

*Compliments of Your Technical Communication Experts at Freund Associates*

The world of technical communication is not always the most graphically appealing. True, in technical writing, content will always be king, but the look and feel of that content can either make your document easy to read or so difficult and incomprehensible that the reader wants to use it for kindling! The key is creating a piece of usable documentation that delivers the goods, while looking good. This task, however, can be fraught with challenges, as you will read in this issue of *Ask Dr. Freund*.

Speaking of looking good, Freund Associates is proud to announce that we are celebrating our **10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** this October! We would like to express our sincere thanks to our clients for having the confidence in us to help them look like the professionals they truly are.

**FREUND ASSOCIATES  
10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**



**Question 1:**

**We've invested a lot of time and money in making sure our manuals are accurate, yet we continue to get calls and e-mails from our customers about things we spelled out very clearly in print. What can we do to get them to read the instructions?**

**A:** Maybe it's not your content, but the way it's presented that makes your customers want to pick up the phone. Even technical information has to look attractive enough to engage readers and keep their attention. We recommend that you consult a professional graphic designer who can help you understand how to make your information *look* as attractive as it is important. Starting with your company logo or color scheme or other design element, a good designer can select the type and size of font, spacing, color, diagrams, and use of white space (the area of the page that is *not* devoted to text or images) to make your documents easy to read and reflect your company's professionalism.

**Question 2:**

**Why should we invest even more money in a graphic designer when we have someone in-house who can use Microsoft® Publisher to design our documents?**

**A:** Freund Associates has discovered that while many in-house staff may be familiar with Microsoft® Publisher (e.g., the secretary who creates good-looking flyers for the company picnic, the engineer who uploads content onto the company web site, or the college intern who was editor of the school newspaper), rarely are they skilled enough to create a document that will impress thousands, even millions of prospective customers. The business world is too competitive to let something like amateurish design stand in the way of your company's success.

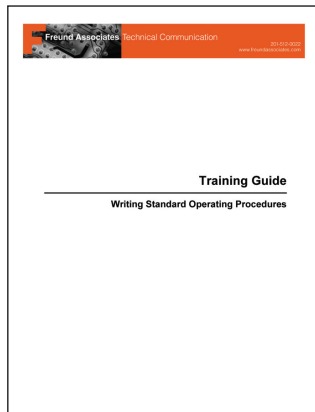
### Question 3:

**We only have a few dozen key high-level clients who use our manuals. They know that *we know what we're doing*. After all, didn't they invest on our technology in the first place? Why should we worry about the design of our manuals?**

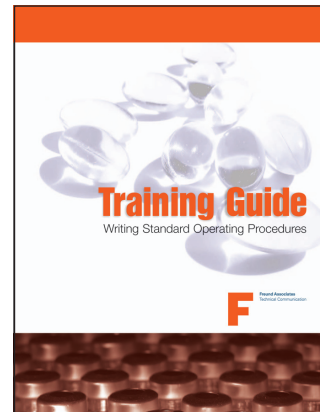
### Example

Here is a Before & After example of what Freund Associates has done to make our own materials more visually appealing.

**A:** Having a professionally written and designed manual not only makes you look more professional, but it can be used as a sales tool, as well. When your potential customers see that you have spent the time to research, write, and design a comprehensive and easy-to-use manual, it will be easier for them to justify the major investment they make in your product or service.



**BEFORE**



**AFTER**

### Question 4:

**So who should I consult first, a graphic designer or a technical communications specialist? And how do I know I am choosing the right ones?**

**A:** Take it from years of experience in technical communication: creating content should precede choosing your graphic designer. The designer needs to see the kind and amount of content you have before being able to quote and design your project. Talk to your technical communications expert before you request proposals from designers. In many cases, your technical communications expert will be able to recommend graphic designers with whom they have worked on previous projects, show you samples of their work, and save you the time and expense of screening vendors.

### Question 5:

**We have been so busy marketing and selling our technology that we have not gotten around to writing the user and troubleshooting manuals our customers are beginning to ask for. Our help-desk is overwhelmed! Is it too late to get started?**

**A:** No, it's never too late to get started! As a temporary fix, you might consider crafting a one- or two-page *Quick Reference Guide* or *Quick Troubleshooting Guide* to answer your customer's most common questions and concerns. The document could also be uploaded to your web site while you have hardcopies printed. Then you can begin writing the user manual and/or troubleshooting guide in detail, using the "quick" formats as an outline. One advantage of this temporary fix is that you might discover topics in the manual that could benefit from more detailed instructions. You may also discover that visual aids, charts, tables, or a video clip could take the place of excessive text. Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words!