

Hello All...

Since dropping my so-called pearls of wisdom at Conference regarding programme design, a number of people have asked if I could put them on the MTNZ website. So here they are in no particular order - modified somewhat and expanded...

1. Think about the framing of cast photos. We want to see the performers faces, not their bodies or too much of the background. Some programmes I have seen have cropped the performers' head through the hair or had an extreme close-up. That is fine and can look really good but keep it stylish and consistent.
2. This is a pet hate of mine. (With one or two exceptions), photos of cast accompanying their bios should not be in character. The bio is of the performer, not the character. There will be plenty of opportunity for "in character" photos elsewhere in the programme.
3. The names of shows in bios or elsewhere in the programme should be italicised. It makes the programme look classy and shows that you have considered the programme in detail.
4. Think carefully about editing of large shots. Let's see the action, not a boring black background. Generally you should take out the stage floor as it will look messy and will often have electric cords and tape. If you have to have the floor, Photoshop the "unsightly" out.
5. Be ready for your photo shoot! I know that this is done last minute and, because of printing deadlines, is done when you may not be fully packed in - but the bottom line is you need to be ready! If necessary, brief your stage manager and lighting, wardrobe and makeup people beforehand. Many photos suffered as there was no theatre lighting, just a general wash which made the photos flat and uninteresting. Further, if ever there is a time when wigs and makeup come under close scrutiny, it is in the programme photos. Make sure these are right and look right. It is not difficult with a little preparation.
6. If you are going to have action shots or shots on the move, make sure the arms and legs are consistent. If you cannot achieve that, don't use the photo.
7. Hit on a colour or design scheme for the programme and stick to it. Don't try to do too much. To quote Tim Gunn from Project Runway - edit edit edit. As Sondheim once said, even if something is brilliant, if it does not "fit", leave it out.
8. Fonts/point size. A number of programmes suffered due to the font used and/or the point size. I hardly need say that this really is critical to a successful programme and needs a lot of thought. I personally avoid serif fonts such as Times New Roman, as they are more difficult to read. And try to avoid "thin" fonts. Simply bolding the entire text can make a huge difference without compromising space.
9. Don't have too much text in one block. Break it up by using paragraphs. It makes it visually more interesting and easier to read.
10. Think carefully about how you use the centrefold of the programme. I really don't like it being used as just another 2 pages of cast photos (although ironically the winning programme did just that). It needs to be something significant such as a double page photo. However, my preference, is for this to be used for the song and cast lists for the show. The programme naturally falls to that page and it makes it an easy reference for the audience during the show.
11. Try to avoid having the centre crease of the programme running through performer's faces.
12. Give some thought as to whether the pages should have a gloss, semi-gloss or matt finish. Gloss does look good but it might make the programme difficult to read in theatre lighting. I am not suggesting not to use gloss, but, if you do, make sure the text is clear enough to be read.
13. Correct spelling and grammar is a real issue with me but I am pleased to say that this did not appear to be an issue this year. Use proof readers to check bios etc. Also, brief them as to your design concepts so that they can check for inconsistencies.

14. The thing to remember about the single sheet is that it is limited in space. I does not give you a licence to cram as much in as possible. Use the space judiciously.

Remember that 'anal' is not a good motto to live your life by, but it is when designing a programme.

If anyone wants to talk to me about anything from programme design to why their girlfriend won't sleep with them, I am more than happy to talk to you - 021 337779 or markham.lee@immigration-solutions.co.nz

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