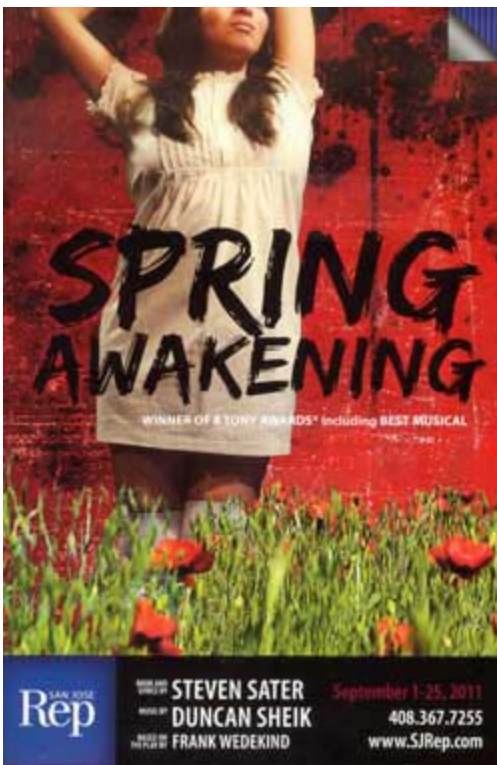




## Effective Postcards: The Complexity of Simplicity

The best arts marketing postcards deliver a clear, simple message, but often get there by a complex route through "hot" and "cold" opportunities. Because of its compact, convenient size, the postcard works both as an emotional trigger (hot) to get a patron to ACT NOW, and as a persuasive argument (cold) in favor of inviting others to come along too. That is, readers of an effective arts marketing postcard will say, "Ooh, look at this!" when they see it, and will say, "Here, look at this." when they discuss it with friends and family. Knowing that readers will save a good postcard to show others often tempts designers to cram too much in or attempt to create a portfolio piece, and good marketers will resist those temptations. Postcards should whet the appetite, not offer a 5-course meal. **This week, we'll look at three cards that use collages to tell a story.**

## Smiley Face



This **San Jose Rep** postcard does a nice job of layering. Layer 1: there's a clear focal point ("Spring Awakening"), that leads to an image of a young woman in 1960's garb (layer 2) that both pays off the title (that is, I now know that the play is about sex) and gives me a sense of the setting. Then I notice the (layer 3) spotty wall behind her and the wildflowers in the foreground and get a sense that the story is more complex than merely the horny angst of a hippie teenager. There's a tiny line of text (layer 4) that identifies it as a Tony award winner and as a musical, and my understanding is nearly complete. I'd have made "musical" more prominent since it's easy to miss, but that's a quibble.



On the back of the card, my eye is drawn to the subhead below the title and cast: "Coming of Age in a Society Cloaked in Taboos." As a reader, I am now 5 layers into my gradual understanding of this show and I'm hooked. As long as the dates and prices work for me, I'm coming to the show and I'm bringing a friend.

Another quibble ... I would have added the subhead from the back of the card to the front as well -- perhaps superimposed on the wildflowers.

By the way, both this San Jose Rep card and the Teatro Vision card in the Wowza column benefit from strong and consistent branding. Every postcard sent by the Rep this season has the logo in the bottom left next to a black box with artist info, dates and ticketing contacts. Every Teatro card frames the show inside a branding box with the logo centered at the top.



The collage on the postcard below is a chaotic mess that makes me want to throw it away. I get the vague sense that the stars might be women and that music might be involved somehow. The title is competing too much with the images in the background to really make sense. The first several times I looked at it I didn't see "In the Land of the" on top of the word "Grasshopper." As a result, the title makes a weak focal point, and once I've looked at it, I have no idea where to go since all of the collage pieces are given equal weight.



The back of the card makes things worse. The text is too small because there is too much of it. But why is that so? The first paragraph is entirely about the company putting on the show. Readers aren't given the slightest clue about what the show will be like until the second paragraph.

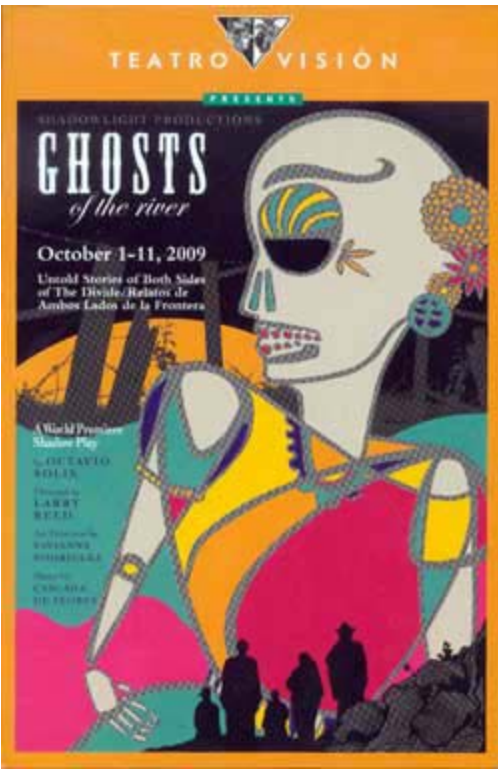


Imagine receiving this postcard in the mail. Naturally your first question is, "What is this?" All you know is "Grasshopper Song," whatever the hell that is. The beginning of the show title, "In the Land of the", is too tiny to make out.

So you start to read, and it's a bunch of blah blah about the theater company. You will now wonder, "Why did they send this to me?" and "Why won't they get to the point?" They attempt to provide a point by ending the first paragraph with the assertion that the show is one "audiences will talk about for years to come," but you still don't know what the show is about so this claim is just annoying BS.

Finally, the descriptive paragraph dwells entirely on the who, what, when and where of the show. The reader is never told why he or she should be interested in buying a ticket. It merely ends with another BS claim that it's a heartwarming tale the whole family will enjoy. The final nail in the coffin is that there are only vague hints in the text that the show is a musical comedy.

In any marketing piece, every important message should be repeated three times, and with this card the reader is lucky to get any message once.



The more I looked at this **Teatro Vision** postcard, the more I impressed I became at the clever laying of the message. We are irresistibly drawn to the skelton image as the focal point (layer 1), which tells us the story deals with death and with Mexican culture. Our eye is then drawn to the title "Ghosts of the River" (layer 2) and to the answer to "Why do I care?" (layer 3) -- the subhead, "Untold Stories of Both Sides of The Divide / Relatos de Ambos Lados de la Frontera," which also tells me the play is bilingual (layer 4). Then I notice the other elements of the collage that make it clear the story is about illegal immigrants (layer 5). Finally, I see the line "A World Premiere Shadow Play" and I say to myself, "Hmmm ... a shadow play. Interesting."



The back of the card is a bit of a mess, but I suspect that the designer may have wanted the definition of "shadow play" in the first paragraph to be the first thing readers saw. Sadly, the title is the focal point of this layout, so many readers will miss the paragraph in the top left. Here I've rearranged the information in a more logical order for readers:

