

Memo released on Feb 22, 2006

## Memorandum

TO: Dr. Russell Willerton  
FROM: Andrew Cornell  
DATE: April 12, 2011  
SUBJECT: Evaluation of a Print Document

The purpose of this memo is to provide an analysis of a print document for English 516 *Topics in Print Documentation*. The chosen document for this assignment is a double-side data sheet that explains the features and specifications of a company product. This particular document was chosen because of the design layout, writing style, and the targeted audience.

### Document Purpose

The purpose of the data sheet is to explain the company's product features, to an interested reader, whose looking for additional information to solve a problem. Because the document is generated by a marketing department, there is an opportunity to expand the marketing rhetoric. However, the content is very technical but the layout needs to be redesigned to improve the document's credibility.

### Document Description

The document is a double-sided data sheet, with the front side of the sheet covering the features and benefits of the product and with the back side covering the specifications. The sheet uses a two-column grid system, a gold horizontal rule on page top and bottom, and a company logo positioned at the lower right-hand corner of each side. The data sheet is made of glossy mat finish and is durable, which is excellent choice for distributing to customers.

The document uses bold san-serif typeface for page titles, bold serif typeface for all subheadings, and non-bold serif typeface for all body text. The document is content heavy but includes a product photo, small timing diagram, and parameter table.

### Audience Analysis

After reading the data sheet, I determined the primary audience will need to have technical knowledge in the electrical field and must have a basic understanding of how to apply products in a system. The data sheet includes technical material that is difficult to interpret without previous knowledge or experience. Because the sheet is filled with technical details, the data sheet lacks introductory material for a general audience. A general reader such as a purchasing manager or a product distributor will have difficulty interpreting the information without prior training or asking questions.

The author of the data sheet analyzed the audience from an *Intuitior* perspective and appears to have written the data sheet without conducting an audience analysis. The author used there own perspective of what they new about the product without really thinking about the reader. This can be seen in the data sheet where the features and specifications have limited transitional paragraphs or sentences. For example, the **Feature and Benefits** section includes two bulleted

phrases that begin with *Reports*, however, the section does not include transitional material on who or what the device is reporting to. Although the product is the object of the data sheet, a paragraph is needed to explain how the product integrates within the system. An example of a transitional phrase to add after **Features and Benefits** would be:

*“The TVM monitors line voltage and reports this data to Telemetric’s wireless web-based server where the data is available for viewing over the Internet. The TVM’s reporting features are as follows:”*

The first paragraph in the data sheet does talk about the TVM and its capability of monitoring the line voltage; however, this is listed in the first sentence with the last sentence of the paragraph vaguely describing how the customer accesses the data. Using the proximity design principle, these sentences should be combined.

## **Tone**

The tone of the data sheet is technical or *techy*, which is surprising because it was generated by marketing personnel. Because of the technical detail, two audiences may interpret the document differently.

## **Expert Audience**

An expert reader may decide that the document is not credible because the presented information has not been reviewed in detail before publication, which reflects poorly on the product and company. The reader would see that most information on the first page is a simple bulleted list of product features. One example is the first paragraph in the first column, where it mentions *“different models are available for monitoring 120v single phase (TVM1).”* However, in the second column, second bulleted item from the top, it mentions that *“single (TVM1) and three-phase (TVM3) models are available.”* Only one of these phrases needs to be in the document and should have been removed if another staff member reviewed the document. The redundancy could weaken the document’s credibility and affect the reader’s perception toward the product or company. A large organization may consider the company unprofessional if they publish documents that are not reviewed by a team and may question the company’s idea of product quality.

## **General Audience**

A general reader may decide the document is too complicated because the design focuses upon the detail specifications and product features without providing general information on product operation. For example, the parameter table on the second page lists a variety of selectable values but the description in the data sheet is weak. Because the reader will lack initial information about the product, they may feel overwhelmed and feel the product is too complicated because of the technical details presented in the document. Because there is no in-depth information on product operation or how the product will help the reader in their application, they may decide to pursue a familiar product offered by another company.

## **Design Analysis**

Considering the document was generated with few resources, the design layout is fair in terms of basic technical communication principles.

## Observations

Looking at the piece from an overall view, the information is organized and “chunked with repetitive elements. Bulleted descriptions are used on the front page and bulleted specifications are listed on the back page. The bullets are the major repetitive element in the document.

The document follows the alignment design principle and uses left justification for all elements: all headings align, all bulleted lists align with the headings, and all paragraph turnovers align.

The headings are the major elements in the document that take advantage of the contrast design principle. All headings are bolded, which allows the information to be “chunked” and provides queues to the reader when scanning for information. The typeface for the main heading **Specification** is san-serif and is bold. The large bold typeface creates contrast with other items on the page and connects all information under the heading and thus the page.

## Improvements

A few technical details were found that affected the document’s credibility that can easily be changed and improve the document. There were two design problems with the document layout that can be solved with a modified layout.

### Technical details

- **Bulleted items are not parallel.** All items in a list should be parallel to strengthen the repetitive elements. For example, the bulleted list under the **Voltage Measurement** heading includes a bulleted item that starts with an adjective, *Instantaneous*, while another bullet starts with a verb, *Reports*.
- **Non-repetitive element is substituted for a repeating element.** If the use of bulleted lists is to be used as a repeating element, remove similar elements that are used to group information. For example, the numbered lists in the second column on the front page should be indented with dashes, similar to the elements shown under **Features and Benefits**. Using dashes instead of numbers will repeat the element and will work because the list has no ranking elements.
- **Reference phrases need to be close to graphics.** Like elements need to be close in order to form a group. For example, the heading **Features and Benefits** includes a timing diagram but the reference phrase, - *Number of state changes*, is placed four lines above the diagram. This violates the proximity design principle. This can be corrected by positioning the reference phrase above the diagram on the last line. In order to prevent any association with the information below the diagram, the leading should be increased between the diagram and the next bulleted list. Another example under **Features and Benefits** is the bullet showing *Units are shipped with Steady State Defaults*. This bulleted phrase should be near the **Programmable Parameters** table shown on the **Specifications** page.

### Layout Improvement

After reviewing the document, there were two design problems that could be solved by changing the layout.

## Parameter Table

Under the **Specifications** page, the parameter table shown at the bottom has a dark and cluttered design because of the detailed information. The table consists of 4 vertical columns and 17 rows. Shaded horizontal rules and gridlines are used to group the rows by feature. Although the table does align with the right and left side of the page, the row height and typeface are small and cramped because of the vast amount of numbers that are listed in the table. The table appears to be dark and cluttered and needs more contrast to make it readable.

Because the data sheet lacks information that explains the meaning of the table parameters, the table can be improved by eliminating the detail. For example, the three columns **Steady State Defaults**, **Quality Defaults**, and **Possible Values** could be replaced by one column that shows a range of values. By eliminating three columns and focusing upon the main parameters, *set-points and trigger-time*, the table can be designed with more contrast that will make it more readable.

## Product Photo

The design layout of the first page uses a two-column grid layout and incorporates bulleted lists and product photo. A problem occurs when another list is created in the second column where the photo resides. In the second column of the front page, the text wrapping around the product photo is too narrow and makes the column unreadable and cramped.

To make the design layout flexible and to incorporate the proximity and alignment design principles, the layout can be modified by changing from the two-column grid to using blocks of information. For example, all information that refers specifically to the product photo should be close. Product information is available in both columns of the existing design. Because there is wasted white space at the bottom of the page, the page could be redesigned with a block of introductory information next to the photo. Dividing the page in the middle, with the top half containing the introduction and photo, more room would be available to *write* about the features and benefits of the product. Using blocks of information instead of struggling with the two-column grid layout will improve the design.

## Follow Up

Please provide feedback on my analysis of the print document. Any comments about the writing in the analysis would be appreciated.