**A brief guide to labelling and graphics**

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Exhibit labelling and graphics are big subjects, so these notes only scratch the surface. They simplify some things, and leave out many details which a professional graphic designer should consider in producing well designed labels and graphics. But, by following these principals anyone should be able to produce usable and reasonably attractive labels.

****Keep it short****Exhibit labels should be as short as possible. Ideally the whole text should be less than 150 words, and no paragraph or section of text should be longer than about 50 words.

****Keep it simple****Use short, simple sentences. Keep punctuation and sentence structure simple by only having one idea per sentence.

****Talk to the reader, and ask questions****Use phrases like 'what do you think will happen if...', 'can you ...', 'make a...', 'look at...'. Don't always tell visitors what's going to happen, ask them what happens instead.

****Choose a style - and stick to it****If you are making labels for a number of exhibits you need to keep the style of writing consistent across all of them. For example, if you decide that numbers less than ten should be written in figures be consistent. Don't put two on one label and 2 on another. Where you make decisions about style record them in a style manual so that others can follow the same style, and you can remember what you did, too.

****Write with a single voice****It may be that several different people draft labels for different exhibits. To ensure that the label style is a consistent as possible it is best when this happens to give one person the task of writing the final versions of all the labels in the exhibition.

****A picture may be worth at least 100 words****If you need to follow a series of steps to get an exhibit to perform try explaining what needs to be done in pictures not words. But beware if the pictures dont look enough like the real exhibit people wont connect the two.

****Keep diagrams simple****If your labels need illustrations, keep them clear and simple - avoid unnecessary detail, it confuses people who aren't familiar with the equipment - the people you're making the diagrams for!

****Test your instructions/graphics****Because you are intimately familiar with your exhibits its very easy to miss vital information out of labels and graphics. Get colleagues/friends/offspring to check the labels to make sure that they make sense, and that nothing important has been left out.

****Don't rely on spelling checkers to proof-read your text****Exhibit labels must be 100% error free. It is amazing how many people will spot, and comment on, spelling mistakes and similar typographical errors in labels, even if they don't understand what the label means, and can't follow the instructions! Spelling checkers are a useful first step in proof-reading exhibition text, but they cant distinguish between homophones such as there and their, and they cant tell sense from gibberish. So human proof-reading of text is vital.

****Get someone else to proof-read your labels - or two people if possible****Because you've written your own work, and you know what it should say it can be almost impossible to spot errors in your own work. It is therefore a very good idea to get help with proof-reading. Your proof-reader doesn't need to be part of the exhibit project - it often helps if they are a complete outsider, as they will approach the text with a completely fresh eye. If you can get two people to proof read for you independently so much the better.

****Type sizes****The absolute minimum type size for exhibit labels or graphics is 18 point (one point, the traditional measure of type sizes, is 1/72 of an inch). If at all possible use a larger size than this, say 24 point, for body text with still larger sizes, say 36 point, for headlines. Use the largest possible type size, bearing in mind the following additional guidelines.

****Line Length****It is easiest to read text which is
set with about seven or eight words to the line.
Short
lines can be
very hard to
make sense of,
as can lines with a very large number of words set in them which tend to become indistinct rivers of letters.

****Spacing (Leading)****The spacing between lines of text has an impact on their readability. Text which is set with the lines too close together, or too far apart becomes hard to read. The optimum line spacing for exhibition text is about 1 1/2 lines if you're working on a word processor or with leading equal to about 50% of the point size of the type if you're working with a DTP or typesetting programme.

****Alignment (Justification)****Text is easiest to read if it is set with the left margin aligned, and with the right margins hanging, as in this paragraph. This arrangement is known as left justified text. Centred text or right justified text (right hand margins aligned and left margins hanging) are less easy to read, and should have no place in exhibition label design. Fully justified text, like newspaper columns, should likewise be avoided.

****Coloured text****Research and experience alike confirm that ordinary black text on a white background is the most easily read. So, it is a good idea to keep exhibit text in this simple format. If you must have coloured text, use a strong, deep colour displayed on a white background. It is better to keep colour in text to headlines and borders for text panels rather than setting body text in anything other than black and white.

****Choosing fonts****There are hundreds if not thousands of different fonts available, some of which are very readable, and others of which are practically illegible. Given the need for exhibition text to be easy to read it should not be set in one of these fancy types. The basic choice for exhibition fonts should be between letters with serifs (dangly bits) and letters without (sans) serifs. Serif fonts (eg Times New Roman) are easier to read than sans fonts (eg Arial), but have a more old fashioned look, so it may be more appropriate to use a sans font. Sans fonts can be made easier to read by spacing the lines of type slightly wider, and by using larger point sizes.

****Combining fonts****Using more than one font in a label can make it more visually interesting, but using too many fonts will make it look dreadful. If you want to combine fonts be restrained - chose one sans font and one serif font and stick to them. The classic combination is to use a serif font for the body text and a sans f