

Should I Layout the Interior Myself?

There's more to interior book design than meets the eye.

by Michele DeFilippo

We've heard the question many times, "Should I layout the interior of my book myself?"

Seems like a no-brainer. You have word processing software. You know how to set margins and choose a typeface. You even found a book that describes the process (written by folks who are not trained in typography, by the way). So why shouldn't you create your own interior?

Of course you can and should use your word processing software to write your text, but interior design and formatting are best left to people who do this for a living. Why? Because there are a lot more details involved in page composition than you'd think.

For starters, word-processing software does not have the sophisticated hyphenation and justification controls that professional page layout software does. And even if you were to buy the software, it's a mistake to assume that no knowledge of typography or design is required to layout a book. There are several dozen conventions to be followed in book design, that may not be known to the reader, but when followed, they give your book a polished appearance. But it's not only about knowing the rules, it's knowing how and when to bend or break them on a case-by-case basis... decisions that that must be made quite often when the words in the text don't cooperate with the page geometry.

Quality typesetting has never been about the tools. Experienced typesetters rarely use software at the default settings. We adjust the settings for better results, sometimes paragraph by paragraph, line by line, and even word by word. Why? Because someone once trained us to see the difference between "so-so" type and great type.

For what it's worth, only beginning self-publishers consider using a word processor for page layout. Successful publishers wouldn't think of producing the

text in this way. They know that experienced book designers bring real value to the table, offering creativity and aesthetic judgment that only comes with training and experience. And it's been clinically proven that quality typography improves reading comprehension. More importantly, an amateur job won't satisfy the distributors, reviewers, and book retailers, the "gatekeepers" of the book industry, who will immediately spot a beginner's efforts and reject your book as "self-published."

Unfortunately, printers won't turn away a PDF that was made from a word processed document. They'll print your book because that's what they're in business to do. Their success is measured in how many books they print. Your success, on the other hand, is measured in the number of books you sell.

Your book design, inside and out, establishes your credibility in the eyes of the buyer. Buyers may not be able to pinpoint exactly what is wrong, but without a professional interior design, your book will not measure up to those that are professionally prepared. For the success of your new publishing endeavor, we hope you'll give this issue some serious thought.



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