henry Ruddle founded Ruddle Creative in 1988. The firm produces publications and brochures for a wide variety of companies and non-profit organizations, including orchestras, theatre companies and ballet troupes. For information, visit www.ruddle.com, or contact him at 1-800-778-3353 or henry@ruddle.com.

