

# A Career On The Web: On The Road To Success

# Imprint

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Cover Design: Veerle Pieters

eBook Strategy and Editing: Vitaly Friedman

Technical Editing: Cosima Mielke

Planning and Quality Control: Vitaly Friedman, Iris Lješnjani

Tools: Elja Friedman

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## *About This Book*

There comes a time in everyone's career when changing jobs is the natural next step. Perhaps you're looking for a new challenge or you feel like you've hit a wall in your current company? Either way, you're standing at a crossroad, with an overwhelming amount of possibilities in front of you. But how can you make the most of this situation? How can you find a job you will truly love?

There is, of course, no secret recipe for success. However, the tips and best practices in this eBook are an invaluable source to make searching for a job a less daunting and much more fruitful undertaking. To support you on this journey, our authors provide practical advice to guide you through the different stages of your job hunting process – from assessing whether a position might be a good fit for you, to landing and preparing a job interview, and finally, growing into your new role in a new company. No matter if you're a seasoned web professional or just about to gain a foothold in the industry, this eBook is bound to bring you a step closer towards a job that will make you thrive and, in the end, towards the career that you envision for yourself.

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# How A Designer Can Find A Job They Will Truly Love

BY SUSIE POLLASKY 🍷

There comes a time in nearly everyone's career when changing jobs is the natural next step. As a designer, you might start looking for a new job when you feel you have hit a wall with your current employer or when greater opportunities are present at other companies.

After taking the necessary steps to prepare for a job search, like updating your resume and nurturing a small savings account to provide a little cushion, think about what you want in your next job. Planning for job requirements, salary and perhaps location before applying is obvious, but many people forget to set criteria for one major thing: corporate culture.

## *The Foundation For Innovation*

Corporate culture is defined by an organization's values and philosophy; it is a set of collective beliefs or personality traits that govern everything a company does. Corporate culture shapes every aspect of an organization, from operations and business policies to "extra-curricular" activities and day-to-day staff interactions.

To be truly happy at a job, you have to find a company that resonates with your personality and that provides an environment in which you can thrive. In the US, the average full-time employee works nearly 1,700 hours each year. When you spend that much time at work, the job be-

comes a part of your identity, an extension of you. Isn't it fair to say that the company you work for represents you as much as you represent it?

## *What Helps You Thrive?*

Before even applying for a job, consider what kind of culture you feel you would best fit in. After all, you are 27.2% less likely to leave a job in the first year if you join a company that is a good fit for you.



*Think about what kind of work environment is best for you.  
(Image credit: [Kate Hiscock](#)<sup>1</sup>)*

List the traits that you feel a good corporate culture should have by considering the following:

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1. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/slightlyeverything/8214124711>

- **Management style**

Are you more comfortable working with few restrictions, or do you like a more hands-on approach? Do you need feedback and affirmation?

- **Opportunities for growth**

Where do you want to be in the next three years? What would you like your responsibilities to include?

- **Work environment**

Do you work best in a fast-paced, collaborative environment, or do you do your best work in silence? Do you enjoy socializing throughout the day, or do you work better without interruptions?

- **Corporate personality**

Would a more serious and professional environment work best for you, or would you prefer a more casual workplace?

By thinking of these criteria, you will be able to determine what kind of research to conduct and what kinds of questions to ask before and during your interviews.

## *Become A Culture Detective*

Most of the time, you get only a few hours with the hiring manager to determine whether a company is a good fit for you, and vice versa. One of the best ways to find out whether the company you are interviewing with has a culture that meets your requirements is by doing a little detective work beforehand.

A company's culture is strongly molded by the people who make up the organization. Use tools such as LinkedIn to get an idea of the work experience, skill sets and possibly even hobbies of your prospective colleagues. Look at the profiles of the leadership and management team. Do you feel you could learn from them? Do you have experiences or skill sets that seem compatible with those of employees of the company?



*Do research to uncover the true nature of a company's culture.  
(Image credit: [Unsplash](https://unsplash.com/)<sup>2</sup>)*

On a few occasions, I have seen applicants even reach out to a current employee in a similar position within the prospective company to get a better idea of the culture and work environment. This is a great idea. You will of-

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<sup>2</sup>. <https://unsplash.com/>

ten get an inside glimpse of the organization, while also getting to know a potential colleague.

## *Common Criteria For Designers And What To Ask*

The interview is a crucial time to prove to the company that you are a good fit for it, while also determining whether the position is a good fit for you. The number-one piece of advice I can give at this point is to go into the interview prepared to be yourself. This is a two-sided discovery process. When you're honest with who you are and what you want in a job, you will be able to determine whether the position meets your criteria.

Through my work with designers and UX professionals, I have witnessed patterns in the environments that creative professionals truly thrive in. To give you some ideas, consider asking variations of the questions under the headings below to determine whether a company makes sense for you and fits your criteria.

### **IS THE COMPANY DESIGN-DRIVEN?**

Challenge yourself to grow in your skills and experience by working for a company that puts design at the center of its business. Companies such as Apple and Airbnb have built a culture around design, making it a priority and an essential part of their innovation. Working for a design-driven company will force you to work outside of your comfort zone, to innovate, to work smarter and grow beyond the confines of “ordinary.”

- “What is your design philosophy?”
- “How do you as an organization value design in your daily work?”
- “How has design changed your business?”
- “What do you feel is the most innovative design project your company has done recently?”
- “What inspires you about your employees’ most recent work?”

### **DOES CREATIVITY TRUMP TENURE?**

The best working environment for a designer is one in which creativity is rewarded above all else. Companies that discourage risk are actually cultivating a norm of anti-innovation, and nothing crushes a designer’s soul faster than that. As a creative, you know that your job is to take risks and to seek out new ways to solve problems. You will thrive in an office that encourages this behavior, that nurtures your ideas and that moves people up based on initiative and skill, not just tenure.

- “What do you look for in your employees?”
- “How do people in your organization move up? What qualities do you look for?” (Consider how this translates back to your career path.)
- “What does the career trajectory look like for this position? How do you groom your talent for growth?”

## **ARE TOGETHERNESS AND COLLABORATION VALUED?**

A corporate culture of “togetherness” emphasizes collaboration among employees. For designers, this is extremely important. Collaborating with people with different design backgrounds and experiences, and possibly even from different industries and professions, will help you to solve problems in ways you had never thought of before. This process of collaborative learning is crucial to your continued growth as a professional and an artist. Togetherness can also take place during a company’s extra-curricular activities.

- “What is the day-to-day interaction like between the different departments here?”
- “How do you establish or nurture a sense of camaraderie among employees?”
- “What do your coworkers or employees do after hours?”
- “What kind of non-professional events or activities does the company sponsor for employees?”

## **IS INNOVATION A PRIORITY?**

What propels you as a designer is likely a desire to create amazing work and to do it better each time. Because of that internal drive, you would likely become complacent by doing the same work over and over. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, for instance, demands that employees be inventive. Amazon even established a group within the company, Web Lab, that is in charge of experimenting with UX

design to find improvements – they are constantly innovating.

Companies that place innovation high on their list of priorities will look to their designers to think creatively and strategically, to solve problems with design answers. You will be encouraged, perhaps expected, to use cutting-edge tools and techniques in your work, which will also push you to continue honing your craft.

- “How do you inspire innovation in your employees?”
- “What work has your company done that you feel was cutting-edge?”
- “How much time does your company dedicate to learning or teaching employees new skills?”
- “Where is your company going? What are your major initiatives for this year?”

## *Read Between The Lines*

When evaluating a company’s culture, listening to what the interviewer doesn’t say is as important as listening what they do say. Pay close attention to body language and hesitations when asking questions. An interviewer struggling to come up with an answer to a question as easy as, “How would you describe your corporate culture?” could indicate that the culture is not well defined. This is dangerous, because I often find that corporate culture is the glue that keeps everyone working together, the grease that keeps the engine moving the collective forward.



*Listen to what people tell you during the interview and read between the lines. (Image credit: [Bratovanov<sup>3</sup>](#))*

While waiting for the interview or when exiting the office, look around you. How do people look? Happy? Miserable? What do they have on their desks? One study suggests that messy desks indicate a creative environment (perfect for designers). If you make eye contact with someone passing by, do they smile or quickly walk by without acknowledging? These are all ways to better understand the corporate culture in which you might be working.

## *Evaluate Based On Your Criteria*

After the interview, sit down with your list of criteria for corporate culture and go through it one by one, noting

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3. <http://www.shutterstock.com/pic-185118926/stock-photo-reading-between-the-lines-concept-abstract-background-design.html?src=HsPmiS6BzcsewkpAlHkI8w-1-7>

what you heard during the interview and observed in the office. Make sure to cover the most important items. If your criteria have not been satisfied by the information provided by the interviewer, perhaps this is not the position for you.

Sometimes the evaluation process will last beyond your acceptance of a position. Even after carefully considering all of the aspects we have discussed, things might not fall into place. If, for some reason, you start a job and find that what you thought the culture would be misaligns with what you are experiencing, you still have an opportunity to make an impact and offer ideas to influence the organization.

It could just be bad timing, a case of a great company going through a rough patch. In this case, evaluate the leaders of the organization. Do they have a vision and a plan? Is the plan clearly defined and actionable? This will give you a sense of where the company is at, as well as a road map of where it is going and how the journey will affect the culture and your future at the company.

However, if it truly is a mismatch, then account for these factors as you look for your next position. Before deciding when to leave, consider whether you are financially and emotionally prepared to leave or are in a position to remain there while you look. Ultimately, finding the perfect corporate culture means understanding where you fit in best. That process takes time, so sometimes getting it wrong is perfectly natural, despite our best effort.

Joining a company with a culture and personality that align with your values and that support your ambitions

will ultimately make you happier and more successful in your new position. Be honest with what you need and want in an employer, and settle only when the most important criteria have been met, even if that means leaving a new job for a better fit.

If you want to know more about what is possible in a corporate culture before drawing your list, check out these great reads:

- *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't*<sup>4</sup>, Jim Collins
- *Tribal Leadership: Leveraging Natural Groups to Build a Thriving Organization*<sup>5</sup>, Dave Logan, John King, and Halee Fischer-Wright
- *Great by Choice: Uncertainty, Chaos and Luck – Why Some Thrive Despite Them All*, Jim Collins and Morten T. Hansen

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4. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good\\_to\\_Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good_to_Great)

5. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribal\\_Leadership](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribal_Leadership)

# The Difference Between Good And Bad Job Requirements

BY JIM BOSVELD 🍷

In web design, as one of the seemingly few markets that is actually growing, job opening postings are common. They're not all equally convincing, though. In fact, most of them are unpleasant, uninviting and sometimes bordering on hostile. Some, however, are great, and give you an honest and pleasant sense of what it's like to work at the studio in question, and, in the best cases, what makes a good designer.

By looking at some good and some bad lists of job requirements, I'll explore some of their strengths and weaknesses and try to pinpoint what makes the best lists inviting and honest introductions.

Before looking at some lesser examples of requirements lists, let's start off with the list that made me think of exploring this subject. It's from San Francisco-based design studio Mule<sup>6</sup>. They're looking for a web designer and created a job posting that featured the following requirements list.

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6. <http://muledesign.com/>

## **The Web Designer we're looking for has**

- *3+ years experience designing web sites and web applications in a client-services environment*
- *an overwhelming desire to create the best web sites on the Internet*
- *a burning need to push design into its next evolutionary stage*
- *no fear of clients, or of telling clients things they might need to know but are afraid to hear*
- *the ability to work collaboratively across disciplines (IA, strategy, interaction design, code) and ideas about how to grow the intersections between them*
- *the verbal skills to help clients understand what we're building for them*
- *a powerful intellectual curiosity*
- *a strong sense of craftsmanship*
- *a year or three working a crap job in the restaurant industry*

This is a great list. It's clear, challenging, funny and devoid of dozens of acronyms that add nothing to the job opening ad (we all understand that basic HTML and CSS are necessary skills for a web designer). It gives you an unambiguous understanding of the kind of studio you'll be working for. Mule senses that this list is the place to show you their identity, and not to tell you things you al-

ready know. Before further exploring the qualities of a good requirements list, however, let's look at some bad ones.

## *Some Bad Lists*

This next list forgets all that hoo-hah about being a good designer, and might as well add “must be able to turn on computer” to it (the employer in question shall remain nameless, because I'm not trying to make them look bad, but to make a point).

### **What you need for this position:**

- *HTML/HTML5*
- *CSS/CSS3*
- *Javascript and JQuery*
- *Photoshop, Illustrator and Flash*
- *PHP and AJAX is a plus*
- *Ability to work in a fast paced environment, move between short and long term projects and remain focused on the user experience.*

Every item on this list is more or less redundant. It gives you no impression of the kind of work or projects you'll be doing. It's also very, *very* boring, and to be boring is bad. To be actively unpleasant, however, like this next one, is worse.

### **Required Skills:**

- *Proficient in Mac-based Photoshop, ImageReady/Fireworks, Illustrator and Dreamweaver.*
- *Thorough understanding of the elements of good design, HTML production and web process.*
- *Will be held accountable for the technical accuracy of their own work.*
- *Able to complete tasks independently and as part of a team.*
- *Possess effective communication of ideas/development of presentation skills.*
- *Ability to manage deadlines and production scheduling on numerous, concurrent projects.*
- *Perform effectively in a demanding work environment and show resiliency to stress.*

Would you like to work here? This list is almost threatening in its rhetoric. “You will be held accountable for the technical accuracy of your work.” Well, yeah. Of course you will. Are you trying to prepare me for the constant breathing down my neck I will be experiencing on your team?

I’m also not looking forward to the “demanding work environment” and having to “show resiliency to stress.” I’m all for honesty, but this is just silly.



(Image credit: [opensourceway](http://www.flickr.com/photos/opensourceway/6554314407/)<sup>7</sup>)

Mule’s “An overwhelming desire to create the best websites on the Internet” covers all that without terrifying you. It says “you will have to work hard here, but it’s for a *great* cause,” as opposed to “you will have to work hard here, and we *still* won’t thank you.”

### **Required Experience:**

- *BFA in Digital/Graphic Design or equivalent experience*
- *5+ years work experience in digital/Web*
- *Requires knowledge of commercial internet/web tools and protocols, particularly Adobe Creative Suite.*
- *Knowledge of Content Management Systems, Email Marketing, Search Marketing and Mobile/Social is a huge plus.*

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.flickr.com/photos/opensourceway/6554314407/>

- *Proven ability to manage relationships*
- *Self-motivated and team oriented*
- *Must be able to troubleshoot and be solution oriented*
- *Must be able to thrive in a fast-paced, high volume environment*
- *Solid portfolio of great design work*
- *Strong copywriting / editing skills*
- *Solid knowledge of such user experience practices as user flows, site mapping, interaction design, etc.*
- *Solid understanding of design needs that support SEM and SEO*
- *Ability to write HTML/CSS*
- *Agency background (media and/or SEM agency) very strongly desired*
- *Technical skills required: Adobe Creative Suite with Advanced Photoshop, Advanced InDesign, Advanced Illustrator*

This is less unpleasant and less a summation of acronyms (although “ability to write HTML/CSS” adds nothing to this list), but it still lacks any enthusiasm, and does nothing to challenge your view of your career. Can you imagine *really, really wanting to work here?* Is that not what these lists should do, kind of? As they are, they give me the feeling I should be thankful for them even considering hiring

someone like me, if, and *only* if, I am able to “manage relationships” or am “self-motivated.”

## *Some Good Lists*

Mule is not the only studio capable of writing up a nice and inviting requirements list. Some forego the list entirely, like [Mobify](#)<sup>8</sup>, in their search for a mobile designer. Like most job opening ads, there is an introduction and a description of the studio itself. What differs from most other job ads, though, is that the requirements list is no more than two lines at the end.

*Mobify is looking for a talented Mobile Designer to join our Launch Team. As Mobile Designer, you'll be responsible for the creative execution of mobile and tablet sites for our incredible clients. You'll have the opportunity to work with some of the biggest brands in the world all in the fun and relaxed environment of Mobify's beautiful Gastown, Vancouver headquarters.*

*From prototyping to launch, you'll have ownership over each step in the creative process. You'll create the experience and then work with our engineering team for the execution.*

*The ideal candidate for this role must have an excellent online portfolio (with URLs of course) and good experience with HTML and CSS.*

Very simple, just like this next one, from [Houzz](#)<sup>9</sup>.

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8. <http://www.mobify.com/about/jobs/>

9. <http://www.houzz.com/jobs#VisualDesigner>

## **Desired Skills & Experience:**

- *Impeccable modern visual design aesthetic*
- *Strong web/visual design portfolio*
- *Understanding of digital media and its technical aspects.*

No pointless acronyms and no threats. It's not exciting or funny, but it's honest and well-written. Wouldn't you rather read "You must have a strong portfolio" than "At least 5 years of experience"? What if you have four years of experience but are convinced you are the perfect candidate? A good list of requirements solves that problem by communicating in clear language. Sure, you could ask "But what is a 'strong' portfolio? Who decides?" but this kind of phrasing asks for a designer who believes in his or her own *qualities*, rather than leaning on a certain number of years of being able to hold down a job.

Hudl<sup>10</sup> is looking for a UI designer, and their requirements list is the best one I found (next to Mule's).

## **You**

- *Love seeing the world through someone else's eyes and building an interface that fits their mental model of the world.*

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<sup>10</sup>. <http://hudl.theresumator.com/apply/Vw54L5/UI-Designer.html>

- *Are anxious to work on a variety of platforms and products (iPad, iPhone, Android, web app, thick-client desktop, etc.)*
- *Can tell the story of a product or service with sharp copy and crisp imagery.*
- *Sketch out your ideas on paper before you dive into your prototyping tool of choice (Photoshop, Illustrator, HTML & CSS)*
- *Know which details matter and how to push back and say “no.”*
- *Communicate your designs with developers and managers using the appropriate media and fidelity.*
- *Think that copywriting is crucial to building a great UI.*
- *Can’t wait to see real people use your designs in usability studies – even if it makes you grit your teeth.*

What they do is so much more than just telling you what you should have already *done* by now. They’re telling you what you could *become* working for them. I especially like the fifth point, “[You] know which details matter and how to push back and say ‘no.’” It tells you not to be submissive, in a career of following orders and meeting deadlines, but to be independent and to create independent and healthy relationships with clients. It’s similar to Mule’s “No fear of clients, or of telling clients things they might need to know but are afraid to hear.” I think this requirement says so much about the studio in question. It tells you that you will not have to give up any indepen-

dence, or any other part of your personality, in working there.

## *How To Be Nice While Remaining Effective*

The first thing the good lists have in common is a sense of good, human communication. They're not afraid to delve into your personality more than just "must be easy going and fun." The designer they're looking for is an actual human being, and not just an "asset" with good Photoshop skills.

The second thing they have in common, and this is something inherently connected with the *kind* of studio, and therefore not something easily imitated by a company that doesn't actually *feel* this way, is that they have an idea of how your relationship with the client should work. The fear of deadlines and tremendous workloads the other lists try to instill in you is connected to the way they view the client — *as king*. But the client is, of course, not king at all. The client is someone you have to build a relationship with, not as two companies, but as two people. And that implies equal footing. You must be able to deny the client things that are unreasonable or unwise. And where to tell that to aspiring employees better than on the requirements list?

## *Concluding*

A requirements list should be ambitious, inspiring and funny. Just like the studio you'll be working for should be.

It also has to be honest, but not threatening. What most of these companies forget is that it's no use trying to prepare designers for the worst. We all understand it'll be hard work and that we're supposed to be good at it. So try not to tell us what your ideal employee is. Try to tell us what a great designer we could become should we want to join your team.

Of course designers will respond to all these lists. A job is a job. And good for them, they all might be delightful places to work. But if you could choose? Compare the list from Mule or Hudl with some of the other ones (and most of them out there), and try to image the studios they represent. If I'm ever in the position to hire someone, I'll do it like Mule does it. Without any threats, and without giving them a sneak peak into a bleak future filled with people yelling about accountability, deadlines and my "resiliency to stress."

You know, the nice way. 🐼

# Preparing For A Front-End Job Interview

BY JAKE BRESNEHAN 🍷

Moving on from your current job or stepping out into the real world once you've completed your studies can be daunting. Taking time to do a little preparation goes a long long way.

If you come across the perfect job, you will need to portray yourself in the best possible light to show that you are the right person for the position.



*It doesn't always turn out as you expected.  
(Image credit: [opensourceway](https://www.flickr.com/photos/opensourceway/6809909114)<sup>11</sup>)*

Preparing for an interview as a front-end developer is hard. There is no “standard” interview, and what was relevant last year might no longer be relevant today. To make

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<sup>11</sup>. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/opensourceway/6809909114>

the process even more complicated, each company has its own way of interviewing prospective employees, its own desired skill set and its own duties for the incoming developer.

The interview process could be quick or drawn out. The process is out of your control, so don't stress out too much about it. As long as you have given yourself the best possible chance of landing the job, that's all you can do.

One thing to keep in mind: don't be afraid to apply. Some job advertisements are worded to scare off some applicants and attract only the best of the best. If the job appeals to you and you meet the essential requirements, why not apply?

## *Getting An Interview*

Once you have found a job that appeals to you, it's time to pour a big cup of coffee and knuckle down.

Read the job advertisement – read it again and again and again. The most important thing to do is really address the selection criteria. Submit exactly what they want; if you cannot do that, then do your best to show why you are the right person for the role.

## *Things To Help You Land An Interview*

### **PERSONAL WEBSITE**

For crying out loud, you're a front-end developer: build a website! Take your time to learn while tweaking and modifying. If you don't have the design skills, then pair

up with a designer friend to help you out, buy a theme or even hire a designer.

## **UPDATE YOUR PORTFOLIO**

How you incorporate your portfolio into the website comes down to personal preference. Showcasing the work you've been involved in can increase your chances of getting an interview. There is no need to show all of your work, just your best.

If you are a newcomer to the field, you might find it hard to fill out a portfolio. This is not a big concern. It might just take a little more preparation. For example, you could do the following:

- Ask around to see if any family or friends need a website,
- Build a website for your local sporting club,
- Create a WordPress plugin,
- Create a splash page for an imaginary application.

The possibilities are endless. It requires just a few more hours at your desk, but the effort will pay off.

## **COVER LETTER**

Not all job advertisements ask for a cover letter these days. Generally, the body of the email will suffice. If you are required to supply a cover letter, though, make sure to address the given questions, and write in a professional yet friendly manner. There's no need to be over the top, but don't be too casual either. Before hitting the "Send"

button, double-check your spelling and proofread the email to make sure it reads well. Better still, get someone to triple-check it.

## RESUME

This is generally a one-page document and one of the first items an employer will look at. First impressions count, so make sure it conveys your skills, values and experience accurately.

If you are required to provide an online version, [LinkedIn](http://linkedin.com)<sup>12</sup>, [Zerply](http://zerply.com)<sup>13</sup> and [Stack Overflow](http://careers.stackoverflow.com/)<sup>14</sup> are all great services. Whichever you use, ensure the resume is up to date and sets out your skills, values and experience.

## GO THE EXTRA MILE

If the company you are applying to is outstanding, you will certainly not be the only one applying. To stand out, why not take the time to put together a personalized website specifically for this application? Doing this not only shows that you have gone above and beyond what is required, but shows off your repertoire of skills and shows that you really want the position.

Another great draw card is to be active in the community. Participate in online conversations, answer questions on [Stack Overflow](http://stackoverflow.com/)<sup>15</sup>, fork [GitHub](http://github.com)<sup>16</sup> repositories, dig

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12. <http://linkedin.com>

13. <http://zerply.com>

14. <http://careers.stackoverflow.com/>

15. <http://stackoverflow.com/>

16. <http://github.com>

through code, and keep on learning. If you find you need a tool or resource that doesn't exist, try to build it. Open-source the code and add it to GitHub. Having a solid GitHub account that showcases your projects and involvement in the community can add that "Wow" factor to your application, especially with more technically oriented companies.

### **KEEP YOUR ONLINE PROFILE CLEAN**

Once you have submitted your application, there is a high probability that the employer will search online for you. Make sure your Twitter feed, Facebook page, LinkedIn profile and so on are clean and represent your professionalism.

### *Possible Pre-Interview Step*

An extra step in the normal recruitment process is not unheard of. This often involves a simple coding challenge or a phone interview. Companies tend to do this in order to shortlist applicants.

Don't be afraid of a coding challenge. Treat it as an opportunity to show off your skills. Go the extra mile — take your time and execute it to your best ability. Show them that you know your stuff.

For example, I have been asked on several occasions before an interview to code modules that were currently being used on the company's live website.

If you are asked to interview by phone or Skype, be prepared. Do some research, and have some notes handy. Be confident and passionate about the role. Get comfort-

able wherever you take the call. The more relaxed you are, the better. Just because you are on the phone, doesn't mean you should forgo general interview etiquette.

## *The Interview*

### **PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW**

When the interview comes around, put in as much effort as you can. Preparing will give you a huge advantage and will hopefully calm your nerves. It is the key to increasing your chances of landing the job.

### **RESEARCH**

Before the interview, take some time to look into the company, its people, its values, its current and past projects, and its history.

Investigating the company's competitors is also a good idea. It will help you to see what the company and its competitors do well, and identify areas of improvement that you can discuss with the employer. It will also show that you have done your research and that you are able to think outside of your "code editing" role, which could make a big difference.

Moreover, knowing who you will be interviewed by and researching the caliber of the staff will be to your advantage.

## PRACTICE ANSWERING SOME QUESTIONS

Get comfortable talking out loud about yourself and what you have to offer. No two interview questions will be the same, but this [compilation of questions<sup>17</sup>](#) on GitHub by leading front-end developers is a great resource.

## DURING THE INTERVIEW

First impressions count. Be on time (but not too early). Dress appropriately. Starting off the interview on the right foot will give you a massive advantage and will help to calm your nerves. Being polite, excited and knowledgeable will put you in a good position.

Throughout the interview, show how passionate and enthusiastic you are for the position. No employer wants to hire someone who seems disinterested. Try to keep calm, even if you are ridiculously nervous. Try to convey positive energy, rather than let your nerves get the better of you.

For example, I was given the task of coding on a whiteboard in one of my interviews. Not only was this completely unnatural, but it really pushed my knowledge. Try to remain calm and focused if you are put in such a situation. Preparing for the unexpected is difficult — just do your best.

Know your strengths, and talk them up where possible. Turn any of your negative attributes into positives. If you lack a particular skill set or area of knowledge, there is no need to highlight it. Instead, emphasize what you

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<sup>17</sup>. <https://github.com/darcyclarke/Front-end-Developer-Interview-Questions>

have to offer; for example, that you are a quick and eager learner and can easily acquire any skill set necessary to perform the job.

### **TAKE ALONG SAMPLES OF YOUR WORK**

If you have a portfolio, take your laptop or tablet in with you to show the employer samples of your work. This will allow you to explain your work in greater detail, including showing off your code under the hood. This interaction with your work will create a more memorable impression than just giving a description or a link.

### **TALK ABOUT SIDE PROJECTS**

Talking about any interesting and relevant side projects will enhance your prospects. Much can be said about what someone does in their free time. If you live and breathe front-end ” development, make this known to the interviewer.

### **ANSWER THE QUESTIONS**

Be succinct, but give well-rounded answers. If you feel you can't answer a question, explain how you would find the answer, or at least turn the situation into a positive and show them what you do have to offer.

Keep the interview flowing, but don't waffle. Waffling is dangerous. You could easily divert into saying something you will regret. There is a fine line between giving too much away and intriguing the interviewer.

## ASKING YOUR OWN QUESTIONS

Take along a list of questions to pose to the interviewer (or panel) in the final stages of the interview process. You might be too overwhelmed or exhausted to remember the questions, so a note might come in handy.

Here are some questions you could ask:

- What kind of work will I be doing in general?
- Is this a new position that has opened up because of more work?
- What is the company's policy on work-life balance?
- What kind of tools or software are provided in the workplace?
- What would I be working on first?
- Am I allowed to do other work after hours?
- Is there a budget for conferences or training?

## BEFORE PARTING WAYS

Before you leave, find out the next step — i.e. the timeline for when you will be advised of whether you've been chosen. Then, thank the interviewer for the opportunity and for taking the time to meet with you.

## *Post-Interview*

If the interview has gone well, your referees (or at least one of them) will no doubt be contacted. Giving them a

head's up is courteous. It would also help if they knew some details about the position before getting quizzed about you.

If you feel you have waited long enough to hear whether you've gotten the position, send a follow-up email. Try not to come across as impatient, though. I have waited up to six weeks for an initial response.

Interviews are hard! Don't be disheartened if you don't get the job. Make the most of any positive feedback, and work on the negative feedback so that you have even more positives in your next application. And reflect on how the interview went. Jotting down any matters you felt you could improve on will assist you the next time around.

If you are offered the job but are unsure whether to accept it, you could contact current or past employees via services such as LinkedIn. This insight into their experiences and the workplace will help you make an informed decision.

## *Conclusion*

The interview can make or break whether you land your dream job. Regardless of whether you have the right skills, the best portfolio and the most experience, if you cannot sell yourself during the interview, you might not convince the employer that you are the one for the job. Your skills and experience will not go unnoticed, but a poor interview performance would detract from them.

So, to put your best foot forward, make the most of pre-interview preparation, and have confidence in yourself.

Good luck!

## FURTHER READING

- “[Front-End Developer Interview Questions<sup>18</sup>](#),” Darcy Clarke, GitHub
- “[How to Create a Great Web Design CV and Résumé?<sup>19</sup>](#),” Kat Neville, Smashing Magazine
- “[Seven Tips for Your Design Job Interview<sup>20</sup>](#),” Jad Limca-co, Smashing Magazine
- “[The Importance of Standing Out in the Job Market<sup>21</sup>](#),” David Greiner, Campaign Monitor 🐦

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<sup>18</sup>. <https://github.com/darcyclarke/Front-end-Developer-Interview-Questions>

<sup>19</sup>. <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2009/04/01/10-handy-tips-for-web-design-cvs-and-resumes/>

<sup>20</sup>. <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2010/05/04/seven-tips-design-job-interview/>

<sup>21</sup>. <http://www.campaignmonitor.com/blog/post/3458/the-importance-of-standing-out-in-the-job-market/>

# Land Your Next Web Development Job: The Interview Process

BY DEAN HUME 🐦

During my career as a software developer and manager, I have been involved in many interviews. Whether the interviewer or interviewee, I have always paid special attention to the interview process.

In my current role, I spend a lot of time interviewing potential employees, so I've seen my fair share of good and bad interviews. Some candidates stand out from the crowd immediately, while others are just another face in a million. In this article, I'll give you a few tips and a head start on your next interview. Whether your next interview is your first or twenty-first, hopefully these tips will help you along the way.

Interviews can be scary, especially when you attend your first few or haven't attended any for a while. Preparation is the key to success and can take the stress out of the dreaded process. You can do a few things before even walking through the door. If you are prepared and your mind is ready, then the whole process should be a breeze. I like to break the interview process into three steps: preparation, interview and post-interview.

## Preparation

This is the most important stage in the process and could determine whether you appeal to the recruiter. A CV won't even make it past the review stage if it doesn't meet certain criteria, but by preparing beforehand, you can maximize your chances of making it to the interview stage.

### UPDATE YOUR CV

Spend time creating a great CV. Some great templates are on [Guardian Jobs](#)<sup>22</sup>. If you have never created a CV, try to mirror the layouts of some of the people who inspire you. I drew some inspiration from both [Scott Hanselman](#)<sup>23</sup> and [Paul Irish](#)<sup>24</sup>. For example, Paul's CV contains testimonials from other popular developers in the community, and Scott's CV contains highlights from his presentations, qualifications and open-source contributions. You might not have the same experience or work history as the people who inspire you, but you can always get new ideas from their CVs. Who are the leaders in your field?

I follow a few rules when creating a CV:

- **Don't lie.**

Never claim anything on your CV that you can't do, because if an employer questions you and you don't have

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<sup>22</sup>. <http://careers.theguardian.com/cv-templates>

<sup>23</sup>. <http://www.hanselman.com/resume/ScottHanselmanResume.htm>

<sup>24</sup>. <http://www.paulirish.com/resume.html>

the answers, you could lose the job and look like a fool in the process.

- **Steer clear of buzzwords.**

I have noticed a trend of candidates adding a load of buzzwords to their CVs to help recruitment agents find them. Only add a skill if you have used it before and feel competent enough to answer questions about it. Also, steer clear of buzzwords such as “dynamic,” “synergy” and “creative.”

- **Have your CV reviewed.**

Get your mother, sibling or friend to review your CV before submitting it. The extra pair of eyes might spot a few areas for improvement and help you finely hone the document into the perfect CV. Remember that your CV is the first point of contact before you walk in the door. You may be the greatest programmer in the world, but if your CV isn't up to snuff, no one will want to interview you!

- **Spellcheck.**

And then spellcheck again!

## **PUT YOUR CV ONLINE**

If you haven't done so, create a [LinkedIn](http://www.linkedin.com/)<sup>25</sup> profile. It's a great way to get your profile out there and to get potential employers looking at your CV. Simply upload a copy of the CV that you created earlier, and, with a little tweaking, LinkedIn will format it for you. I often use LinkedIn to see whether a candidate knows someone I know or

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.linkedin.com/>

have worked with in the past. Professional connections are a good indication of a person's working background. You might have a friend who works at the company – a referral always helps.

Another great website for developers is StackOverflow's [Careers 2.0](http://careers.stackoverflow.com)<sup>26</sup>.

The screenshot shows the StackOverflow Careers 2.0 website. At the top right, there is a user profile for 'Dean Hume' with links for 'log out', 'messages', and '23 invitations'. The main header includes the 'CAREERS 2.0 by stackoverflow' logo and navigation buttons for 'home', 'search jobs', 'my profile', and 'for employers'. The 'search jobs' section features a search bar with 'what' and 'where' filters, a 'search' button, and lists of keywords, locations, and companies. Below this are 'featured jobs' and 'jobs near London' sections, each displaying job titles, company names, and locations. On the right side, there is a 'invite from linkedin' section, a 'your profile' section with statistics (Public views: 1389, Employer views: 44, Search hits: 843, Email inquiries: 9, Email responses: 8), and a 'company spotlight' for 'VESON NAUTICAL' with a brief description and a link to job listings.

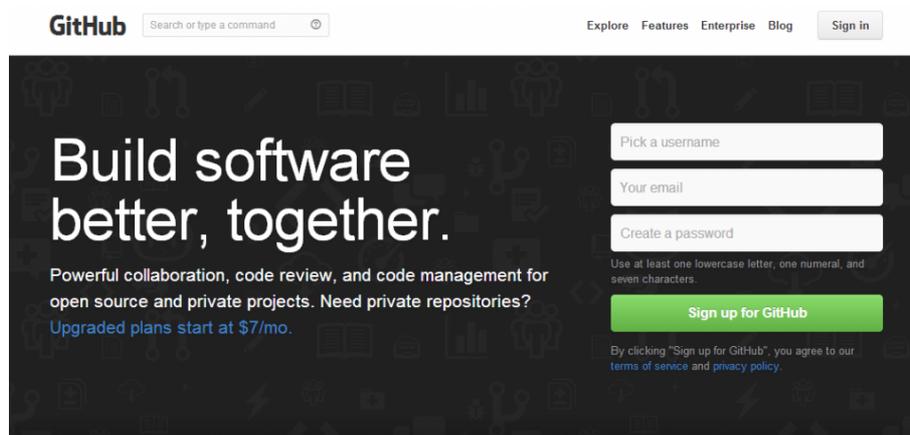
Much like LinkedIn, Careers 2.0 lets you post your CV, but it is more developer-focused, allowing you to link to your open-source projects and any technical books you may be reading. Once you have created your online profile, both LinkedIn and StackOverflow will let you export a PDF of your profile, which could serve as a CV. So, if

<sup>26</sup>. <http://careers.stackoverflow.com>

you like the format and layout, simply download and use it for your next job application.

## GET SOME CODE OUT THERE

If you are a web developer or designer, then an online presence is vital. If you have any side projects or even snippets of code, get them onto a social collaboration platform, such as [GitHub](https://github.com)<sup>27</sup>. Seeing that a candidate builds things in their spare time or even contributes to open-source projects instantly piques my interest. It's a great indicator that they are passionate about what they do. Include your highest-quality work in your online portfolio. Tinkering with projects in your spare time also helps you to learn and grow, and hopefully you will be able to bring that knowledge into the company.



### Why you'll love GitHub.

Powerful features to make software development more collaborative.



<sup>27</sup>. <http://www.github.com>

A few great code-hosting services are GitHub, Bitbucket and CodePlex. Once you have uploaded your code, put it on your CV! It could help you to stand out from the crowd.

If working on an open-source project isn't for you, then you could always contribute on [StackOverflow](http://stackoverflow.com/)<sup>28</sup>. The community is great, and the more questions you answer, the higher your score, or “reputation.” While this doesn't necessarily indicate that a candidate is qualified, it does show that they have an active interest in the community and are willing to learn.

## GET A BLOG UP AND RUNNING

If you have the time, writing a blog can be a rewarding experience. It will teach you the ins and outs of SEO, website deployment and social promotion. You could go down the route of writing your own blog engine (which would give you something to deploy on GitHub!), or you could use one of the awesome blog engines out there that are ready to roll. I quite like [Tumblr](http://tumblr.com/)<sup>29</sup>, [SquareSpace](http://www.squarespace.com/)<sup>30</sup> and even [WordPress](http://wordpress.com/)<sup>31</sup>.

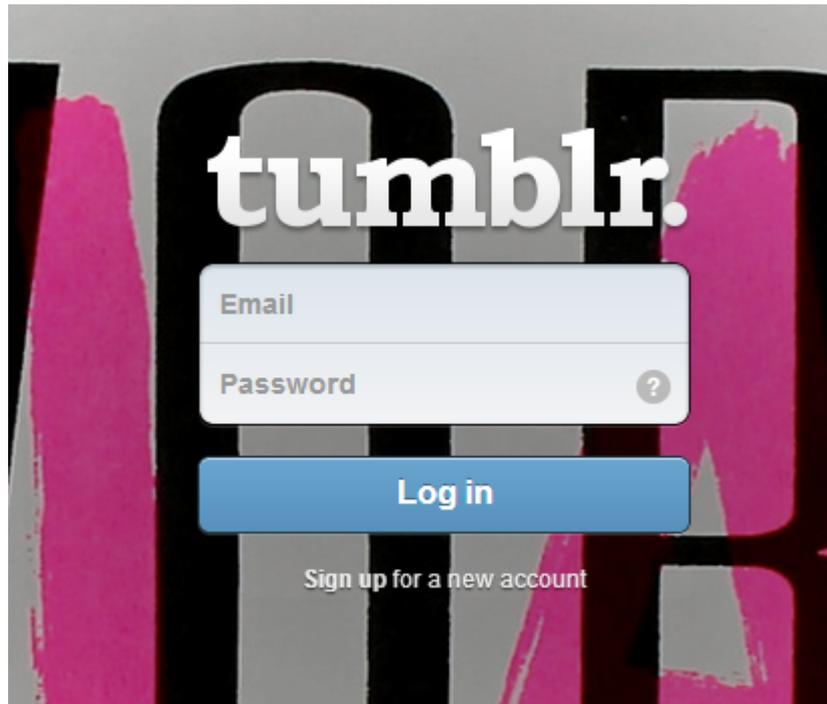
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<sup>28</sup>. <http://stackoverflow.com/>

<sup>29</sup>. <https://www.tumblr.com/>

<sup>30</sup>. <http://www.squarespace.com/>

<sup>31</sup>. <http://wordpress.com/>



Again, don't forget to add the blog's URL to your CV! Blogging isn't for everyone, and it takes time, so if you feel you might not be able to commit or update it regularly, get yourself onto Twitter and start following people who inspire you. As an employer, I always like to see what a candidate is interested in, talking about, etc.

## **DO YOUR HOMEWORK**

Before going to the interview, learn as much about the company as you can. How long has it been operating? What products does it sell? What is its culture like? Think about the challenges it faces and how you can use your experiences and know-how to help it build great tools. Nothing is worse than interviewing someone who has no idea about our company or what we do. You don't need to spend hours learning the history of the company, but a basic understanding of what it does and its ethos is im-

portant. If you haven't done your research, then an automatic "No" is almost guaranteed!

## TECHNICAL TEST

If the job entails writing code, then certain companies will require you to complete a technical test. It could be a simple exercise that you complete at home, or it could be a test that you come into the office and complete then and there. If you are asked to complete the test at home, put as much effort into it as possible. I have received many tests from candidates that have a lot of JavaScript errors or that don't compile. Make sure yours has no errors and that it works on platforms other than the one you develop on! If you get the chance, review the code briefly with someone you know. You might just find a few areas to improve on.



Sign In

### Site44 turns Dropbox folders into websites.

Edit your HTML locally, and your website will always be up-to-date.

Sign up for the personal plan: 10 websites and 10GB of monthly traffic for only **\$4.95 per month**.

**SIGN UP! \$4.95/month**

Log in with Dropbox to get started

[or learn about other plans](#), including the free starter plan

### How it works



Another great idea is to deploy the test to a live server. You can sign up for a free starter plan on [Site44](http://www.site44.com/)<sup>32</sup>, which enables you to create and deploy HTML websites from your Dropbox account for free. Both [Amazon EC2](http://aws.amazon.com/ec2/)<sup>33</sup> and [Windows Azure](http://www.windowsazure.com/)<sup>34</sup> let you set up free cloud websites in a matter of minutes and delete them when completed.

By deploying your application and showing a working version, you demonstrate an understanding of how to deploy software, which could give you an advantage over other candidates. In fact, I hire most developers who show me a live, deployed, working version of their code!

```
function fetchJSON(url) {
  return new Promise(function(resolver) {
    var xhr = new XMLHttpRequest();
    xhr.open('GET', url);
    xhr.responseType = 'json';
    xhr.send();
    xhr.onload = function() {
      if(xhr.response)
        resolver.resolve(xhr.response);
      resolver.reject('JSON Error');
    }
    xhr.onloadend = function() {
      resolver.reject('Network Error');
    }
  })
}

function showResults(response) {
  console.log(response)
}
```

By taking that extra time to make sure your technical test is outstanding, you give yourself a clear advantage over other candidates.

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32. <http://www.site44.com/>

33. <http://aws.amazon.com/ec2/>

34. <http://www.windowsazure.com/>

## *The Interview*

If you've made it this far, congratulate yourself. Your hard work and preparation have secured an interview, and the employer thinks you might be the right candidate. It's time to nail the interview and finish the whole process in style.

### **QUESTIONS**

Before going into the office for the interview, write down a few of your own questions about the position. This is your chance to learn as much about the role as possible. Having learned a little more about the company, you might even find that it's not the place for you!

Ask about the working environment, the development stack you will be working on, and anything else related to the job. Interviewers love to answer questions, and it shows you have taken the time to think about the position. Going into an interview without any of your own questions is a bad thing! Remember that you are also interviewing the employer in this stage!

### **DON'TS**

There are a few definite no-no's in the interview process. Follow these simple rules to avoid any awkward moments:

- **Don't ask about the salary.**  
Bringing this up during the interview is not the best timing. Other members of the staff will often sit in on the interview, and your potential salary might not be intended

for their ears. If you do need to ask at this point, do it privately with the hiring manager.

- **Don't ask how you did.**

This is important because the people in the room will be discussing you after the interview. Other candidates might be interviewing before or after you, and the team will need a chance to compare you to them.

- **Don't badmouth your former employer.**

No matter how mistreated you feel or how bad the job was, keep your thoughts about your former employer to yourself. Be as diplomatic as possible, because disparaging other people won't win you points with the interviewer. Your attitude towards and description of your former employer is a good indication of the kind of employee you will be. If asked about your last position and why you left, explain the situation but save the ranting — you would only make yourself look bad!

- **Don't lie.**

If you don't know the answer to a question, just say so! The interviewer will respect you for answering honestly and will understand that you don't know the answer to every question.

## **LAST-MINUTE DETAILS**

Whether you are applying for the job directly or through an agency, check a few last things before going to the office for the interview:

- What is the dress code?

- What will the format of the interview be?
- How long will the interview last?
- When and where will the interview be held?
- Who will be present in the interview?

Find out the address and time of the interview, and arrive at least 15 minutes early. This will give you a chance to relax and to avoid the stress of rushing about. By arriving early, you will also observe the staff coming and going through the reception area. Those 15 minutes could give you a good feel for the company.

Finding out these simple things before going for the interview takes some of the stress out of the situation. Preparation is the key to success!

## **RELAX**

The interview process is as much about you finding out whether the job and company are right for *you*. Feeling nervous is natural, but try to relax and enjoy the process. If you are relaxed, you will interview that much better and will come across as more confident. You've done all the hard work to get through the door – now, just keep up the good work.

## *Post-Interview*

The interview is over, and you are eagerly awaiting the result. Depending on the company, it could take a few days to a week to get back to you. Rest easy, knowing that

you have done all the hard work and given it your best shot.

If you wind up not being chosen, don't be disheartened. The timing might not have been right, or you might need to brush up on a few areas. There could be any number of reasons why you weren't offered the position, many being outside of your control. Interviewers will often give you feedback on the process and your performance; if you would like more detail, don't be afraid to ask. Whenever I have been turned down for a position, I have asked the interviewer for areas to improve upon. It is an opportunity to learn and grow. Practice makes perfect, and the more you interview, the better you will become at the process. Once a few interviews are under your belt, it starts to become a piece of cake.

If you do get the job, well done! You've nailed your first interview and are on your way to starting the new job. You should be extremely proud of your achievement.

## *Remember*

Interviewing is difficult! No matter how hard you try, you will not always be successful, and sometimes it just doesn't work out. By following the steps in this article, hopefully you will become more effective at the process and seem a more attractive candidate. Finally, remember that the interview process is as much about *you* learning about the employer as it is about them learning about *you!* 🍷

# Career Advice For Graduating Web Design Students

BY JEREMY GIRARD 🍷

It's that time of year again: graduation, when students transition away from the classroom to what will hopefully be a long and successful career in their chosen industry. I recently said goodbye to some of my own website design and development students. Instead of teaching lessons in design principles or responsive websites, I spent our final evening together answering their questions. One of those questions was, "What is the best career advice you've ever received?"

At the time, I didn't have an answer. I could think of many instances when someone helped me solve a particularly complex design challenge or a complex CSS issue or helped me navigate a delicate client situation, but I wouldn't consider those "best career advice" moments. After thinking about it for a week or so, I came up with four pieces of advice that I received early in my career and that were invaluable to me as I was getting started in this industry but that are just as relevant and useful to me today.

## *Learn To Solve Problems*

Whether you consider yourself more of a designer or a developer, your real job is to solve your clients' problems.

Yes, a visually rich design with great typography, powerful imagery and a user experience that works great on a wide range of screen sizes is very important. So is clean code that scales to future needs and conforms to best practices. Still, great design and well-written code are *not* the reasons clients hire you; they expect those things as part of the package.



*The reason clients will hire you is for you to help solve their problems.  
(Image credit: [opensourceway](https://www.flickr.com/photos/opensourceway/4749432145/)<sup>35</sup>)*

Every project you work on will require you to make a number of decisions along the way. Those decisions need to be based on how to improve the client's business and help them meet their goals for the website. You need to become a problem-solver. Doing so not only will improve the effectiveness of your work, but will do wonders for how your clients respond to your suggestions.

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<sup>35</sup>. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/opensourceway/4749432145/>

As with anyone new to a job, your lack of experience will sometimes be held against you, rightly or wrongly. One of the best ways to ensure that your ideas are taken seriously is to tie them to actual business solutions. A suggestion for a particular approach, like responsive design, or an explanation for why you've made certain design choices will be better received if you show how they will solve specific problems.

One of the best pieces of advice I've ever received as a web professional is that an amazing design that doesn't solve any problems is not as valuable as an adequate design that addresses the company's problems and improves their business.

## *Be Open To Change And Look For Opportunities*

When I began working in this industry, my passion was design. That is what I loved to do, and I firmly believed that design would always be at the forefront of my workday. If you had told me then that 15 years later design work would make up the smallest part of my job and that most of my time would be spent leading projects, writing, speaking and teaching, I would have said you're crazy. Still, that's where my career has brought me — and I am thrilled that it has!

The web industry is not a single road. You can take many different routes, and those routes are often opportunities to grow. But they also likely entail change for you. Don't allow fear of change or uncertainty about new responsibilities to keep you from growing. Had I been de-

terminated to always focus on design, I never would have discovered how much I enjoy the aspects of my job today, nor would I have achieved the success I have now.

Learn to recognize that some paths you encounter are detours and not right for you, while others are opportunities to be seized upon. Be mindful of these opportunities, be open to change, and be willing to challenge yourself. Which brings us to the next piece of advice.

## *Challenge Yourself*

Focusing on what you do best is tempting. If you are a good designer, then continually honing your design skills is an easy road to take. This might be good early in your career, allowing you to build on your strength as you get some experience under your belt. After a while, though, it will limit you.

Actor and comedian Charlie Day, of “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia” fame, recently gave a commencement speech<sup>36</sup> at Merrimack College. While the entire 20-minute speech is funny and worth listening to, one part really resonated with me:

*I don’t think you should just do what makes you happy. Do what makes you great. Do what’s uncomfortable and scary and hard but pays off in the long run. Be willing to fail.*

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<sup>36</sup>. <http://youtu.be/IulvPqb1Eus>

This advice is valuable and very relevant here. If you are unwilling to fail, then you will always take the safe path and not push yourself to learn new skills and accept new challenges.



*As your career unfolds, be open to change. (Image credit<sup>37</sup>)*

I remember a conversation that I had a number of years ago with my supervisor. It was during my annual review, and he asked me what I was planning for the coming year, professionally. Everything I rattled off were extensions of what I was already doing or good at. When I had finished, he gave me very honest feedback, saying that I was becoming complacent and not challenging myself. Shortly after that meeting, I began writing – which I had been hesitant to try for fear of negative feedback.

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<sup>37</sup>. <http://mysuccessprinciples.com/general/8-strategies-to-open-your-mind-to-change/>

Challenged by my supervisor, I worked to overcome those fears. I began writing on my personal blog, then later for other websites and magazines. My writing helped me to better convey my ideas and to become more comfortable sharing them with others. A year or so later, I took a job at an area university and began teaching website design and development. None of those opportunities, from the writing assignments to the teaching position, would have been possible had I not challenged myself and gotten out of my comfort zone.

## *Work With Good People*

From the company you join to the clients you work with, surround yourself with good people. There are many things you cannot control in this profession, but if you work with good people, then overcoming challenges will be much easier (and rest assured, you will face plenty of challenges).

I know that many people will argue that you cannot choose whom you work with, whether colleagues or clients, especially early on in your career, when your options are limited. Still, don't accept a bad situation simply because you think you have no other choice. You will learn a lot from the people whom you surround yourself with, so do not compromise. If you want to be the best you can be, work with the best people you can find.

Ironically, the person who advised me to work with good people is someone whom I very much disliked working with. Still, the advice was sound. I quit that job a few months later, and I have held myself — and the peo-

ple I work alongside – to a higher standard since then. That my success and satisfaction are as high as they have ever been is no coincidence. That comes from working with good people.

## *In Summary*

Throughout my career, I have received plenty of advice, but the four points covered here have really stuck with me over the years and have made a significant impact on my career. To recap, here is the best career advice I have ever received:

- Be a problem-solver, and make design or development choices that help to solve your clients' actual problems.
- Do not allow fear of change to limit your career choices.
- Look for opportunities to grow your skills and to focus on things that you do not do well.
- Don't be afraid to fail when trying something new.
- Surround yourself with good people from whom you can learn from.
- Don't accept a bad situation, either with colleagues or clients, simply because you think you have no other choice.

## **ADDITIONAL ADVICE**

The idea of offering advice to new web designers and developers has been on my mind recently after reading Cen-

nydd Bowles’ “[Letter to a Junior Designer](#)<sup>38</sup>” and Andy Clarke’s follow-up, “[A Different Letter to a Junior Designer](#)<sup>39</sup>.” These two articles offer competing suggestions, but each contains valuable advice and I encourage you to give them both a read.

Additionally, “The Habits of Successful New Web Professionals” offers advice to web professionals who are starting their first position in this industry. 🍷

```
<html>
  <head>
    <title>Dear Graduates</title>
  </head>
  <body>
    <p id="message">Congratulations!</p>
  </body>
</html>
```

*On behalf of the entire SmashingMag team, we wish all graduates the best of luck going forward in their careers! Believe in yourselves, in your talents and skills, and always keep learning, growing, and realizing the best in yourselves! Cheers!*

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<sup>38</sup>. <http://alistapart.com/column/letter-to-a-junior-designer>

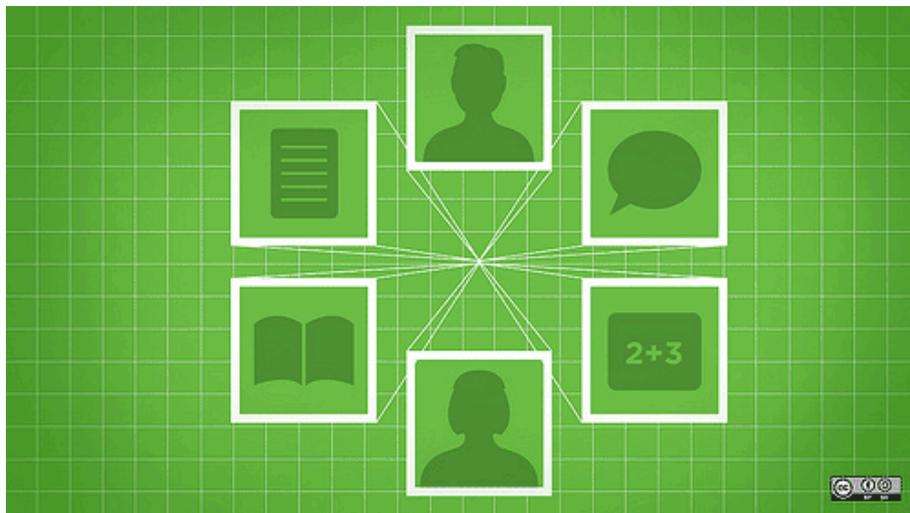
<sup>39</sup>. <http://alistapart.com/blog/post/a-different-letter-to-a-junior-designer>

# The Habits Of Successful New Web Professionals

BY JEREMY GIRARD 

Starting a position in an organization, especially if it is your first in the industry, can be as nerve-wracking as it is exciting. Practices that seem like common sense to those of us who have been in the web industry for some time might not be as obvious to designers and developers without the benefit of our experience.

Part of our responsibility as veterans in this industry is to mentor new team members and share with them the knowledge that we know they will need to succeed.



*As President Rutherford B. Hayes once said, “The expert in anything was once a beginner.” (Image credit: [opensourceway](http://www.flickr.com/photos/opensourceway/6555466127/)<sup>40</sup>)*

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<sup>40</sup>. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/opensourceway/6555466127/>

I recently published an article on Smashing Magazine titled “[Lessons Learned From Leading New Web Professionals](#)<sup>41</sup>.” As a follow-up to that piece, this one looks at the other side of the team leader-new employee dynamic. We’ll cover the practices that I have found are consistently followed by employees who excel in their new role and grow in this industry.

## *Embrace The Company’s Culture*

Every company is different – with policies, procedures and a culture unique to it. While much attention is given to ensuring that new employees understand these policies and procedures, understanding and embracing the company’s culture is just as important to long-term success. One way to embrace a company’s culture is to get involved – both in and outside the office.

If your company is holding an event or activity for employees, make it a point to attend. It could be a full-blown company party or a small after-hours get-together of only a few employees. Either way, it provides an opportunity to socialize with your new colleagues and begin to build relationships with the people you work alongside.

In the office, look for projects that interest you and that you feel you can contribute positively to. These could be normal client engagements or even side projects driven by small teams in the organization. By asking to be included in these projects, you’ll get time to work hands

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41. <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2013/10/18/lessons-learned-leading-new-web-professionals/>

on with your colleagues and show them the value you bring to the team.

Now, the challenge to participating in these activities is that new employees often feel like outsiders, and many are reluctant to join in on the company's planned events. The irony, though, is that participating in these company events is one of the best ways to feel like part of the team and to break down that outsider status.

## *Respect The Client*

Complaining about clients is a practice that has been around as long as clients themselves, but it has no place in the web industry, whether you are a new professional or a seasoned veteran.

Clients can be challenging, but remember that when they stop calling you with questions or with work to be done, that is the day you no longer have a job. We are here because of our clients, not in spite of them.

Does this mean that the client is always right and that you should take whatever they dish out at you with a smile and a nod? Of course not. No one should ever suffer a client who disrespects them professionally or personally, but an abusive client who must be fired is very different from one who simply asks a lot of questions because they recognize that you are the expert. Yes, clients make poor decisions at times, and some of their questions will seem obvious or silly to you, but your answers and advice are why they hired you in the first place.

Respect clients — they keep you employed — and refrain from the bouts of unnecessary complaining that

others in the organization might engage in. If others are complaining and trying to rope you in, politely excuse yourself. Nothing good will come of those negative conversations.

## *Ask Questions*

As a new employee, you will undoubtedly have questions — a lot, in fact. That is OK. In fact, it is expected. You might feel like you are bothering others, but asking questions is how you learn and how “tribal knowledge” is passed from veterans in an organization to newcomers.

When you join, a company will likely give you some kind of orientation and show you the ropes, but only so much information can be conveyed in an orientation or in training. So much of what you will need to know is picked up on the job, by actually doing the work itself. When you hit a roadblock, look to others on the team for help. They will often have encountered the issue before and have set a precedent for dealing with it — the aforementioned tribal knowledge. Gaining that knowledge through experience and by asking questions is how you will grow in the organization.

Now, there is a balance to be struck. Throwing your hands in the air and yelling “Mayday!” every time you hit a bump in the road is too much. Try to solve a problem for yourself first, so that when you ask for help, you can show the person what you’ve tried so far. Over time, you will find the balance between exploring solutions on your own and asking for a hand.



*Asking questions enables you to learn and acquire team knowledge, but try to solve problems for yourself first. (Image credit: [Tim O'Brien](#)<sup>42</sup>)*

## *Teach Me Something*

I am constantly reading articles with new tips, techniques and best practices in our industry, and I spend many nights and weekends outside of normal office hours working to master these new techniques. When I discover an article or idea that I think is valuable, I always share it with the rest of my team. And I love it when others on the team return the favor.

When a new employee shares a worthwhile article or an approach that I had not considered, they demonstrate their passion and their dedication to growing in the in-

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<sup>42</sup>. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/oberazzi/318947873/sizes/z/in/photostream/>

dustry. It also shows that they are willing not only to learn, but also to teach others.

## *Check Your Work*

I appreciate when a team member completes a task quickly, but speed doesn't trump accuracy. Too often, in an attempt to impress their manager, new team members will race through a task to show how efficient they are. They submit work before really going over it to make sure that all of the tasks have been completed correctly.

Checking your work before submitting it to a manager for review probably sounds like common sense, but it's one of the biggest problems I hear about from other team leaders and managers. Work that is missing key elements or that has little errors (spelling mistakes are common) or whose functionality hasn't been fully tested (broken links, forms that do not submit properly, etc.) are major headaches for many team leaders. A manager would rather the person finish the task a bit more slowly if the bulk of the errors could have been caught by a more thorough review.

Before you submit work as being complete, give it a once over to make sure that everything works as intended.

## *Mind The Clock*

Web design is not a 9:00 to 5:00 job. Sometimes, inspiration or a breakthrough strikes at the end of the day. If you punch the clock exactly at 5:00, you could lose any mo-

mentum or spark of creativity you may have had, when instead you should nurture the moment. Other times, a deadline is looming that requires extra hours in the office. You need to accept that the day doesn't always end at 5:00.

It goes both ways, though. An employee who is willing to stay late and put in extra effort when needed will be recognized and appreciated, but don't stay at your desk 12 hours a day, only to go home and do more work there.



*Minding the clock means not working late every night.  
(Image credit: [abdallah<sup>43</sup>](#))*

Minding the clock means balancing your professional and personal time. Don't burn yourself out by trying to be a superhero who does nothing but work. The most suc-

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<sup>43</sup>. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/husseinabdallah/4470248982/sizes/z/in/photostream/>

Successful colleagues I have worked with over the years have found and maintained a work-life balance.

## *Work On Your Communication Skills*

Responding to questions and requests from clients can be a full-time job. In fact, on some days I feel like all I've done is answer emails. Managers want to be able to offload some communication responsibilities to others on the team — but they need to know that the communication will not suffer from a lack of skill.

Whether you are answering questions from clients, presenting design concepts in a meeting or brainstorming with colleagues, communicating your ideas in a way that meets your company's expectations is important. This skill will increase your value to the team and set you up to take on more responsibility.

## *Join The Community*

The web community is amazing, and you can participate in it in a number of ways. Depending on where you live, you might have access to meetups, networking events, conferences and other gatherings. We all have opportunities to share our experience, knowledge and passion for this industry.

Participating in these events will make you feel like a part of the web community, help you make connections with peers and reflect well on your company. With limited time to attend such events, leaders appreciate when

other team members take the initiative to get out in the community and represent the company.

## *Stay Positive*

This tip might sound easy to follow, but keeping a positive attitude and demeanor is more challenging than it seems.

As a new team member, you will undoubtedly have times when you are unsure of what to work on next or of how you are performing. This uncertainty can be stressful, and stress can eventually lead to a negative attitude. Fight the urge to give into that negativity – stay positive.

Saying that everything is easier with a positive attitude might sound like an oversimplification, but it's not. A positive attitude makes challenges easier to face, and it encourages others to come to your aid. After all, no one is excited to work with someone with a negative attitude.

## *Have Fun*

Many years ago, I had an employer who, whenever my job got stressful or challenging, would say, "Well, that's why we pay you to be here. If it was fun, it wouldn't be work!"

I don't agree with this sentiment. Yes, most of us wouldn't show up for work every day if a pay check wasn't waiting for us at the end of the week. However, just because we have to work doesn't mean we can't enjoy where we work.

The most successful employees I have had the pleasure of working alongside over the years have enjoyed their job and where they work. Life is too short for anything else. So, have fun at your job — and if you can't, consider getting another.



*Staying positive and having fun at your job are two overlooked yet incredibly important elements of success. (Image credit: [opensourceway](#)<sup>44</sup>)*

## *In Summary*

Joining an organization can be stressful. Hopefully, the tips presented here will help you make the most of the opportunity and relieve a bit of the stress. Here are the do's and don'ts we've covered:

- Do embrace the culture, and participate in company events.

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.flickr.com/photos/47691521@N07/5445602868/>

- Do not let the feeling of being a newbie keep you from participating in events.
- Do not engage in pointless complaining about clients.
- Do respect your clients and recognize that they are the reason you have a job.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions; that's how you learn.
- Do try to solve problems on your own before asking for help.
- Do share helpful or interesting articles that you come across.
- Do not submit work before having checked it for accuracy.
- Do strike a balance between your professional and personal time.
- Do work on your communication skills, and understand what the company expects from your communication with clients.
- Do look for opportunities to participate in your local web community.
- Do stay positive, even when you feel uncertain or stressed out.
- Do have fun at your job and enjoy where you work. 🍷

# How To Maintain Your Personal Brand As A Corporate Employee

BY JEFF GOTHELF 🍷

A strong personal brand is beneficial on many levels. At the core it differentiates the designer, developer, marketer, etc, from the rest of the pack within crowded disciplines. It functions as a self-promotion agent that works for the practitioner 24/7/365 ultimately ensuring this person becomes a magnet for new and interesting work opportunities.

The foundation of a personal brand is initially created by consistently doing good work. From there, commenting, interacting and reacting in public discussion forums, blogging, Twitter, Facebook and the publication of articles and even books further solidify an individual as a thought leader.

However, “the idea of personal brand is often associated with independent practitioners”, as David Armano puts it. And for independents there are typically no conflicts as they are in the business of promoting themselves, their skills and knowledge. However, for practitioners working within corporations and interactive agencies, the challenge becomes balancing their personal brands with the corporate brand.

## *Many Opportunities For Friction*

As a corporate employee you don't represent "you" out in public — you represent the company. The opinions, theories and expertise you present publicly all get attributed to your employer. If you say something controversial, the story that will propagate is not "John Smith said..." but "John Smith, Lead Developer for Company X, said..." Add to this the risk of disclosing proprietary or sensitive financial information and it's no surprise many corporations aren't interested in promoting individuals (outside of C-level executives) externally.

These same corporations are only now beginning to comprehend the power of the social web and don't understand the need for external "corporate ambassadors<sup>45</sup>". Colleagues within the organization can also be points of friction as they begin to question whether the now-public practitioner is actually a "work horse or a show horse", as Christian Crumlish, Director of Consumer Experience at AOL, puts it. If it's not clear that the company is getting more benefit than the individual, resentment can build causing the individual to start defending their activities.

Crumlish also suggests some companies are concerned that making their star employees visible exposes them to competitive employers looking to poach talent. This alone may make an organization reticent to promote individuals externally.

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45. [http://darmano.typepad.com/logic\\_emotion/2010/09/how-be-an-effective-corporate-ambassador.html](http://darmano.typepad.com/logic_emotion/2010/09/how-be-an-effective-corporate-ambassador.html)

Finally, if the practitioner works for a less-established brand, there is a risk the personal brand will ultimately outshine the corporate brand. While this is certainly not an issue for global corporations, start-ups who have one or two star employees could face this challenge.

## *Overcoming These Hurdles*

The challenges may seem risky but there are some specific ways to mitigate these risks. By following the guidelines featured below, you will be able to convince your employer to not feel insecure or threatened about you strengthening your personal brand and encourage you to participate in public events.

### **MAKE YOUR EMPLOYER THE STAR**

To alleviate any concerns that you are attempting to promote your brand more than your employer's, make it obvious who that employer is and that you're speaking on their behalf. Any public facing documents you present must have company branding. This includes white papers, conference posters and slide decks. In addition to branding your thought leadership, all online profiles (Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, et al) and blogs should clearly disclose where you work. Finally, all client associations should also be disclosed to minimize the risk of perceived conflicts of interest or favoritism.

Luke Wroblewski, former Chief Design Architect at Yahoo! and Lead Designer at Ebay, who is a popular speaker at many design conferences, ensured all his presentations were branded with the Yahoo! and Ebay logos.

Like Wroblewski, Crumlish, a mainstay on the design conference circuit, also made sure he was seen as a “Yahoo! Person” in all of his public efforts.



*Participation in conferences is a good way to strengthen your personal brand and solidify yourself as a thought leader.  
(Image credit: [Joel Bez](#)<sup>46</sup>, Fronteers conference)*

## **MAKE YOUR COLLEAGUES SMARTER, BRING BACK LEARNINGS**

Conferences, meetups and other professional extra-curricular activities provide tremendous learning opportunities. As much as you are a presenter at these events, you must also be an attendee. The opportunities for learning and growth are tremendous. It’s important to capture that knowledge and bring it back to your organization to share with your colleagues.

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<sup>46</sup>. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/lejoe/5063631608/in/photostream/>

This shared learning can take two forms. The first is sharing the specific things you learned while at the event. What did the other presenters discuss? How does it relate to the challenges you face as a team? How can it be applied? These are the domain-specific elements you picked up from the other presenters.

The second is sharing with your colleagues how to become more successful and active within these external communities. You're likely not the only person in your organization who is interested in furthering their personal brand. Bringing this education to your colleagues who did not attend the conference and sharing your techniques on how to become more active on that front helps minimize any jealousy that may develop in your colleagues and positions you as a mentor.

### **YOUR EMPLOYER IS NOW A THOUGHT LEADER**

When attempting to convince your superiors to allow you to participate in public forums on behalf of the company, it's imperative to remind the organization the benefits the corporate brand gets from this exposure. Active engagement in industry-specific forums and conferences gives the company the chance to stand in front of peers as a thought leader and, in many cases, frame the conversation on a particular topic. Brand perception of your employer improves as adjectives like cutting-edge, innovative and supportive (of new thinking) are associated with it.

In addition, both your business development and talent acquisition departments benefit from the corporate

brand enhancement you're facilitating. Every interaction that is publicly available from the employees of a company provides an opportunity to strengthen that company's public persona. Tweets and blog posts about the kind of work or processes taking place there humanize the company and increase the attraction of higher caliber employees as well as potential new customers.

This may not be obvious at first to your employer. It's imperative that you showcase these successes internally. Positive mentions for the company in tweets, blogs and post-conference meetings should be forwarded to the organization's management. When employment candidates express interest in the company, try to make sure that they are asked how they heard of the company. Each time a candidate mentions a public appearance or some thought leadership showcased in an industry forum, make sure your superiors are aware. If possible, quantifying (in dollars) the value of these appearances should further your cause.

High-level talent that is acquired through word of mouth is significantly less expensive than talent acquired through staffing agencies. Also, have your business development team assess the source of new leads and customers to see how many were driven by the company's public presence. Each one of those leads and customers has a monetary value which, when tallied, can justify the expense of sending you to the next event to present.

## **BE BOLD, YET HUMBLE**

In some companies, your superiors may not see the immediate value of your personal brand. In these situations it may prove more successful to ask for forgiveness rather than permission. Write a blog post on an industry or domain-specific topic and share it publicly. If it drives discussion and positive perception of your employer, tell someone.

Attend the next local meetup and present a quick deck on your latest thinking. Did someone tweet about it? Share that with your boss. Was there a strong discussion on your blog that reflected well on your employer? Point your PR person to it. Showcasing the success of a low-profile activities or blog posts should engender some level of support from your boss. One word of caution though: ensure that you've consulted your company's policies on such activities, as Crumlish advises. You don't want to end up violating corporate policies that could put your job at risk.

## **CHOOSE THE RIGHT EMPLOYER**

If creating and maintaining a personal brand is something you value then it's imperative to view your employer through that lens to understand if your goals align. As your personal brand has been developing and growing, has your employer been supportive? Is there a broad corporate understanding of the benefits you can bring through promoting your thought leadership externally? If the answer is 'No' then it may be time to evaluate new opportunities.

Becoming an independent practitioner is the easiest option but may not be viable for everyone. In that case, how much do prospective employers “get” the concept of employee empowerment? This is a discussion that should be clear from the outset with a potential new employer. Set the right expectations in your interviews and, if possible, have public-facing activities that grow both your personal brand and the corporate brand written into your job description. There’s no more effective way to balance your personal brand as a corporate employee than to actually have it as one of your position’s responsibilities.

## *Conclusion*

Ultimately, for the personal brand to grow, the “company should get more value than the individual”, as David Armano said. If that balance is off, then you should consider becoming independent. That doesn’t mean that you cannot create, cultivate and curate a personal brand within a corporation. In fact, a personal brand can be crucial to your continued success and career progression. Be respectful of your employer and their policies but find creative ways to promote yourself while promoting your company at the same time. Personal branding enhances corporate branding. It makes the company appear more “human” and approachable. It makes people want to work there and it attracts good press. If balanced correctly, this is a win-win for all parties involved. 🍷

# About The Authors

## *Dean Hume*

Dean Hume is a software developer and author of the book [Fast ASP.Net Websites](#)<sup>47</sup>. An avid [blogger](#)<sup>48</sup> and contributor to various tech and coding websites, he brings a strong desire to constantly build his skillset and help do the same for those around him by writing, presenting, or training on various subjects. Twitter: [@deanohume](#)<sup>49</sup>.

## *Jake Bresnehan*

Jake Bresnehan has been obsessed with all things relating to Front-End Development for the last 6 years. So far he has worked with a large range of clients ranging from large international media companies to stealth startups. He also runs [Web Design Weekly](#)<sup>50</sup> which is a newsletter and blog dedicated to helping developers stay on top of the latest tools, tips and techniques. Twitter: [@jake\\_bresnehan](#)<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup>. <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Fast-ASP-NET-Websites-Dean-Alan/dp/1617291250>

<sup>48</sup>. <http://www.deanhume.com>

<sup>49</sup>. <http://www.twitter.com/deanohume>

<sup>50</sup>. <https://web-design-weekly.com/>

<sup>51</sup>. [http://www.twitter.com/jake\\_bresnehan](http://www.twitter.com/jake_bresnehan)

## Jeff Gothelf

Jeff Gothelf is [Neo](http://www.neo.com)<sup>52</sup>'s lean evangelist, spreading the gospel of great team collaboration, product innovation and evidence-based decision making.

Jeff is a speaker and thought leader on the future of user experience design, often teaching workshops or giving talks on building cultures that support teamwork and innovation. Jeff is passionate about advancing the principles that lie at the core of Neo, and often does so on a global scale.

Prior to joining Neo, Jeff lead the UX design teams at TheLadders and Web Trends. Earlier he worked with and lead small teams of software designers at AOL. He is the co-author (with Josh Seiden) of *Lean UX: Applying Lean Principles to Improve User Experience*. Twitter: [@jboogie](http://www.twitter.com/jboogie)<sup>53</sup>.

## Jeremy Girard

Jeremy Girard was born with six toes on each foot. The extra toes were removed before he was a year old, robbing him of any super-powers and ending his crime-fighting career before it even began. Unable to battle the forces of evil, he instead works as the Director of Marketing and Head of Web Design/Development for the Providence, Rhode Island based Envision Technology Advisors. He also teaches website design and front-end development at the University of Rhode Island. His portfolio and blog, at

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<sup>52</sup>. <http://www.neo.com>

<sup>53</sup>. <http://www.twitter.com/jboogie>

[Pumpkin-King.com](http://www.pumpkin-king.com)<sup>54</sup>, is where he writes about all things Web design. Twitter: [@jeremymgirard](https://twitter.com/jeremymgirard)<sup>55</sup>.

## *Jim Bosveld*

After working as a freelance web designer for some years, Jim is now working on web development at [The Bright-house](http://www.thebriighthouse.nl)<sup>56</sup> in Amsterdam. This means a lot of front-end stuff, but also database management (H2 mostly, fun!) and project management. Twitter: [@jimbosveld](https://twitter.com/jimbosveld)<sup>57</sup>.

## *Susie Pollasky*

Susie Pollasky is Talent Ambassador of [Digital Telepathy](http://www.dtepathy.com)<sup>58</sup>, a UX design company that is passionate about crafting meaningful experiences and products [like Hello Bar (acquired by Crazy Egg), [Impress](http://doyouimpress.com/)<sup>59</sup>, and [Filament](http://filament.io/)<sup>60</sup>] and fostering great company culture. Twitter: [@SusiePollasky](https://twitter.com/SusiePollasky)<sup>61</sup>.

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61. <http://www.twitter.com/SusiePollasky>

## *About Smashing Magazine*

Smashing Magazine<sup>62</sup> is an online magazine dedicated to Web designers and developers worldwide. Its rigorous quality control and thorough editorial work has gathered a devoted community exceeding half a million subscribers, followers and fans. Each and every published article is carefully prepared, edited, reviewed and curated according to the high quality standards set in Smashing Magazine's own publishing policy<sup>63</sup>.

Smashing Magazine publishes articles on a daily basis with topics ranging from business, visual design, typography, front-end as well as back-end development, all the way to usability and user experience design. The magazine is – and always has been – a professional and independent online publication neither controlled nor influenced by any third parties, delivering content in the best interest of its readers. These guidelines are continually revised and updated to assure that the quality of the published content is never compromised. Since its emergence back in 2006 Smashing Magazine has proven to be a trustworthy online source.

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<sup>62</sup>. <http://www.smashingmagazine.com>

<sup>63</sup>. <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/publishing-policy/>