Design & Production

Designers Need Answers!

by Kim Pettit

Designers are responsible for interpreting editorial and marketing goals to achieve an attractive, effective visual package for the publishing house's final product. To accomplish this, they may need to communicate with several people in multiple departments. What they need are answers to the following questions:

▶ *Who are the intended readers?* For example, if the target readers are Christians between the ages of 18 and 30, and the book is on how to be a better Christian, then the designer must produce a "look" that appeals to college and career-minded young people.

▶ *What is the book about?* An editor may provide a written synopsis of the content or require that the designer review the text. If the author of a particular book or article tells a graphic story or uses visual imagery or metaphors in his or her writing, the designer should be aware these can serve as a departure point in conceptualizing the look of the end product. The editor should give the illustrator the freedom to come up with a strong image.

▶ *What is the editorial goal of this product?* Is it meant to challenge readers, or to inspire, entertain, humor, or educate them? The "tone" of a book, whether serious or comical, instructional or inspirational, will dictate which typefaces the designer chooses, how much white space he or she uses, and what kind of art to suggest for the book.

▶ *Is the book part of a series?* Does the design need to work well with an existing line of product? Are there certain elements in the present design that must remain the same from product to product?

▶ *What if the intended reader is not the one who will purchase the book?* If parents are buying books for their children, then the designer must choose a format that appeals to both groups.

▶ *What is the budget for the book?* How much can the intended purchaser afford to pay for a book like this? Designers can greatly influence the final cost of a book through their choice of page size, paper quality, art treatment and so on.

▶ *What is the deadline?* Designers need enough time to do a good job.

▶ *Are there other parameters to keep in mind?* Do cultural or religious factors need to be considered in the design? Are certain colors or art styles preferable for this audience? Does the product need to look similar to or very different from its competitors in the market? If the editing and marketing staff can clearly articulate their goals, then the designer can come up with an appropriate cover concept and inside design.

▶ *Who approves the design?* One useful strategy is to have the editorial, marketing, and design staff meet to approve a cover art concept. A committee changes their collective opinion less easily than one person changes his or her mind.

▶ *Who is the contact for this assignment?* Budgets or schedules may change along the way. The content might change significantly from what it was when the project was first conceived. A publisher may launch a competing project. There may be a problem with the compensation received by the designer once the work is completed. Assigning responsibility for each piece will help everything run smoothly.

Working relationships always go more smoothly when each party assumes that the other wants to communicate as clearly and as creatively as possible. Invest the time and thought necessary to accomplish this. Designers need answers. Make sure these are available. ❖