

Philadelphia Daily News

A product of sibling rivalry

February 9, 1993

by John Sherlock

Graphics Editor

We're the Philadelphia Daily News, a tabloid that's the lusty little sister to the broadsheet Inquirer. Owned by the same parent company, Knight-Ridder, "The People Paper" takes great pride in reporting gutsy, gritty urban news in the nation's fifth largest city.

We are a local-focus, street-sale paper with limited home delivery. We have to shout a little louder to get attention, so our covers are designed to be provocative and pithy. We try to avoid covers that are sleazy or sensational - you won't get "Headless Body in Topless Bar" stories from us. What you do get is solid reporting, controversial columnists and probably the best sports section in the country. We do it well enough to convince 195,000 people a day to spend 50¢ for their daily news - news that they may have already seen on television or heard on the radio. We give them something that other media cannot - insight, depth and attitude.

In 1992, Knight-Ridder opened the doors on a \$300 million printing plant in the suburbs of Philadelphia. This gave us the ability to begin putting offset color on newsprint for the first time. It also gave us the chance to design the paper to appeal to a greater reader audience, and do it in color!

The onslaught of modern technology has never landed harder or faster on any newspaper than on the Philadelphia Daily News. In nine months, we brought in color Macintosh computers, Scitex color systems, AP Leaf color photo equipment, updated APS typesetters, cranked up state-of-the-art Goss Colorliners, paper folders and mailroom equipment and retrained or hired the staff to make color newspaper a reality. While we were

at it, we redesigned the newspaper to emphasize the improved printing quality and make the most intelligent use of the color at our disposal.

Our design credo is K.I.S.S. (keep it simple, stupid). We try to make every page reader-friendly with clear labeling and concise headlines. We give equal weight to stories, graphics and photos to best report the news. We got rid of excess vertical rules, we closed-up boxes with .5-pt. rules, lightened tint screens and made (the dreaded) white space a welcome element of our page design.

For the February 10 edition, the focus of "Day of Design," we were beset by a slow news day. We were hoping for another government blunder, a sports world revelation or a five-alarm fire, but as on many days, great news did not materialize.

Instead, we were milking a day-old drug bust and put a local spin on the national underground economy story. Neither was great fodder for good photos or graphics, so we "winged it" as usual.

10:00 a.m.: First planning meeting of the news day revealed our worst fears: more rehashing national news and the local news was nothing to get excited about. We lost a color position and had to convert a great Features front on alternative medicine to black and white. The top story of the paper had no art available for the cover or inside. Sports had a good feature on ex-boxing champ Buster Douglas and Flyers' hockey wunderkind Lindros was returning to play tonight. Let's hope for some real news to break.

3:00 p.m.: Editors tense due to TV's "Today Show" cameras in the room taping a segment on tabloid journalism (not your average day at the office). We plod on to firm up more sto-

ries. Page 1 gets a frenzy of headlines offered for underground economy story we'll call "Nannygate" inside. We discuss graphic options to dress up artless main story. Features offers man-sharing story that ruffles some feathers - good, the Daily News edge. We'll need a good visual as main art (could be good tease on page 1). Biz offers G.E. story...no charts available, but Sears announces big losses... good, barchart time! Page 1 head for now: "You're Guilty."

5:00 p.m.: "Today Show" is still filming. The news day is not any more exciting, but we have to pitch page one to Editor Stalberg. We lead with nannygate and point the finger at the reader to ask the question about their honesty with the IRS. Who better to point the finger than Uncle Sam in cliché, but effective "I want you" imagery? Copy editor writes attention-getting, 'FESS UP, AMERICA, in all caps as is our style. The deck will help qualify what we need to 'fess up about. Other hot stories are still man-sharing and Buster Douglas. The Editor questions, challenges and we get our marching orders for final page 1 treatment - play up 'fess up. Inside, stress local angle with local celebrity confessions.

8:00 p.m.: Page 1 elements are finessed one more time. Sports cover coming together with great hockey photo from staff shooter. As a tabloid, we use our sports front on the backpage and make full use of sports hoopla to sell the newspaper. Inside color art is sent to Scitex and Page 1 holds until midnight in case a late-breaking news story forces a remake.

1:40 a.m.: Page 1 goes to press without changes, Sports cover sent 10 minutes past deadline due to late filing of story and final headlines.

The rest is history. ■

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Innovations

What are we doing differently this year than last? How have we improved? The PDN has been newspaper designer's heaven in 1992 (or hell, looking back at it):

Redesign to color.

Philly readers are pleased by our transformation to color. Our blended heads are the most innovative feature. In color or black & white, section heads and page toppers carry a blend from black to light. A TV trick used to add depth behind type. Even the masthead carries the change on newly-massaged Franklin Gothic Heavy fonts.

New markets.

Introduced weekly special section directed at teen market. Kids have a high disposable income and need less convincing to spend. At the proposal of our Features Editor, Sandra Shea, we designed an upbeat, colorful, irreverent tab to cater to teen-agers.

We call it Fresh Ink.

Fresh Ink (see attached) has received a tremendous welcome from teens since it's launch in Summer of '92. It's now the 'IN' thing to have hanging out of your knapsack on Thursday mornings.

The design is a colorful Mtv/Nintendo/Ren & Stimpy-on-acid approach to lure a TV generation back to newsprint. Designer Dominic Wolocko, an Artist in our Editorial Art Dept. helps keep life and energy flowing on the pages of this new venture.

We keep a 'Student Council' of young contributors and advisors from area high schools to keep the language straight and the stories topical.

Our old fogey ad salesmen haven't figured out how to sell this young product yet, but they're beginning to catch on. We've had a 9% Thursday sales increase and a 5% circulation growth over last year.

Power Page.

Essentially, a double-truck color poster (see attached).

Zoned edition.

Many have tried it. Most don't know the extra work involved. But, the Philadelphia Daily News have made its best gains in circulation and advertising in our NorthEast edition (see attached). We produce a 16-24 page section with news by, for, about readers in Northeast Philly. With little investment, we have a winner on our hands.

Wraps.

We take advantage of our new color capabilities and are not afraid to 'wrap' a special section over the daily newspaper (see Mummies attached). The design does not compromise the identity of the newspaper and stimulates sales on the racks.