

The New FT: the designer's inside story

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I like the [FT re-design](#) as I posted [below](#) – now the young [designer](#) responsible has given me the inside story on how it happened. [Ryan Bowman](#) is a 26 year-old American who, coincidentally, has attended a number of POLIS events looking at the Future of News. Amazingly, the venerable Financial Times gave Bowman quite some freedom to revamp one of the great newspapers of our age. Says Ryan:

“Change, understandably, doesn’t come easy to an institution like the FT but give Lionel credit, he was willing to be quite radical (for the FT at least) in the way he envisioned the paper—just think how brave it is to let a 26 year old with an annoying American accent be in charge of the way your world-class paper is going to look like.”

Bowman says this was a very different brief to redesigning a newspaper like the

Guardian – says Bowman:

“The Guardian is an incredible aesthetic achievement but the FT was aiming at a different set of targets. The FT is, more than any other paper, a functional tool for its readers. It needs to be informative, concise and clear first and beautiful second.”

And what exactly was the guiding design principle?:

“With the FT, the content was never the problem, it was always about making all their brilliance a bit more accessible. The story and word counts are almost exactly the same—the design just makes all the great work that goes into the pages more visible. It just seems like there are more stories because the elements of the page don’t ooze together anymore.” said Bowman.

And like any launch or redesign, you can’t always judge by the first version. Ryan Bowman says he believes it will improve further:

“Now its all still a bit rough around the edges (the production people did an amazing job in a ridiculously small window of time) and in the next 3 weeks I would say it will get at least 20% better. And just wait till Saturday....”

I’ve never redesigned a newspaper but having launched at least three TV news programmes and gone through at least one major over-haul I can say that they are both exciting and disturbing. All media products must move with the times and try to reinvent themselves. The look of a media platform is more than a superficial element – it is part of the very essence of the editorial mission. But changing appearances disrupts the cherished comfort for both audience and journalists. Too much reform can repel, too little can feel pointless. I suspect the FT has got it 80% right on what is only a 33% shift.

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