

The Typography of a Small Newspaper

*An Address at the Meeting of
the Illinois Press Association*

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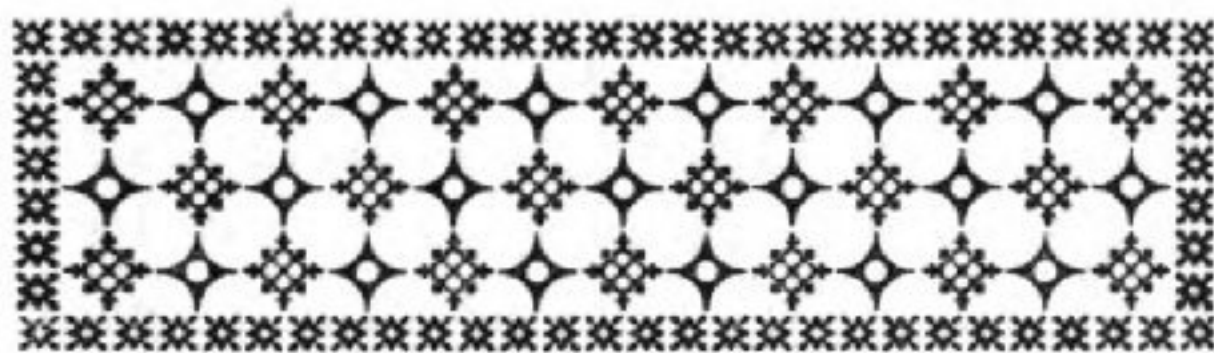


Chicago
Ludlow Typograph Company
1928

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THE publishers of smaller newspapers, I believe, think of fine typography as the concern of only metropolitan dailies and national advertisers. In this view I feel they are wrong. And I feel also that they over-estimate the difficulty of offering to their clientele typography of a reasonably high standard.

Those advertisers, who pay the highest rates for white space, have found that good typography pays. If we should examine a copy of the New York Times of fifteen years ago, we would find that the department store advertising was badly set,

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badly arranged, and unattractive. If we look at the same advertising in the same paper today, we find that it is distinguished to a degree, well displayed, set in the best types, and arranged according to sound typographical principles.

The New York department stores believe so firmly that good typography pays that some of them spend between \$50,000 and \$60,000 a year, in addition to their bill for space, to have their advertising set by an independent advertising typographer. This money is not spent blindly, but for the simple reason that they feel that an effective typographic presentation of their sales story will sell more merchandise, and that the additional profits which will come to them, will pay many times over for the cost of the competent setting of their advertisements.

The national advertisers using both magazines and newspapers,

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have come to the same conclusion, and they, too, spend a vast sum of money each year to provide good typographic dress for the advertisements, which the magazines and newspapers would, of course, set for them without charge. They do this to obtain better results.

If good typography will sell more merchandise for the large department stores and national advertisers, it will sell more goods for any advertiser in any community. That the community is a small city or town does not change this situation, for the best of the magazines have a large circulation in such communities, and the advertising the readers of these magazines have become accustomed to is of a high order of merit. They have been educated, as it were, to a fairly high standard of advertising appeal.

It will therefore follow that the newspapers in the small cities or towns will do a more effective job

for their local advertisers if they set copy in a typographically effective manner.

The average publisher will doubtless grant this contention without argument, but he will urge in rebuttal, that in spite of this situation, he could not afford the cost. I am here venturing the statement that good typography will not cost materially more than bad typography if one's plans are intelligently laid. How can an improvement in typography be obtained without a material increase in composition costs? I will venture some suggestions looking toward this end.

In the first place, much bad typography results from giving the compositor access to too many different faces of type, many of which are bad and out of key with the best taste of the present period. The typography of the average newspaper would be improved at least 100% by going through the com-

posing room and throwing out all worn out, badly designed, and antiquated type faces, which are now taking up room and serving no good purpose. Having them available simply tempts the compositor to an orgy of typographic excess, which results in muddled and unattractive advertisements.

By cutting down the number of faces, the publisher decreases the number of frames and cases he must carry on his floor. It is surprising how few different type faces are really necessary to get out a good-looking paper. They can certainly be cut down to four, so far as display composition is concerned. If these faces are wisely selected, it will take a very surprising degree of incompetent handling to make the ads look as badly as does the average run of advertising in the smaller newspapers.

Having selected a few good types, the publisher should make sure that

he has an ample quantity of them available in all sizes from small to large. It is better, in choosing between two alternatives, to have two series absolutely complete in all sizes than four series in broken sizes.

Of course, an ideal thing is to have the faces in the form of matrices, for then the compositor faces no limitations, whatever, in setting his display properly, in point sizes from 6 point to 72 point.

My second suggestion, in the course of this very brief discussion of an important subject, is that all advertising copy pass through the hands of one compositor, to be marked for type and layout before it is actually set. One would, of course, select for this function the compositor on the regular staff who has the best sense of type and its use. You will probably find this individual not among your oldest and most experienced compositors, but among the younger men. It is possible, in

almost every office, to find a compositor with a real enthusiasm for his craft, one who subscribes to the trade journals and reads them religiously, and who regards his work more as a profession than a trade.

You might think, superficially, that this will cost more in time and payroll. But, as a matter of fact, every compositor when he is handed an advertisement to be set, must give some time to thinking just how he will set it, in what sizes, in what faces and how he will handle the display. If the compositor receiving the advertisement is naturally inept at typography, he will devote more time to "fiddling around" before he starts to actually set type in his stick, than will the young man fitted for the job of typographic layout. It will be apparent, therefore, that the time consumed in handling the job by the manner suggested, will not be any greater in the one way than in the other.

A good choice of type for the composing room and competent use of it will have a very definite influence on the business aspects of newspaper publishing. In the first place, the local merchants will appreciate the improvement and feel that the paper is offering them more for their money. More important still, however, is the influence on foreign advertising. In making up schedules for national advertisers, the advertising agency cannot judge regarding the character of the editor or his standing and influence in the local community, but the agency can form a pretty shrewd conclusion as to whether the paper is "dying on its feet" or is a progressive enterprise, by its appearance. And apart from reasonably clean presswork, typography is the factor of greatest importance in making an attractive newspaper. The appearance of your advertising can spell to the outsider either shiftlessness or progressive-

ness. Should this factor influence a favorable decision on one national account, the effort on the part of the publisher to accomplish the improvement would be justified.

An attractive typographic dress has always a definite influence on circulation. There is too much attractive reading matter offered the American public today, for them to put up, willingly, with slipshod composition and printing. An attractive paper will bring you more readers, and this in turn will likewise exert an influence on advertising volume and income.

The Ludlow Typograph (an enterprise in which I am particularly interested) has rendered a great service to newspaper publishers of this country, in making possible composition in the best faces at a very economical cost—a cost lower than for setting of individual types. It has also made available, to the newspaper publisher, an unlimited supply

of always-new type, in all sizes from 6 point to 72 point.

The Ludlow System has, in short, brought to many newspaper publishers the economic advantages resulting from a paper which is attractive typographically, and has done so at a reduction rather than an increase in operating costs.

But whatever method you may use to improve the standards of typography in both text and advertising, I am confident you will find the effort repays large dividends in advertising income, in circulation growth and—a by-product not to be overlooked—an increase in your own pride and satisfaction in your newspaper.



