

Making Ends Meet

or how the public sector can reach a broader audience on a tiny budget!

The 'Making ends meet' challenge!

You work in the public sector, so you already know publications and communications come with certain obligations and legal requirements. In order to comply with the Official Languages Act, the Disability Act and Equal Status legislation, for example, you may need to create information in different formats or you may need to publish a document in a number of languages, depending on your audience(s).

And, of course, there's more...

Add to this procurement requirements, budget constraints and the need to get your message across efficiently and clearly... making all the ends meet gets challenging, doesn't it?

Make ends meet without blowing the budget!

There is an increasing demand for clear, legible, good quality public sector information that meets its audiences' needs and your budget! With money this tight, it's vital to make sure that none is wasted because of bad planning; lack of experience; or inaccessible design or writing. Good design and writing brings information to life, engages your audience and, basically, makes the whole thing work harder!

Over the last 20 years, Language has worked on thousands of design and advertising projects for public sector clients. We have always advocated clear, accessible design and content, and this Universal Design approach has served our clients well. That's why we thought a guide based on our experience and illustrated by a range of public information projects from our portfolio would be useful to show how your communications can make all the ends meet without wasting the budget — no matter how small it is!

Making Ends Meet at a glance

Language's top tips

- 1** Know where to start — make accessibility part of the brief, not an afterthought.
- 2** Know your audience(s) and keep up to date with their needs.
- 3** Know what formats are available and when to use them.
- 4** Know how to make one format adapt to more than one audience — 'the multiplier effect'.
- 5** Know how to create hard-working translations.
- 6** Publish, don't print — and get just what you need, just when you need it!

1 Know where to start — make accessibility part of the brief, not an afterthought

Considering inclusive formats after the main body of the work has been designed makes for more work and expense, so make sure to factor accessibility into the design or advertising brief. Make the primary piece as clear as possible and use it as the basis for any other formats. Experienced designers will be able to give you costs and a timeframe on how to meet your obligations. This will help with planning and scheduling press releases and launches well in advance.

CASE STUDY

The Beginner's Guide to Ireland, created for the Reception & Integration Agency in 2005

Brief & requirements

The brief was to write, design and produce a handbook for refugees arriving in Ireland under the UNHCR resettlement programme. It had to be straight-forward to translate; cost-effective to update; and to be understood by people with limited English-language skills. Created for a group of refugees arriving to live in Roscommon, the brief also specified that it was to be adaptable to any part of Ireland.

Our solution

To make the content accessible and easy to read; the design easy to adapt; and the production easy to replicate!

Simply written, the handbook contains a huge amount of information, from 'where is Ireland?' and 'how do people make a living?' through to details such as accessing health services and registering documentation. For simplicity of navigation, the content is broken down into sections and bullet-points. Creating a series of small points also makes the text much easier to translate, in whole or in part.

The Guide uses illustrations as diverse as street signage, Garda uniforms and medical cards to give users visual cues about Irish life. It was designed as an A4 ring binder so that individual pages could be translated or updated quickly and easily without incurring excessive reprint costs. One unusual feature is that the handbook was created first in graphic design software and then replicated in Microsoft Word so that the client could update individual pages easily.

2 Know your audience(s) and keep up to date with their needs

Who are you talking to? Do they have any specific needs which should drive either the format or content? What may seem like the obvious solution (for example, a poster with an accompanying leaflet) may not always be the most appropriate. Remember, national campaigns must meet the diverse needs of many audiences, which can mean communicating the same information in various formats.

CASE STUDY

The Information Age campaign for Comhairle (now Citizens Information Board) in 2007

Brief & requirements

To create an awareness campaign aimed at helping to meet the information needs of Ireland's older population. The cornerstone of the campaign was a booklet to be sent to all state pensioners in the country over the age of 65. (That's 400,000 people. Imagine getting that wrong!)

Our solution

To communicate with this audience, we designed the suite of posters, factsheets and booklets in clear print, audio and large print formats. The photography used in the campaign was researched with groups of older people to make sure it was appropriate for them and felt representative of them. This research was very revealing in that it highlighted a gulf between how older people are often depicted and how they want to be depicted! The pocket-sized booklet included a 'My Information' sheet that allowed people to note important personal information

3 Know what formats are available and when to use them

Accessible information aims to communicate with as broad a span of your audience as possible, including people who can be difficult to reach or may have difficulty understanding what you have to say. Even a quick analysis of the audience can help to determine the most appropriate formats. There's no point doing it if it can't get into the right hands! Whenever possible, test your solution on a sample of your audience — not only is testing useful, it can be remarkably revealing about what your audience knows about what you do!

Easy To Read documents are aimed at people with intellectual disabilities, people with low literacy and people who do not have English as their first language. They use very simple, clear language and images to convey their most important messages.

Writing Easy To Read materials does not mean writing in a childish way. It means using an adult format, and making the information as easy to understand as possible. Just because it reads easy, don't assume it writes easy! There are grammar, tone and style rules for writing in both Easy to Read and Plain English.

Other formats, like audio, large print, Braille and electronic versions, need to be considered for their usefulness and appropriateness. For example, audio formats are not appropriate for a large directory. Nor is an audio version always appropriate for a leaflet — there are times when a radio ad and dedicated telephone line would work much more effectively.

You also need to decide how these formats will be publicised and distributed. How will people who use Braille, for example, know that you have a Braille version of a document?

CASE STUDY

Map of Homeless Services for Crosscare Housing and Welfare Information

Brief & requirements

Crosscare Housing and Welfare Information is an information and advocacy service with a focus on housing, homelessness, social welfare and related matters. The brief was to produce a map for homeless people which clearly denotes all types of services available in the centre of Dublin City. The map had to be easy to understand, pocket-sized and durable.

Our solution

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4 Know how to make one format adapt to more than one audience — ‘the multiplier effect’

Finding multiple audiences for different formats saves time, money and can reach more of your audiences without creating more than one publication. For example, why should a Plain English version or an illustrated version appeal solely to people with low literacy levels?

CASE STUDY

A Guide To Breast Screening (created for BreastCheck, The National Breast Screening Programme)

Brief & requirements

BreastCheck is a Government-funded service that offers free breast screening to all women between the ages of 50 and 64. The aim of BreastCheck is to reduce the number of deaths from breast cancer by finding and treating the disease at an early stage. Language was asked by BreastCheck to create A Guide to Breast Screening to explain mammography and breast health to women with intellectual disabilities; it was to explain to them and their carers or relatives how the procedure worked; and how best to prepare for the screening.

Our solution

The text was written as Easy To Read and each piece of text has an accompanying self-explanatory illustration, which tells the same story as the text. Both text and images were tested on a group of women with intellectual disabilities and their carers (and elements of both text and images were revised as a result of the testing). Creating the document as an A5 ringbinder meant individual pages could be amended/reprinted without incurring unnecessary cost. Because the text was written as Easy To Read and the images used for story-telling, not just for ‘visual interest’, the Guide has also worked really well for women with low literacy levels and has also proved vital in explaining BreastCheck to women with little or no English language skills.

5 Know how to create hard-working translations

Under the Official Languages Act, public bodies have a duty to publish certain documents that would be of interest to the public in Irish and in English simultaneously and to the same standard. This has a huge impact on the production of documents like Annual Reports. Often long documents by their nature, this doubling up of content can create very lengthy documents. And as you know, the longer the report, the more it will cost to print.

CASE STUDY

The Ombudsman for the Defence Forces Annual Report 2007

Brief & requirements

The brief was to create an elegant, visually appealing dual-language Annual Report without creating one big, cumbersome document.

Our solution

Rather than creating one long, heavy report, the English and Irish versions were designed as two matching items presented together in a bespoke folder, fulfilling the need for simultaneous availability but also having documents that are easy to handle. Have a look at the 'printing on demand' section too, for tips on producing documents in more than one language without incurring unnecessary printing costs.

Some Translation Tips

The more straightforward and well structured a document is to read in English, the easier it will be to translate! Mistakes can happen in typesetting, so agree at procurement stage with the translator that they will proofread the typeset document as part of their work, and add that time to the schedule at the planning stage. No matter what language you're working in, have it checked by an expert in that language.

While there is no legal requirement to do so, you are required to communicate with and deliver services to people who do not use English. Over the last few years we've designed materials in Romanian, Arabic, French and Polish, and for Nigerian and Chinese communities in Ireland.

6 Publish, don't print — and get just what you need, just when you need it!

Having a statutory obligation to produce printed materials for your audience(s) doesn't mean that you have to print (and pay for, and post, and store until it's out of date, and then try and dispose of) vast quantities of materials. A simple analysis of your audience should help determine quantities. For example, statutory agencies produce a wide variety of reports for professional audiences who are fully reliant on digital technologies. This reliance may make it possible to make paper-based formats an exception rather than an accepted norm.

Why not print a Plain English executive summary and distribute that, with the full report available online and as a PDF? A dynamic PDF (better for ease of search, navigation and accessibility) is much easier to circulate and store than a redundant number of printed copies — as well as saving money which can be spent on other formats. How about setting up a simple print-and-bind-on-demand system in the organisation or Department?

Oh yes, and you'll save on paper waste and conserve trees too.

Making Ends Meet

The checklist

So, you're putting together a brief for your designer or copywriter. Have you...

- Included in the brief your accessibility and/or translation requirements?
- Got information about the audience(s) you want to reach? Has anything about your audiences changed in terms of numbers or needs?
- Are you up to date on what media and formats are available?
- How can you avoid replicating material? Can you double-up on audiences without doubling-up on formats?
- Have you considered printing requirements? Will a Plain English summary version do for the majority of your audience with a full version available either digitally, in very limited numbers, or as print-on-demand?

Thank you & goodbye!

We hope you found this guide useful. Should you have a particular project you'd like to consider creating in different formats, discussing it with us could be useful too! All the opinions featured here are our own, based on our experience and research, and may not necessarily reflect the views of any other agency or advocate of accessible design or writing.

Many thanks to all featured clients for giving us permission to use their work.

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