Build a Better Business Card
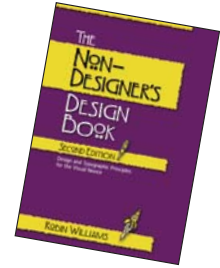
Best-selling author Robin Williams makes any design job do-able, no matter what your level of expertise. The second edition of her classic Non-Designer's Design Book is filled with new art and examples, but remains an essential guide for anyone working with design and type. Using numerous examples, Robin shows you how to go from wimpy to wow just by following basic design principles. In this excerpt, Robin explains the do's and don'ts behind great-looking business cards.
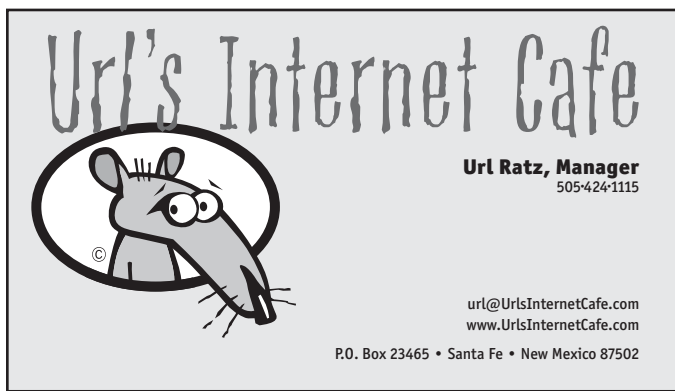
Business Cards

If you use a second color, use it sparingly. Most of the time a tiny bit is more effective than throwing the second color all over the card. You get your money's worth with just a splash.

Talk to the print shop about how many copies of the card to set up on one page, and how far apart. Ask if you can send them an Adobe Acrobat pdf file to print from (if you don't know how to make a pdf, you'll find details on Adobe's web site, www.adobe.com). Or buy those perforated, preprinted business cards that you can run through your own office printer (although the perforated edges can give an unprofessional appearance to your business).

Business card size

Standard business card size in the U.S. is **3.5 inches wide by 2 inches tall** (8.5cm x 5.5cm in many other countries). A vertical format, of course, would be 2 inches wide by 3.5 inches tall.

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Tips on Designing Business Cards

Business cards can be a challenge to design because you usually need to pack a lot of information into a small space. And the amount of information you put on a business card has been growing—in addition to the standard address and phone, now you probably need your cell number, fax number, email address, and if you have a web site (which you should), your web address.

Format

Your first choice is whether to work with a **horizontal** format or a **vertical** one. Just because most cards are horizontal doesn't mean they have to be. Very often the information fits better in a vertical layout, especially when we have so many pieces of information to include on such a little card. Experiment with both vertical and horizontal layouts, and choose the one that works best for the information you have on your card.
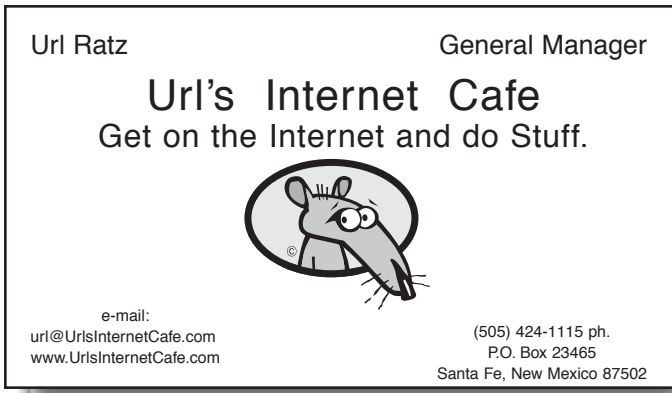
Type size

One of the biggest problems with business cards designed by new designers is the type size. It's usually **too big**. Even the 10- or 11-point type we read in books looks horsey on a small card. And 12-point type looks downright dorky. I know it's difficult at first to use 9- or even 8- or 7-point type, but look at the business cards you've collected. Pick out three that look the most professional and sophisticated. They don't use 12-point type.

Keep in mind that a business card is not a book, a brochure, or even an ad—a business card contains information that a client only needs to look at for a couple of seconds. Sometimes the overall, sophisticated effect of the card's design is actually more important than making the type big enough for your great-grandmother to read easily.

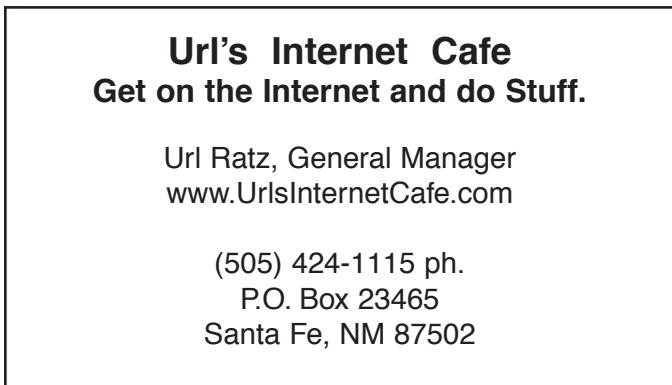### Create a consistent image with letterhead and envelope

If you plan to create a letterhead and matching envelopes, you really need to design all three pieces at once. The entire package of business cards, letterhead, and envelopes should present a **consistent image** to clients and customers.

Don't do this!

Url Ratz   General Manager

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Get on the Internet and do Stuff.

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Don't stick things in the corners. The corners don't mind being empty.

Don't use Times, Arial, or Helvetica or your card will always looked dated. Like from the '70s.

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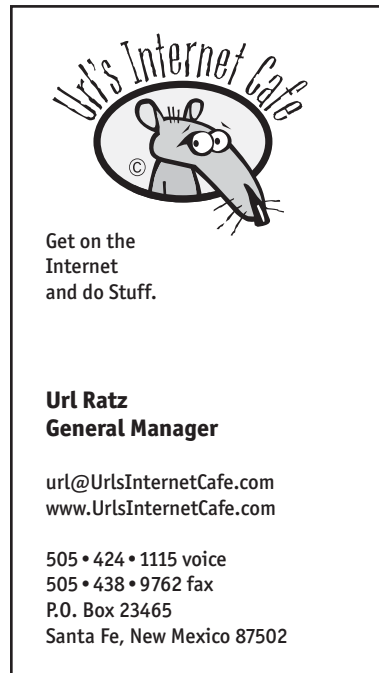
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Don't use 12-point type or your card will always look unsophisticated! People can easily read 8-, 9-, or 10-point type. Business cards often use 7-point type. And please don't center your layout unless you can put into words the reason why you need to do so.

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Don't feel like you have to fill the entire space on the card. It's okay to have empty space. Look at those professional cards—they always have empty space!

It's unnecessary to have the words "email" and "web site" on your card—it's clear what those particular items are.

Try this . . .

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Line things up! Everything on your card should be aligned with something else.

Align baselines.

Align right edges or left edges.

Most of the time a strong flush left or flush right alignment has a much more professional impact than a centered alignment.

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Try using periods, small bullets, or blank spaces instead of parentheses around area codes. It gives your card a cleaner look.

Spell out St., Blvd., Ln., etc. The periods and commas in abbreviations add unnecessary clutter.

If you don't have a fax number, don't type "Phone" before or after your phone number. We know it's your phone number.