Type Trends

People are reading more during the pandemic. They're reading more hardcopy publications and spending more time in front of computer screens reading interactive copy. While the coronavirus is proving to be exceptionally difficult for the hardcopy news Industry, many websites, magazines and other publications are thriving.

If more textual content is being consumed, we'll need to work smarter to get people to pay attention to the typography we create. It's not that difficult to do. There are trend-setting typographic tools and good old-fashioned advice that go a long way toward getting the job done.

Meet Angie and Mark

We reached out to Angie Wang and Mark Fox to learn how they capture and keep readers in these difficult days. Partners in the award-winning Design is Play design studio, design educators and writers, they're worth listening to. Angie and Mark's work is regularly recognized by *Communication Arts*, The Type Directors Club, *Graphis*, the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) and *Print*. Their designs have been celebrated internationally and exhibited in museums in the U.S. and throughout Europe. Located in San Francisco, consciously small and independent, Design is Play is a powerhouse of typographic design.

While classic truths, more than trending solutions, Angie and Mark's advice is simple and direct: build on proven typographic foundations and embrace technology.

Blunt Force Typography

Mark stresses the importance of impact. "I primarily design identities and posters," he explains, "two seemingly unrelated practices which nonetheless make similar demands of type: graphic impact at a small size for wordmarks, and graphic impact at a distance for posters." Mark says his go-to typefaces have durable letterforms. "I rely on display typefaces in medium to bold weights that avoid extreme stroke variation. I am also fond of what I consider 'constructed' letterforms – the kind you find in old lettering books or sign painters' manuals. I love bold and simple typographic forms, partly because they are common in signage and tend to feel authoritative."

Martin Luther King Tolerance Poster created at Design is Play

The type used in the "Tolerance" posters is a perfect example of creating typographic impact. The ultra-bold characters in the Martin Luther King quote have the power of a Waikiki wave – pulling passers-by into the copy – while the inline makes the letters ultimately readable. The forms were hand-lettered by John Stevens, but there are many typefaces, like the heavier weights of Malik, Orgon Plan and Muller™, that command the same attention and respect. For structured letterforms, look no further than Resolve Sans or Neue Plak™.


Easy Reading is Key

"Unlike Mark, I am a text typographer," says Angie. "My interest is in readability – whether on the page or screen. My current first-choice typefaces for setting text for print applications include, FF Scala®, and Minion® Pro. I've also been favoring Brandon Grotesque of late, for screen applications. Geometric sans faces with large x-heights have been in vogue for some time but the forms can be problematic. Although Brandon Grotesque is a geometric sans, I like its warmth and refined proportions."


"When setting text type, I rely on typefaces with an even color – no extreme stroke weights, proportions and details," explains Wang. "All the qualities that make display faces visually interesting at larger sizes become disruptive to the reading experience when used at smaller sizes in continuous text."

"Also, many think that a large text size guarantees readability," she continues. "This isn't true and can often make text even more difficult to read! Take the time to negotiate the proper type size to line length relationship. The general guideline is about 7–10 words per line when setting type in English. Of course, context is also important. Will the type live on screen or in print? Character spacing should be generous, counters open and apertures wide and clear, for on-screen reading. We used Metro® Nova for the Gardner's "ART THROUGH THE AGES" covers because it is such a robust family of weights and widths. Although the final product is hardcopy, the design would transfer equally well to a digital environment."
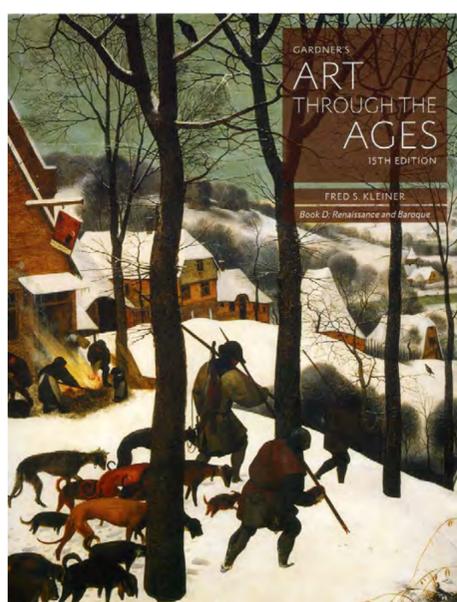
Metro Nova enhances the transparent quality of the design and echoes the delicate branches of the threes
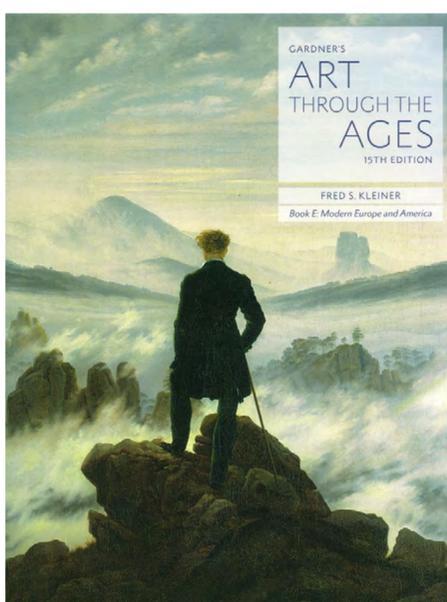
Metro Nova chosen for its strength and range

The Power of Variable Fonts

Angie and Mark are of a single mind regarding variable fonts. According to Angie, "Designers and developers are taking a greater interest in variable fonts, and for good reason. Optical sizing is easily achieved, yielding optimum legibility from text to display – all in one font."

"Technologies that maximize ease-of-use, flexibility, and speed, while reducing costs are what always drives the evolution of type," Angie continues. "Variable fonts allow for great flexibility while offering typographic cohesion. In web design, variable fonts allow for faster site performance since there is no need to embed multiple fonts. As an aside, optical sizing – a feature common in metal type but lost in phototype – is making a return."

TT Norms Pro Variable Roman and italic, Auster Variable, Macklin™ Sans Variable Regular, along with its companion Macklin Sans Variable Italic and Eastman Variable are just a few of the "web-ready" variable fonts that are ideal for digital projects.

While variable fonts that take advantage of optical sizing are still, largely, in the development stages and require specific software, there are a number of font providers, like FontShop and Fontsmith, that have explored their usage and flexibility.

Mark and Angie's advice may not be earth-shattering tends. But grabbing your audiences' attention and enabling easy reading, sure makes sense in these troubled times.

Photo credit: Andy Wang