PCLinuxOS Magazine Scribus Layout Guide

by Paul Arnote
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You've signed up to be a part of the PCLinuxOS Magazine staff. There are numerous ways to contribute. You can help edit articles. You can create artwork. You can write articles. You can be a "technical advisor," ensuring that the magazine articles are technically accurate. Or, you can help typeset the articles for the magazine. It's the latter that we will concentrate on.

Preliminary "Stuff"

Before we can get started on learning how to lay out the magazine articles, we have to define the specifications that are used in laying out the magazine. Adherence to these specifications are important, so the magazine has a unified and congruent appearance from article to article.

The magazine is laid out using Scribus, the open source desktop publishing program that is in the PCLinuxOS repository. So, if you have not already done so, you will need to open Synaptic and install Scribus to your computer.
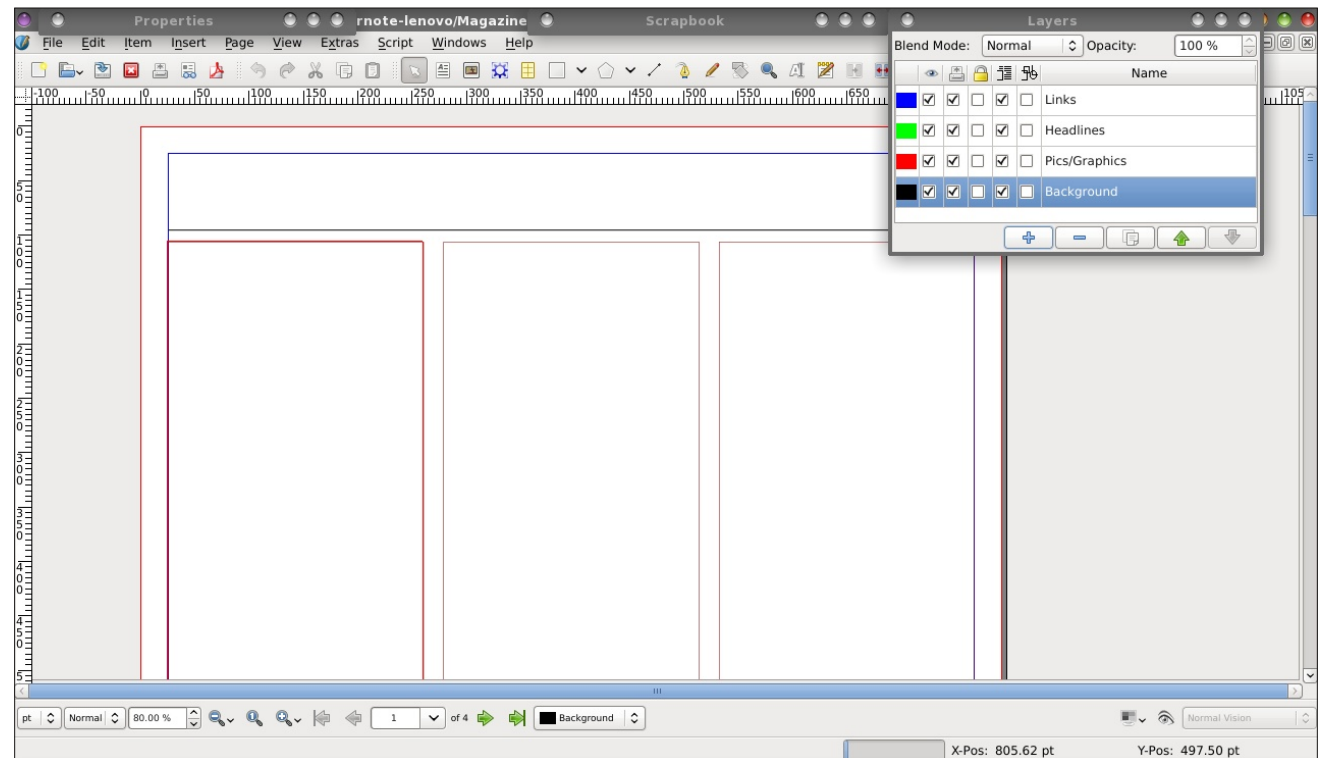
Next, you will want to have some templates. Thankfully, there are several templates for the magazine. While they vary in length, they are all based on the one page template, created by me and Meemaw. Archie Arevalo created the first template, and it was wonderful but we have changed to a new one. From the PCLinuxOS Connect page, you can download the one page, four page, eight page, 12 page, and 20 page three (3) column templates. There are also three two (2) column layouts, covering four pages, six pages, and 12 pages. All

the templates are in the NEW-Mag-Layout-Templates.tar.gz file. The preferred layout template for the magazine is the three column version. However, the two column versions came about because articles that contain large amounts of code snippets, or articles that have a lot of graphics, don't necessarily lend themselves well to the three column layouts.

The only one you are required to use is the one page template. However, all the work has been done for you on the other templates, and they make your life a lot easier when having to lay out articles longer than one page. Obviously, you will want to use the longer templates for longer articles. I have yet to have an article submitted that wouldn't fit within one
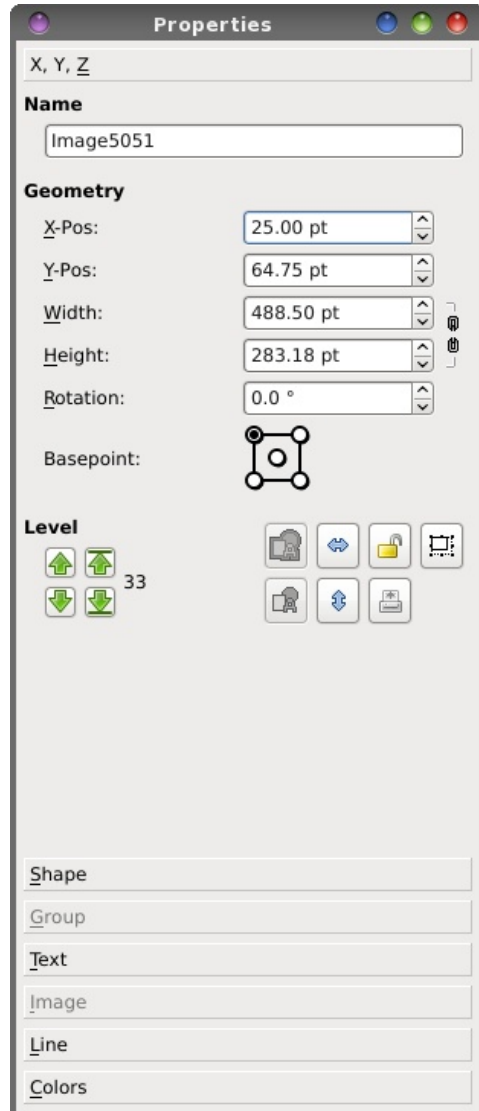
of these templates. Using Ark (or your preferred compressed file utility, such as File Roller or Squeeze), un-compress the templates to the ~/.scribus/templates directory. Alternatively, you can uncompress the files to a folder in your /home directory, preferably named the same as the compressed file. Bear in mind that the .scribus directory is a hidden directory in your /home directory, so you will need to enable "View Hidden Files" in your file manager software (Konqueror, Dolphin, Nautalis, PCFileMan or Thunar).

When you start to lay out a new article, simply open one of these template files as an existing document. Before you do anything else, re-save the file with the name you will call the new article layout. This will
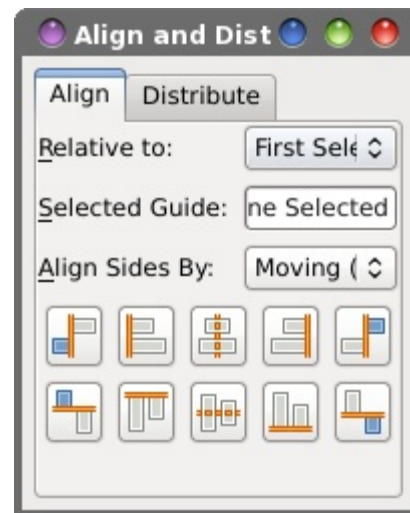
prevent you from potentially corrupting your "clean" templates. Don't worry if you corrupt them, as they are readily available for download from the PCLinuxOS Connect page, should you need them again. Alternatively, you can mark your "clean" templates as "read only" files, preventing you from accidentally overwriting them and their contents.
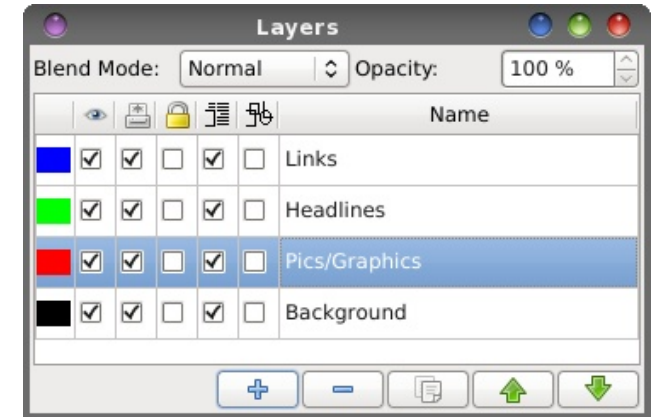
Let's Get Started

When you open Scribus, you should have your work area set up like in the screen shot on the previous page. I will explain why and how you can set your work area up similarly. In the example here, the four page template is loaded, and you are seeing a "naked" magazine page, before any layout has been attempted.

At the far left side of the work area is the **Properties** dialog box (it is shaded "up" in the image on the previous page). This is where you will do a lot of work, customizing the elements of the layout components (text, graphics, photos, etc.). Here, you will control the positioning of the various elements on an X (horizontal) and Y (verticlal) axis, the shape of objects (and whether text flows around those objects or not), the style and color of the text, the scaling of graphics and photos, the style of line used, and colors of various objects. I point this one out first, because it is one of the most heavily used dialog boxes in Scribus. This dialog box can be easily displayed by either right clicking on a page element and selecting Properites from the pop-up context menu, simply by just pressing F2, or by choosing the Scribus menu Windows > Properties.

Above is the **Alignment & Distribution** dialog box. We can use the tools in it to help us align objects.

We'll discuss it further later on. You can display this dialog box easiest by choosing the Scribus menu Windows > Align & Distribute.

At the upper right corner is the **Layers** dialog box. Certainly, we can create the layout all in one layer and not have to worry about layers. My first few attempts at laying out the magazine articles was done that way. And, without any doubt, it can work just fine that way. But, the more you use layers, the more you appreciate them. Typically, you will have the text in the layer that is usually labeled "Background." I then create a separate layer for the article headline, another for photos and graphics, and another for the links. These are already defined in the magazine layout templates. I think you see the pattern. This helps you focus on one element of the layout at a time. It also has the added benefit of protecting your work from "accidental" slips of the mouse cursor. This dialog box is displayed by either selecting the Scribus menu Windows > Layers, or simply by selecting F6.

At the center of the window is where most of your work will occur. At the top, where it is blank is where the article headline goes. The larger grey boxes below the headline is where the body of the text for the article go, as well as any graphics that accompany it. In the middle and at the bottom of the center work space, is the blue ring. The page numbers go at the bottom right of the main work

area when final assembly of the magazine occurs. Unless you are doing the final assembly, you will not be doing anything with these.

One thing that you might notice early on, is that the units of measure with the magazine templates defaults to **points**, abbreviated **pts**. Points is the standard measurement in the publishing world for defining the size of type. So, before we can go much further, we need to know what the "standard" magazine measurements are in the template.

Under the **X, Y, Z** tab of the Properties dialog box, we will find the sizes of the following elements. All of these "properties" are predefined in the magazine layout templates, but you will need to know what they are.

Headline (first page):
X-Pos: 30.00 pt
Y-Pos: 45.00 pt
Width: 732.00 pt
Height: 40.00 pt
Rotation: 0.00

Headline (subsequent pages):
X-Pos: 364.00
Y-Pos: 25.00
Width: 404.00
Height: 25.00
Rotation: 0.00

Left Column Text Box (first page):
X-Pos: 25.00 pt
Y-Pos: 106.00 pt
Width: 235.00 pt (362.00 pt in two column pages)
Height: 470.00 pt
Rotation: 0.00

Left Column Text Box (subsequent pages):
X-Pos: 25.00 pt
Y-Pos: 54.00 pt
Width: 235.00 pt (362.00 pt in two column pages)
Height: 522.00 pt
Rotation: 0.00

Center Column Text Box (first page):
X-Pos: 278.50 pt
Y-Pos: 106.00 pt
Width: 235.00 pt
Height: 470.00 pt
Rotation: 0.00

Center Column Text Box (subsequent pages):
X-Pos: 278.50 pt
Y-Pos: 54.00 pt
Width: 235.00 pt
Height: 522.00 pt
Rotation: 0.00

Right Column Text Box (first page):
X-Pos: 532.00 pt (405.00 pt in two column pages)
Y-Pos: 106.00 pt
Width: 235.00 pt (362.00 pt in two column pages)
Height: 470.00 pt
Rotation: 0.00

Right Column Text Box (subsequent pages):
X-Pos: 532.00 pt (405.00 pt in two column pages)
Y-Pos: 54.00 pt
Width: 235.00 pt (362.00 pt in two column pages)
Height: 522.00 pt
Rotation: 0.00

Under the **Text** tab of the Properties dialog box, we can further define the attributes of the text placed in their respective places on the page.

Headline (first page):
Font: Bitstream Vera Sans
Style: Bold Oblique
Size: 30.0 pt
Line Spacing: Automatic
Scaling Width of Characters: 100.0%
Offset to Baseline of Characters: 0.0%
Manual Tracking: 0%
Scaling Height of Characters: 100.0%
Color of Font: Black
Align Text: Center

Headline (subsequent pages):
Font: Liberation Sans
Style: Bold
Size: 14.0 pt
Line Spacing: Automatic
Color of Font: Black
Align Text: Right

Body Text:
Font: Liberation Sans
Style: Regular
Size: 10.0 pt
Line Spacing: Automatic
Scaling Width of Characters: 100.0%
Offset to Baseline of Characters: 0.0%
Manual Tracking: 0.0%
Scaling Height of Characters: 100%
Color of Font: Black
Align Text: Justified

Are you feeling overwhelmed? DON'T! You most likely won't have to mess with many of these settings. However, to insure that the magazine has a uniform and coherent appearance, we need to list the specifications. And, nearly all of the articles in the magazine will need to adhere to these specifications. On occasion, there will be some deviation from these specifications, but that will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the magazine's chief editor.

Often, the headline font size will vary, and will be adjusted (downward only in size ... we don't want SCREAMING headlines) to allow a desired headline to fit.

On another note about the headline, did you notice the last item under the definitions that appear in the Text tab of the Properties dialog? It says "NO Shadowed Text." I need to explain why. While it may be tempting to allow Scribus to create the shadowed text, problems arise whenever the end user attempts to print out a page with a PDF viewer. It may SEVERELY slow down the print rendering, often to the point of locking up a user's computer. So, it's

best to avoid its use. The magazine's current layout templates have gone completely away from using any kind of text shadowing, real or not.

Placing the Text

Now this part is very easy. Simply left click within the first column (the left column) on the first page, and select "Get Text" from the context menu that pops up. This will allow you to select text from a file on your computer. By far, the best results come from using plain, ordinary text (*.txt) files. While you can import the text from an OpenOffice/LibreOffice Writer file, you end up adding an additional layer of complexity due to the formatting in the OpenDocument file. My motto, when I was teaching, was KISS ... Keep It Super Simple. Using plain text files is the most simple way, and works exceptionally well.

Since the templates have the text flow from text frame to text frame predefined for you, the text should flow from one text frame to the next, seamlessly.

Once you have the text placed in the text frames, it is possible to edit that text and change its appearance. While you can perform minor edits within the text frame itself (such as misspellings, punctuation, etc.), it's often much easier to perform the text edits en-masse. Such edits as changing the style of portions of the text are much more easily done by right clicking on a text frame and selecting "Edit Text" from the context menu that pops up. This will open up an Edit Text dialog box, with the text preloaded into it. Now, simply highlight the text in the dialog box that you want to change the style of (say you want to make the byline of an article bold), and change the font to Liberation Sans Bold. The exact same thing applies if you want some text to appear as italics, only you would choose Liberation Sans Italic as the font to use to display the highlighted text with. You can do a similar thing with color, although colored text must be used sparingly. The default

color of the text for the body of the magazine articles is black, and for the most part, should remain black to maintain and increase readability. One such example is maintaining readability for those readers who may experience color blindness.

Graphics, Screenshots, Quotes and Photos

Endless pages of text is, in a word, boring. Just take a look at any technical or scientific article. Page after page of nothing but text makes the pages appear very gray, and lack visual appeal. Without anything to break up the grayish appearance of the text, there's nothing to anchor the eye and people tend to lose their place much more easily, making reading more difficult and decreasing comprehension. Typically, it takes a very disciplined mind to be able to read page after page of grayish text and maintain a high level of comprehension. This is why, in other publications (like magazines and textbooks), frequent use is made of other graphical elements like charts, graphs, screenshots, and photographs. Plus, the old adage "a picture is worth a 1,000 words" is true, as adding other graphical elements help improve comprehension.

Some articles don't lend themselves well to graphics, especially if you are attempting to present a concept or idea. Often, concepts or ideas are just that – conceptual, and don't have any physical representation, or at least are difficult to represent with any kind of physical representation. In those cases, it's possible to break up the grayness of the text by pulling out quotes from the article to display as an extra graphical element, displayed in a larger font size in a complimentary font face.

In any case, whether we are adding graphics, screenshots, photos, or quotes, the method is the same. We want to add the visual element and have the text flow around it. (Don't forget that we are adding things in layers, so you will place these visual elements in their own layer.) This is also where knowing the template measurements is important.

So the X-Pos, Y-Pos, and column width measurements (in the X, Y, Z tab of the Properties dialog box) take on some added importance.

For example, if we want to place a photo or screenshot in the upper left column of the first page of an article (in a three column layout), we will want the object placed so its X-Pos is 25, its Y-Pos is 106, and (if the photo or screenshot is to only be one column wide) the width of that object is 235 pts. The easiest way to achieve this is to manually adjust the values in the Properties box. Simply select the image tool from the Scribus toolbar, and click and drag to the object's approximate size. Use the values in the Properties dialog box to refine the measurements. Similarly, a two column wide image will be 488.50 pts wide, and a three column wide image will be 742.00 pts wide. With the two column layout, a one column wide image will be 362.00 pts wide, and a two column wide image will be 742.00 pts wide.

You should now see a marker on the screen for the new object. If it's an image, right click on it and select "Get Image" from the context menu. Point to the file you want to use and double click it (you may have to change to the directory where you've stored your images). Go to the Image tab in the Properties dialog and select "Scale To Frame Size." The image will be automatically scaled to fit into the space you've defined. By default, the image will be scaled proportionally, so that the image doesn't appear to be distorted. You may need to make some slight adjustments in the image frame (typically, either lenghen or shorten the height) to fill the space you have in mind for the image. Right click on the image frame, and select "Adjust Frame to Image" from the context menu that pops up. Next, click on the Shape tab in the Properties dialog, and select "Text Flows Around Frame." Magically, you will see the text shift and adjust to flow around the new image frame.

Were you to do this with a quote, you would select the text frame tool from the Scribus toolbar, and you would see a text frame, instead of an image frame.

You would still select the Shape tab in the Properties dialog box, and select "Text Flows Around Frame" to get a similar effect. You would then specify the text to display, along with the font size, font face, and font style in the Text tab in the Properties dialog box, instead of the image tab. As a shortcut, after defining the text frame, right click on it and select "Edit Text" from the pop-up context menu, and simply enter the text there, making all the changes there at once. This is the same method that I use when creating captions for images.

Article submission guidelines specify that graphic files be in the PNG file format, due to its lossless compression (whenever possible). Most images for the magazine, however, will be converted to JPG files, and resized (downward only) to reduce the file size of the magazine's PDF file, and to speed up loading of the magazine's HTML pages.

Finishing Up

By this point, you should be pretty much done with the layout of the magazine article. Now, it's time to package everything up for the final assembly of the magazine, which will be done either by the chief editor, the assistant editor, or someone they designate. That person will not only proof read the article again, but will also pay close attention to insure that all the style rules for the magazine layout are followed. Then, they will assemble the individual articles into the one, common PDF file that you have come to expect for the PCLinuxOS Magazine.

First, we need to make sure all the files you used in the page layout are available to be delivered to the final assembler. To do this, from the Scribus menu, select **File > Collect For Output**. You will be prompted to pick a directory to place the output files into. I recommend creating a separate directory for each magazine article. Once you click on OK, you Scribus will place a copy of each of the page elements into that one directory.

Next, it's time to create a PDF of your layout. Select the PDF icon on the Scribus toolbar, and you will be presented with the PDF Export dialog box. We will be creating the PDF file to be compatible with PDF version 1.4 (right side of the dialog box, about 1/3 of the way down). Towards the bottom of the General tab, we need to change Compression from Automatic, to None. Using compression makes the PDF file load very, very slowly in KPDF, so we want to avoid its use. Under the Fonts tab, we want to embed all the fonts used in the article to create the PDF file. This insures that readers viewing this on computers that may not have all the included fonts installed on are able to view the document as it was intended to be viewed. Like it or not, there will be users who will be viewing the magazine on a Windows computer (possibly while at work), and Windows will not have the free open source fonts installed; hence, it's difficult to predict the results the reader will get on a "foreign" computer.

Finally, change the directory where the PDF file is stored to the same directory used for the Collect For Output step. Then select Save.

Once you have the PDF file created in the Collect For Output directory, compress the entire contents of the directory into a tar.gz file. Then, upload the resulting tar.gz file to the magazine group's mailing list (maximum file size for upload is unknown, but formerly was 5 MB ... we've lately been able to upload files quite a bit bigger).

There you have it. A step by step guide to how to layout articles for the magazine. It might take you a little extra time to layout your first few articles, but trust us ... it gets way faster the more you do it.

Hints & Tips

Make liberal use of layers. We would prefer that you use and stick to the layers that are already predefined in the magazine's layout templates. This will make our jobs much easier when it's time for final assembly of the magazine PDF.

After you have elements placed on the screen, lock them in place by right clicking on the item and choosing "Is Locked" from the pop-up context menu.

Group related objects together.
Don't try to position things precisely with the mouse. Instead, use the X, Y, Z tab of the Properties dialog box. It's much easier.

Extra Additions (gathered from emails)

Screenshot Showcase Layout:
(useful only for those doing the "final assembly" of the magazine. Those individuals have a template in their Scribus Scrapbook to greatly speed up the process.)

1) Copy the header from the page, and fit it PRECISELY (width-wise) in the remaining two columns.

2) Make the "header" deeper, to precisely fill the column height (two column should be 488.50 pt wide, 438.00 pt high, XPos = 278.50 pt, YPos = 95.00 pt)

3) Place headline (max 30 pt) at top of two column block, just as we do for the main headlines, using Bitstream Vera Sans Roman Oblique. Duplicate the headline, re-do the positioning, and create your headline shadow.

4) Place a 2 pt line under the headline, after you have created the headline shadow.

5) Position an image frame within the colored block so that (initially) there is a 5 pt "margin" on both sides (L and R).

6) Right click on the image frame, and select "Get Image." Choose your image (should have already been resized, to 600 px wide and converted to a JPG file).

7) If necessary, re-center the image within the color block.

8) Add text frame under image, same width as image. Use Liberation Serif, 10 pt, BoldItalic. Place posters name, date, and desktop environment. You have probably noticed that I have all that info in the file name of the images in the .tar.gz file.

Creating hyperlinks in Scribus:

1) You need to change the text color to blue yourself, because Scribus won't do it. The color to use is called Blue.

2) On the Scribus PDF toolbar, there is an icon with two "shoe-prints" on it. Click on it, and draw a tight rectangle around your blue text. If the PDF Toolbar isn't visible, click on Windows in the menu bar, and at the bottom make sure PDF Tools has a check mark in front of it. Mine shows up to the right of the page I'm working on. You might have another window obscuring its view.

3) Double click the rectangle you just drew on the screen.

4) At the top of the dialog box that appears, select "Link To External Web Site."

5) Then, enter the URL in the entry box in the middle of the dialog box. Then click OK.

Updated September 2017 by Paul Arnote
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PCLinuxOS Magazine Scribus Layout Guide Quick Reference

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X-Pos: 30.00 pt
Y-Pos: 45.00 pt
Width: 732.00 pt
Height: 40.00 pt
Rotation: 0.00
Font: Bitstream Vera Sans
Style: Bold Oblique
Size: 30.0 pt
Line Spacing: Automatic
Scaling Width of Characters: 100.0%
Offset to Baseline of Characters: 0.0%
Manual Tracking: 0%
Scaling Height of Characters: 100.0%
Color of Font: Black
Align Text: Center

Headline (subsequent pages):
X-Pos: 364.00
Y-Pos: 25.00
Width: 404.00 (may be expanded as needed)
Height: 25.00
Rotation: 0.00
Font: Liberation Sans
Style: Bold
Size: 14.0 pt
Line Spacing: Automatic
Color of Font: Black
Align Text: Right

Left Column Text Box (first page):
X-Pos: 25.00 pt
Y-Pos: 106.00 pt
Width: 235.00 pt (362.00 pt in two column pages)
Height: 470.00 pt
Rotation: 0.00

Left Column Text Box (subsequent pages):
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Y-Pos: 54.00 pt
Width: 235.00 pt (362.00 pt in two column pages)
Height: 522.00 pt
Rotation: 0.00

Center Column Text Box (first page):
X-Pos: 278.50 pt
Y-Pos: 106.00 pt
Width: 235.00 pt
Height: 470.00 pt
Rotation: 0.00

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X-Pos: 278.50 pt
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Y-Pos: 54.00 pt
Width: 235.00 pt (362.00 pt in two column pages)
Height: 522.00 pt
Rotation: 0.00

Body Text:
Font: Liberation Sans
Style: Regular
Size: 10.0 pt
Line Spacing: Automatic
Scaling Width of Characters: 100.0%
Offset to Baseline of Characters: 0.0%
Manual Tracking: 0.0%
Scaling Height of Characters: 100%
Color of Font: Black
Align Text: Justified