It's been called "information anxiety," and who doesn't suffer from it? We're constantly bombarded by messages, all trying to make us look, to make us listen, to make us react. Some of these messages, however, are more important than others. Maybe we'd be better off without the junk mail and the commercials, but often the information we do need isn't provided in a way we can readily understand; think of all the instruction booklets, road, highway signs, electricity bills and tax forms you've tried to read that never seem to have the answer to your questions.

Clearly, there's a crying need for information design in our modern world, for data that is organized, written and presented so everyone can understand it. When the design of information is left to chance the result is information anxiety. And when things become too complex, when an environment defies common sense, when technical requirements are allowed to prevail over human considerations, then someone has to intervene.

This is where the information designer comes in. It's his (or her) job to know that what's required here is more than just "good" design. What's the point of creating a swell-looking layout and

By Erik Spiekermann

printing it in attractive colors when all the wrong questions are being asked in all the wrong ways?

This is more than likely to be news to your average graphic designer. Most designers are conditioned to regarding the design of information as something that is somehow beneath them; they'd rather be left alone to design posters, logos and glossy brochures. And besides, who wants to spend their time trying to figure out what information is needed and where it should be put? Most designers would prefer to leave these

There are some encouraging signs that information design is finally coming into its own.

Taking The Pain Out Of Information Anxiety

thankless tasks to printers, result typesetters, engineers, architects and bureaucrats.

There are some encouraging signs that information design is finally coming into its own. Identifying the problem is the first step. And businesses are now discovering the advantages of clear communications. Their response signals a fundamental shift in design thinking to a model where something is more efficient, more practical and - what a surprise - more affordable, precisely because it is rationally designed.

Good information design must communicate by convincing us, not just browbeating us. And information designers would do well to keep something else in mind. They need to know, as clever advertising people have long known, that nothing convinces people more than being entertained. Show me a form that's fun to fill out, a sign that makes me smile, or a set of instructions I'll want to take to bed to read, and maybe all this information anxiety won't seem so painful after all.

About the Author
Erik Spiekermann is an internationally recognized graphic designer whose typeface Meta is rapidly becoming one of today's most popular fonts. In the international design and typographic community, Erik is a tireless spokesman for the need for functional yet aesthetic design of everything from typefaces to transportation systems and time schedules.
He was the original founder of MetaDesign, which has grown to be one of the world's largest design firms with offices in Berlin, London, Zurich and San Francisco.
He is also one of the original founders and a partner in FontShop, an international franchise of mail order type libraries for Mac's and PC's with a catalog of over 5000 typefaces.
Erik speaks several languages and writes in both English and German. He has written several books on design and typography, notably Stop Stealing Sheep for Adobe Press.

For this typography project, with given text and images, I created a five column grid layout and carefully placed the title, deck, and text into an interesting layout. The challenge was to conform to good typographic norms.