

Design first things first

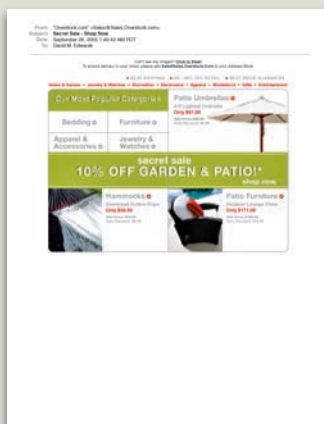


Snap-together modules make this format easy—but get the sequence right!


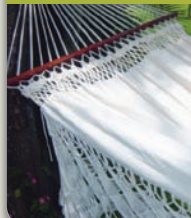

Continued ►

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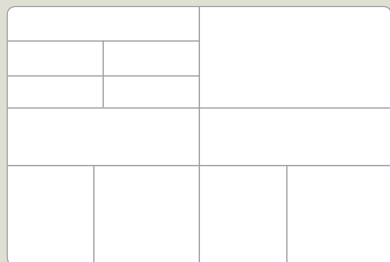
Here's a format that's useful for many things—Web pages (right), e-mail attachments (left), post-cards, magazine ads, fliers, and so on; it's a layout of short headings and simple photos in a small grid. It's popular because it's easy to design—just snap pre-sized modules into grid positions, and you're done. Rearranging modules gives you endless variety. But you must stay alert. It's so easy to mix and match that it's easy to overlook *sequence* and present your material out of order for best comprehension. The good news: sequence is easy to do. Here's how.

Our Most Popular Categories		Patio Umbrellas ◯
Bedding ◯	Furniture ◯	9 ft Lighted Umbrella Only \$81.00 Site Price: \$89.99 Sale Discount: \$8.99
Apparel & Accessories ◯	Jewelry & Watches ◯	
secret sale 10% OFF GARDEN & PATIO!* shop now ◯		
	Hammocks ◯ Oversized Cotton Rope Only \$58.50 Site Price: \$64.99 Sale Discount: \$6.49	
		Patio Furniture ◯ Outdoor Lounge Chair Only \$171.00 Site Price: \$189.99 Sale Discount: \$18.99

Before: This simple format is easy to assemble. Repetitive modules of gray-on-white type punctuated by red prices; headlines in green rectangles; and simple, rectangular photos make for efficient production. When new products or prices are ready, just pop them in without tediously re-designing.

The space has a lot of flexibility

Sharing the small space are a dozen visual “zones”—banners, heads, text, prices and photos—and all are easy to read. Key to this clarity is *repetition*—the ad uses only a few graphical elements over and over, uniformly.



Structural repetition The foundation is laid by dividing the space into zones. The space can be divided *rationally*—in half, then half again, and so on—or *irrationally* as it is here, in which the divisions are not even fractions. Rational divisions are more *mixable*, so start with those, and fudge only if necessary.

Patio Furniture ◻




Outdoor Lounge Chair

Only \$171.00

Site Price: \$189.99

Sale Discount: \$18.99

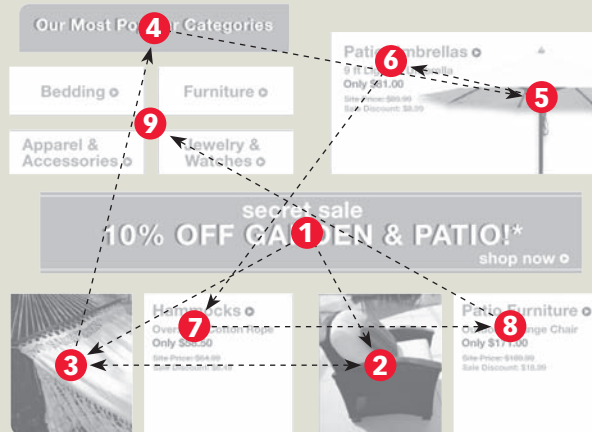
Typographic repetition Only one typeface (Helvetica) is used for everything. Note its hierarchy of big, medium and small sizes (above); these differences convey levels of importance at a glance and must never vary. Gray color on white softens the typeface and allows the red prices to jump out in striking relief.

Our Most Popular Categories		Patio Umbrellas ◻ 9 ft Lighted Umbrella Only \$81.00 Site Price: \$89.99 Sale Discount: \$8.99
Bedding ◻	Furniture ◻	
Apparel & Accessories ◻	Jewelry & Watches ◻	
secret sale 10% OFF GARDEN & PATIO!* shop now ◻		
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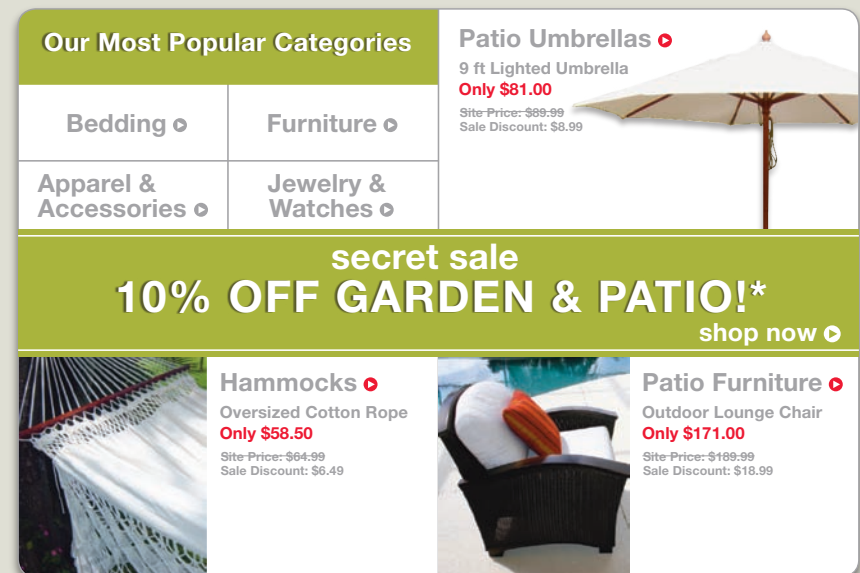
Color repetition The headlines—and nothing more—are in green rectangles that serve somewhat like highway signs. Here, the Helvetica typeface is in uppercase (partly), centered and shadowed, changes that signal information *different* from the sale items.

But here's the mistake

While it's easy to get good results quickly, the downside to modular design is that unless you're careful, its similarities can inhibit communication. This designer wasn't careful enough; he put the most visible elements on the page out of sequence.

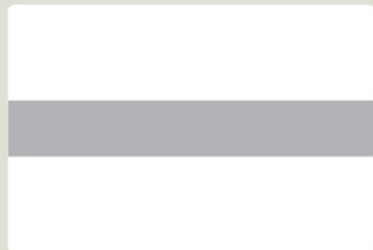


With so much similarity, color and value (dark-light) will determine what the eye sees first. This designer put the most visible elements—colorful photos and dark banners—on the page out of sequence, which created an odd starting point (the middle) and left the reader to wander about the page undirected. Everyone will wander somewhat differently, weakening the presentation.

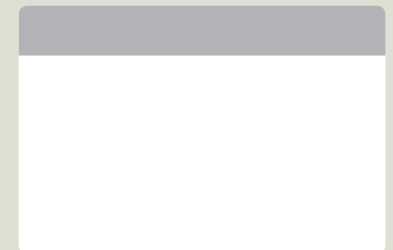


Start over, and get your elements working together

First makeover step is to put the headline at the top, where its dominant color *and position* now send a single message. A new serif typestyle (Berkeley Oldstyle Black) is more complex than Helvetica and conveys a more garden-like image.



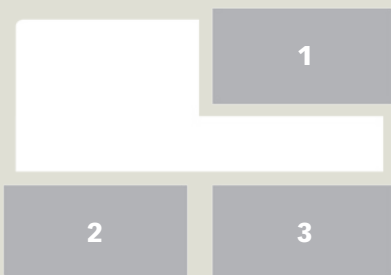
Before: Placing a headline in the center is daring and can look sophisticated, but not here. Alone on the page it's plenty visible (above), but as other modules are added, its "firstness" will be lost.



After: No matter how "noisy" the material below it is, a reader will always recognize a top headline as most important and will always know where to find it. That's part *expectation* and part *physical*, like a flag waving atop a pole.

Gather related objects

Things that *are* alike should *look* alike—same size, shape, position, alignment and so on. Gather the three sale items, and present them uniformly in a row followed by their descriptions, which are also typographically alike.

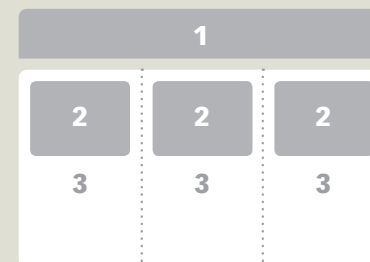


Before: Three elements of the ad—products with photos—are the same and all three relate to the headline—they’re what’s on sale!—yet on the corners of the original ad (above) they had no visible relationship.

10% Off Garden & Patio!*

Secret Sale

 Patio Umbrellas 9 ft. Lighted Umbrella \$81.00 <small>Site Price: \$89.99 Sale Discount: \$8.99</small>	 Hammocks Oversized Cotton Rope \$58.50 <small>Site Price: \$64.99 Sale Discount: \$6.49</small>	 Patio Furniture Outdoor Lounge Chair \$171.00 <small>Site Price: \$189.99 Sale Discount: \$18.99</small>
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After: What a difference! Now in a uniform row, the three sale items are clearly related and more powerful together than apart. (Umbrella in silhouette is an eye-catching [and grid-busting] extra.) Sequential hierarchy reads easily.

Center it!

Centered type drives the eye straight down the page (type aligned left or right tends to move the eye sideways). Products and prices in red both stand out, conveying the key information instantly.

Create a secondary ad

Finish with something clearly different. In this case, the four “Most Popular” categories are permanent, not transitory, so should look different from the weekly specials and come at the end, not the beginning.

Secondary ad



Before: Prime space should be used for weekly specials, not staples. Think *supermarket*. Why is milk at the back of the store? Because everyone buys it. Have your reader walk past the higher-profit stuff to get there.

After

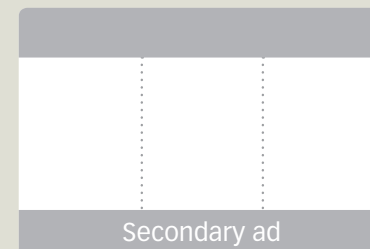
10% Off Garden & Patio!*

Secret Sale

 <p>Patio Umbrellas 9 ft. Lighted Umbrella</p> <p>\$81.00 <small>Site Price: \$89.99 Sale Discount: \$8.99</small></p>	 <p>Hammocks Oversized Cotton Rope</p> <p>\$58.50 <small>Site Price: \$64.99 Sale Discount: \$6.49</small></p>	 <p>Patio Furniture Outdoor Lounge Chair</p> <p>\$171.00 <small>Site Price: \$189.99 Sale Discount: \$18.99</small></p>
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Our Most Popular Categories

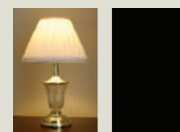
 Apparel & Accessories	 Jewelry & Watches	 Bedding	 Furniture
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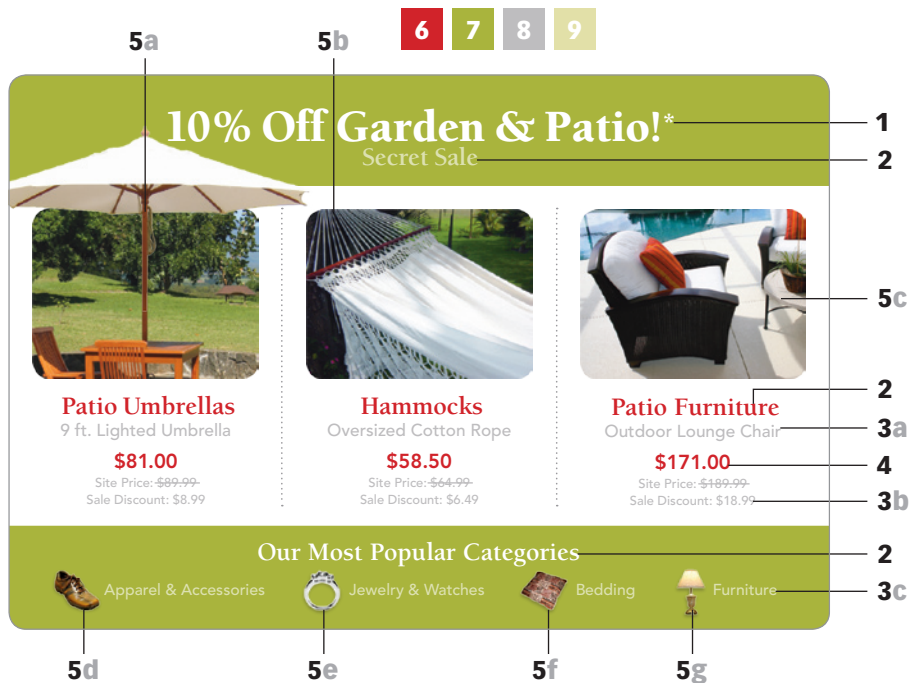
Secondary ad

After: Green bands relate to each other (color, shape, type) and bookend the three sale products. “Most Popular” items are small but clear in silhouette, giving the specials room to shine. The hierarchy is now obvious and effective.

Our eyes recognize shape. Rectangular images lose clarity at small sizes (right). Solution: Cast the objects in silhouette, and add a hint of shadow (far right). This makes them look *real*, visually interesting and *different from* the rectangular images.



Article resources



Typefaces

- 1 [ITC Berkeley Oldstyle Black](#) | 20 pt
- 2 [ITC Berkeley Oldstyle Bold](#) | 11.5 pt
- 3 (a-c) [Avenir 65 Medium](#) | a) 7.5 pt
b) 5.5/12 pt, c) 7 pt
- 4 [Avenir 85 Heavy](#) | 9 pt

Colors

- 6 C15 M100 Y100 K0
- 7 C28 M7 Y90 K14
- 8 C2 M3 Y2 K27
- 9 C12 M5 Y30 K0

Images

- 5 (a-g) iStockphoto.com | [a](#) [b](#) [c](#) [d](#)
[e](#) [f](#) [g](#)



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Before & After magazine

Before & After has been sharing its practical approach to graphic design since 1990. Because our modern world has made designers of us all (ready or not), Before & After is dedicated to making graphic design understandable, useful and even fun for everyone.

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Gaye McWade Associate publisher

Vincent Pascual Staff designer

Dexter Mark Abellera Staff designer

Design advisor **Gwen Amos**

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For presentation format

[Print: \(Specify pages 1–9\)](#)



Print

Format: Landscape
Page Size: Fit to Page

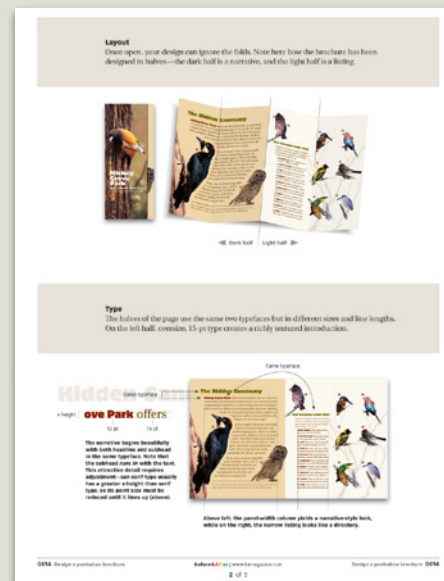


Save

Presentation format or
Paper-saver format

For paper-saver format

[Print: \(Specify pages 11–15\)](#)



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Bedding ◦	Furniture ◦
Apparel & Accessories ◦	Jewelry & Watches ◦

secret sale
10% OFF GARDEN & PATIO!*
shop now ◦

 Hammocks ◦ Oversized Cotton Rope Star Price: \$66.99 Only \$59.50 Star Discount: \$6.49	 Patio Umbrellas ◦ 9 ft. Lighted Umbrella Star Price: \$81.99 Only \$71.00 Star Discount: \$10.99
 Patio Furniture ◦ Outdoor Lounge Chair Star Price: \$166.99 Only \$171.00 Star Discount: \$19.99	

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Only **\$171.00**

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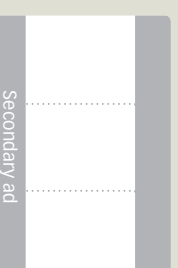
After

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9 ft. Lighted Umbrella
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Sale Discount: \$8.99
\$81.00
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Sale Discount: \$6.49
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- Patio Furniture**
Outdoor Lounge Chair
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Our Most Popular Categories

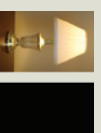
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- Jewelry & Watches
- Bedding
- Furniture



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Images

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Colors

- 6 C15 M100 Y100 K0
- 7 C28 M7 Y90 K14
- 8 C2 M3 Y2 K27
- 9 C12 M5 Y30 K0

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