

Redesign



READERS

Fox designs a paper based on the needs of readers and research into reading habits.



MAKING BUSINESS A BRIGHTER PACKAGE

Looking back on the BusinessDay Redesign

Kerry Swift (left), describes how editor Jim Jones (right) got a new-look newspaper.



WRITERS

The changes involved altering journalists' perceptions of what readers want from a daily newspaper.

www.bday.co.za

R2.50 inc VAT

Subscription: R2.00 inc VAT

BUSINESSDAY

with the FINANCIAL TIMES worldwide

A BDFM Publication

Morning Final

Tuesday, November 2 1998

Vintage wine in an African cup

Redesigning a major daily is not just about drawing up templates and rushing ahead to implement a new look. It is about careful research to gauge what readers want, and a team effort on the paper to develop a total package that the staff can implement given the constraints under which they work.

KERRY SWIFT writes about the Fox Publishing redesign of *BusinessDay* ...

Whoever said the English are punctual got it wrong. David Bell is late for our meeting. The dawn patrol train journey into London's Liverpool Street from Essex, the breathless charge through the Underground commuter crush to London Bridge and the cold walk in the rain to Southwark (only hard currency travellers use taxis) to meet the chairman of the *Financial Times* is all in vain. David Bell has just returned from a sortie across the 'pond' on Concorde and will be delayed. Such is life in the fast lane.

The foyer of the *Financial Times* building on Southwark Bridge Road is about as stiff as the paper's receptionists and it palls after reading the FT cover to cover (no mean feat in wet socks). So, using a copy of the FT from the foyer as an umbrella, I stroll out of the building and begin exploring Southwark and Bankside in the rain, the dome of St Paul's just visible through the grey mist rolling up from the Thames. As usual, London is a damp and dismal dowager, but as every visitor knows, beneath those ample skirts lie many secret treasures.

Down Clink Street, parallel to the Thames, is the old red-light district of London. Prostitution having been banned in the more salubrious suburbs of London, it simply crossed the river and waited for the City 'Johns' to follow, which, of course, they did in droves. In days past, the Clink Street whores — the "Winchester geese" — were licensed by the Church of England bishops, presumably on the basis of moral containment, though it was rumoured that certain members of the Episcopal authority were not averse to checking the merchandise on odd occasions.



Hot off the press ... Matthys Moss, visual editor; Valdi Strauss, production editor; Cheryllyn Ireton, managing editor with editor Jim Jones.



Vintage Wine

So what am I doing wandering about in the rain in London's former red-light district? My visit to the UK was part of the Fox redesign of *BusinessDay*, South Africa's leading business daily. I was in London to discuss a few ideas with the team that redesigned the *Financial Times* and to meet their boss and trans-Atlantic commuter, David Bell, at that time the Pearson executive responsible for the FT.

Pearson, the London-based publisher of the FT among other titles around the globe, part owns *BusinessDay* through BDFM, an unlisted company in Johannesburg. The other shareholder in BDFM is Times Media Limited in South Africa. Visiting the FT was part courtesy visit to inform the English shareholder of the general intentions behind the *BusinessDay* redesign, but also an attempt to explore possible visual synergies with the graphic team that had recently given the FT its own facelift.

Taking design templates to the FT is a bit like taking coats to Newcastle but when the moment finally arrived to meet with David Bell and to unveil the early prototypes of the *BusinessDay* redesign, the sun had come out and the FT boss was well over his jet lag, focused and receptive.

Amazing. It was all over in a matter of minutes. I showed Bell the design prototypes and was ushered out of his office in the space of an hour with the promise that whatever the FT could do to assist *BusinessDay* — even to the extent of hosting graphic artists from the paper in London — was simply a matter of request.

Branislav Radovic, the FT's visual editor, and his team were equally helpful during later meetings and, on the face of it, generally enthusiastic about the new look of their sister paper in Johannesburg.

The redesign of *BusinessDay* could hardly be described as radical. At core it was reader driven. In exhaustive focus group surveys before the redesign began, readers made it clear they were against radical visual change — to paraphrase GK Chesterton, change, certainly, but always with an eye to continuity!

BusinessDay readers were against change for change's sake, visual gimmicks or trendy layout. What they wanted was a

general tidying up of the newspaper to aid readability and legibility and to provide rapid access to information. To be more specific, they wanted basically the same information but packaged for quick and easy reading. They also felt that business does not need to be dull, thus the packaging should be a good deal brighter.

On the basis that most business people have around 20 minutes in a working day to scan their daily newspaper and digest the information they need, editorial content must be well organised and signposted. If readers are made to work, the design will fail.

Thus the *BusinessDay* redesign retains many of the features of the old newspaper (such as the same editorial grid on news pages — seven columns — and the same classic headline type, Times).

What has changed is that the entire paper has been opened up with tidier, modular layout using cleaner and more leaded text type (Cheltenham) and the use of more white space to give the paper a less grey and cramped appearance.

As the design beds down, far more emphasis will be placed on graphic representation so that readers can absorb information

at a glance. The awful truth is dawning on newspapers that people are reading less and scanning more. To be effective, newspaper design has to accommodate this new reality.

The most obvious change is to page one where a flexible skyline system is introduced to provide cross-references to major features within the paper each day. Also changed is the masthead which combines 'Business' and 'Day' into one word in small caps made up of Franklin Gothic Heavy and Perpetua Bold (the typeface used in the nameplate of the *Financial Times*). These typefaces work exceptionally well together (once the x-heights are correctly aligned) and are used in a combination of red and black — vintage wine in an African cup! The original colour choice of burgundy was beyond the printers' capability.

One of the controversial aspects of the redesign is the use of *Financial Times*

branding as part of the new *BusinessDay* masthead. In the reader focus groups we discovered that most readers had no knowledge of *BusinessDay's* relationship with the FT. Including the FT branding in the new masthead is a way of filling that perceptual vacuum. I felt that by linking *BusinessDay* visually in this way to one of the world's greatest newspapers, the local title could only enhance its credibility in an increasingly global information market. It remains a controversial design feature, with some of the paper's staff feeling it detracts from the sovereignty of the local title. However, I remain convinced it adds value and at the time of writing there was discussion that this approach might become a standard visual feature for titles linked to the FT through joint ownerships elsewhere around the world.

Adding value

Behind the redesign of *BusinessDay* lay a matrix of concerns about the paper. None of these related directly to content, which reader surveys had shown to be largely what readers expected from a business daily. Indeed, as far as content was concerned, readers appeared to want more of the same. But executives on the newspaper — in particular the editor, Jim Jones; his deputy, Bernard Simon, a former FT correspondent from Canada; and managing editor, Cheryl Lynn Iretton — were hoping the redesign would have the knock-on effect of getting everyone to add value to the paper, driving content to greater heights. In this sense the redesign was the visible part of a much broader process.

BusinessDay had remained largely unchanged since its launch in May 1985. The original formula worked so well that there was little motivation to make any changes. The paper carved its niche as the daily newspaper of record and is widely respected for its editorial neutrality, in-depth reportage and informed analysis of local and international business and related issues.

The redesign has thus to be seen against the backdrop of a winning newspaper with a steadily rising circulation in a market that is not being kind to newspapers. But for all this,

BusinessDay readers were against change for change's sake, visual gimmicks or trendy layout. What they wanted was a general tidying up of the paper to aid readability and legibility and to provide rapid access to information.



nobody was disputing that *BusinessDay* could do with a facelift, least of all the managing director of BDFM, Allan Greenbo, a seasoned and extremely capable journalist himself and one of the moving spirits behind the decision to 'remake' the paper. He was acutely aware that *BusinessDay* had remained static in visual terms and that the paper was largely untouched by the graphic revolution that had exploded all around it over the past decade.

Visual myopia

In some ways this visual myopia may have been a blessing. It meant that the paper had not become a dedicated follower of graphic fashion, like so many titles in America where newspapers have all but been stripped of their news content at the altar of design. In the case of *BusinessDay*, this meant that the tail (design) had never wagged the dog (news content).

Change, when it came, would by definition be cautious, consensual and conservative, which are precisely the values which underscore this particular redesign. While the redesign may have introduced a sense of visual modernity and an emerging graphic coherence to the paper, it has tried to remain familiar because in the newspaper context, familiarity does not breed contempt at all, it provides a comfort zone for readers overwhelmed by informational overload and the visual jambalaya of the modern consumer marketplace. In this cauldron of competing information, steady and reliable points of reference become vital. To be successful, a newspaper has to become the reading public's compass, its best and most reliable daily source of reference: a friend, companion and partner in the Devil's brew world we live in.

The implementation of the design templates, once agreed to by the editor and the BDFM board of directors, fell to *BusinessDay*'s production editor, Valdi Strauss and a talented new staffer, Matthys Moss, the paper's visual editor, who, to my knowledge, is the first such appointee in South African journalism. It is a tribute to *BusinessDay* that it should lead the way in this type of appointment. Hopefully other South African editors will be as visionary and appoint their own visual

editors to develop and safeguard the visual standards of their newspapers.

Moss came to *BusinessDay* from Cape Town where he had stewarded the redesign of the *Cape Times*. He had also worked with the American-based newspaper designer, Rolf Rehe when he came to South Africa to redesign *Die Burger* in 1990.

Moss's job on *BusinessDay* will be to take visual control of the paper, ensure that the redesign beds down over time and then to inject the graphic excellence that the newspaper will need to become a world-class title. This will not happen overnight. Incremental graphic advances, however, will steadily be made throughout the newspaper as time goes by. Illustrations and information graphics will become regular features while editorially readers of *BusinessDay* are likely to be introduced to more of the content of the *Financial Times*, particularly on analysis pages.

Adding personalised columns will encourage and attract talented writers to strut their stuff in *BusinessDay*.

Hopefully, one of the major knock-on effects of the redesign will be better print quality,

which has now become vital because of the cautious introduction of more refined graphics and, of course, colour into the newspaper. I say 'cautious' both because of print constraints (oh to have presses in South Africa that could emulate the colour quality taken for granted in European and American newspaper markets) and reader perceptions of colour usage.

From all of the above it is clear that the redesign of *BusinessDay* is really only the next step in the evolution of South Africa's leading business paper. The paper has shed its old skin and will continue to evolve and remake itself, always getting closer to its readers and their needs. The new design package has been created to provide the platform for that evolution both visually and editorially.

Kerry Swift is executive director of Fox Strategic Limited in Johannesburg and is the founding editor of the Rhodes Journalism Review. Working with him on the BusinessDay redesign were Preven Moodley and Wayne Rietfeld in the Fox Publishing studio. These pages were designed by Fox Studio's Leon Lazarus.

To be successful, a newspaper has to become the reading public's compass, its best and most reliable daily source of reference; a friend, companion and partner in the Devil's brew world we live in.



ABOVE: The design templates for *AfterHours*, the Friday leisure section, and the leader page.

BELOW: Examples of flexibility in the skyline system. BOTTOM LEFT: A synthesis of north and south, the FT and the old *BusinessDay* emerge in a bright new package.

