Creativity Lessons For
Web Designers

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Imprint

About This Book

"Creativity" is a term that often partakes of something mysterious and nearly magical — something that we are blessed with, something like an ambivalent, secret power that one moment strikes us unexpectedly, and then puts us on hold when we desperately try to come up with an idea. But the infamous creative spark isn't as random as we might think. Sometimes we just have to betake to the right techniques in order to fuel our creativity.

In this eBook, we have put together a collection of creativity lessons that may help you overcome a creative trough. Our authors provide some general insights into the process of creativity, discuss some interesting aspects, such as *why* it is important to also have a life outside the Web, and also present useful hands-on tips on how to develop fresh approaches to given problems. In addition, "Creativity Lessons For Web Designers" also shares some inspiring design projects and what made them unforgettable. As you will see, creativity has nothing to do with magic, but is often just a matter of perspective. We hope that this eBook will be a motor for your own creative mind.

— *Cosima Mielke, Smashing eBook Producer*

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The Process Of Creativity

BY JASON GROSS ✍

The creative attribute has always been a highly debated and researched component of the human psyche. The "designer" job title seems to be one that calls to the more creative minded among us and according to some, requires the highest level of creative processing. This idea does lend itself to the truth, Web designers are called upon to find creative solutions every day. However, we certainly aren't alone.

Contrary to previous belief, creativity does not limit itself[1] to the "right-brained" artistic types. The ability to find creative and innovative solutions to problems holds value in almost all aspects of life. Even those with highly analytical jobs and hobbies benefit from the ability to approach a complex issue from different perspectives and foresee alternate outcomes. So perhaps it shouldn't come as much of a surprise to suggest that creativity itself is more rooted in a process than random visionary moments.

Image credit: Ferdi Rizkiyanto[2]
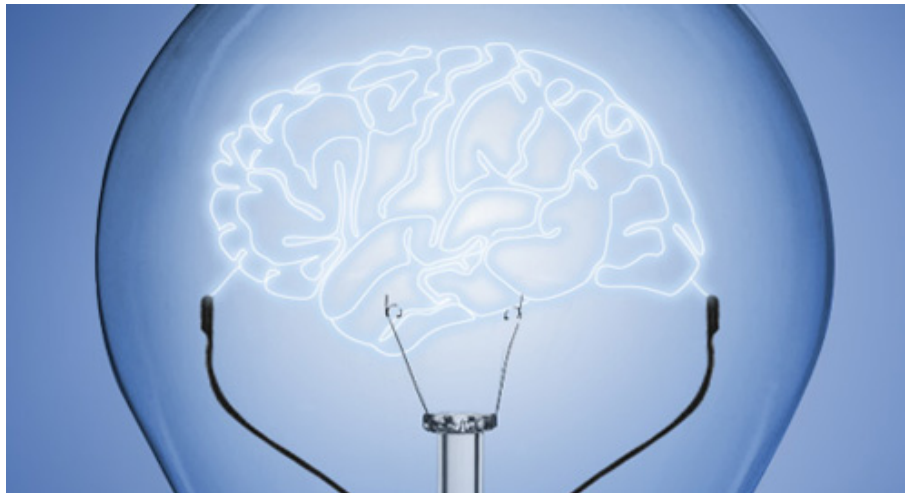
In one way or another we have all experienced that classic "aha" moment. Be it in our own experience or through those genius minds we love to follow in shows, movies or books, the light bulb moment of mental clarity is an iconic expression. But whether you know it or not

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1. http://www.livestrong.com/article/81868-parts-brain-influence-creativity/
2. http://twitter.com/p3p3y

you may be reaching those light bulb moments through more of a defined process than you think.

The Not-So-Random Spark

Believe it or not, you have probably been practicing the process of creative thinking on purpose for quite a while. Have you ever been instructed to skip a question on an exam that has you stumped and come back to it after you've answered the others? Or maybe it's been something as simple as facing a tough choice with the decision to "sleep on it". This might seem to imply that our brains continue to work on our hardest problems for us while we sleep or think about something else. Unfortunately it's not quite that easy.

Even if by accident, when you let go of a problem that you can't solve you are actively engaging in mental incubation[3]. As it turns out, leaving a complex issue to its own devices doesn't generate a resolution out of passive thought processes so much as an active new approach[4]. This different approach allows our minds to set aside failed solutions and misconceptions that we generated on our first pass. We aren't suddenly finding a new solution so much as we are allowing ourselves to shed our fixation on all of the things we thought of before that didn't work. As we move on with our day or the next task, those bits of information that we forget may be replaced with different pieces to the puzzle. These pieces are pulled from other tasks or mental processes and applied to the equation we couldn't solve earlier. When something from a current and not necessarily related task locks in with the problem we couldn't figure out earlier the light switch flips on.

3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incubation_(psychology)
4. http://www.mendeley.com/research/dynamic-memory-processes-retrieving-answers-questions-recall-failures-judgments-knowing-acquisition-information/

Down time can be a powerful tool in the creative process.

For designers we should be able to put this into context fairly easily. Certainly there are those among us who have been plagued with the eternal judgment of the typography, layout, and color choices that we see around us everywhere. Even the task of e-mail a client back and explaining why we shouldn't make their logo bigger sparks thoughts of alignment, positioning and weight. In processing the things that we do or don't like we constantly build our mental database of micro-ideas that we apply to our designs.

This seems a little less fun than random strokes of genius but it does give us the power to craft our own epiphanies instead of letting them fall upon us. It is because of this, that a lot of designers find success moving between tasks on a single project or shifting to an entirely new project when they feel their creative juices waning.

At the head of all of this it is important to remember that a lot of designers depend on their skill set to make a living. So trying to implement time to let your mind rest doesn't coincide well with meeting deadlines and "thinking time" doesn't look great on a project invoice. Like so many things, practice makes perfect in this area and you can go ahead and plan on getting it wrong the first time around. As you become more comfortable with your own working and thinking pace it will allow you to better predict the timeline of a project that includes the mental brakes you need to find creative answers.

Practicing Creativity

For some it may be a little disappointing to think that all of those inspirational moments that came over breakfast, in the shower or on the morning commute were a little more scripted than we thought. On the other side of that coin though lies the potential to place a little more control over our inspirations. Could it be possible that the answer to be-

ing a creative individual lies within a process that we can all replicate on demand?

We can practice and refine our creative techniques.

Well, of course there is no worksheet to follow along with that can promise unlimited creative power. We all have different capacities for intelligence, imagination and creativity so naturally some will have higher creative thresholds than others. With that said, there are a lot of theories[5] out there about the various thought processes that spark creativity and how they can be harnessed.

Distance Makes the Design Grow Fonder

One of my favorite methods for finding that inner creativity is the process of disassociation. This type of thinking can come in quite a few forms but always has the same core component. The point of disassociating your thoughts is always to force your brain to take a new perspective on a problem.

One way of doing this is through purging thoughts. In a previous article on Abduzeedo[6], covering some additional thoughts on the creative process, they discuss an experience with a former professor. The task was to sketch out a logo for a new project but the challenge was the 150 required variations of the logo. The point here is that so many of our

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5. http://www.spring.org.uk/2010/03/boost-creativity-7-unusual-psychological-tech-niques.php
6. http://abduzeedo.com/thoughts-creativity-and-design-process

initial thoughts and ideas are based on our previous experience or observations. We can't expect to provide a unique design until we have purged our minds of ideas that were gathered from other sources. Many designers will admit to having sketch books full of logo or design variations that range from tiny detail changes to entirely new concepts, all of which is part of the process of coming up with creative ideas.

Dumping thoughts out on paper helps make way for more unique ideas. Image Credit: Mike Rohde[7]

Two Heads are Always Better

Another interesting technique that plays along with the rules of disassociation is the process of making decisions for someone else. In a fun trick of the brain, it turns out that we may very likely be better at making more creative decisions for other people[8] than we are for ourselves. Cashing in on this theory could take us down several paths.

First, this places emphasis on the importance of feedback. Anyone who has been waist deep in a project for an extended period of time has likely had the experience of being too familiar with the work. A jaded designer can easily miss key components of a design. Other designers who are familiar with the task and goal but not the exact job at hand are a great resource for situations like these. But what about those unfortunate times when another designer isn't handy?

An admittedly more difficult but still productive option is to treat your own design as though it belongs to someone else. If you find yourself stuck on a project, try splashing a little bit of that incubation process we talked about earlier on it and re-approach the project as

7. http://rohdesign.com/weblog/2011/8/26/madison-ruby-logo-t-shirt-designs.html
8. http://psp.sagepub.com/content/37/4/492

though you're helping a peer review their design. Forget about what work might be involved behind your suggestions or any pre-conceived notions of how other project stakeholders might respond to your suggestions. Finding points where you manage to disagree with yourself is a good clue that this process working.

Constructive self-criticism is a valuable creative practice.

Creativity is not Magic

At the end of the day are some people more creative than others? Yes. But are there people that simply lack the ability to be creative at all? I don't believe so. We all have tasks that require a little bit of creativity to complete, for some of us it may be the process of a logo or Web design yet for others it could be finding a more efficient formula or algorithm. Heck, depending on where you live it might require some creativity to find a parking spot at home after 5:00pm.

As something that is a part of all of us, I don't find creativity to be any kind of magical power. This is just as well, because it means we can practice creative thinking and encourage the process when we need it the most. Methods such as mental incubation, disassociation, and forced third party perspective may not yield the best solutions for everyone but the topic of creative thinking is a broad one that includes

dozens of different theories. If you are someone who draws on your creativity on a regular basis I would encourage you to take some time and find out what works best for you. ❧

Additional Resources

- Dynamic Memory Processes in Retrieving Answers to Questions[9], I. Yaniv, D. E. Meyer, N. S. Davidson
  Dig into pages 81 through 90 in this article for an in depth look at the theories behind mental incubation.

- The Nature of Insight[10], Robert Sternberg
  This book digs into exercising our creative thought processes and examines how we can capture insightful thinking processes.

- How We Decide[11], Jonah Lehrer
  A great resource for designers, Jonah's book is a classic work that encourages readers to think about how we think.

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9. http://www.mendeley.com/research/dynamic-memory-processes-retrieving-answers-questions-recall-failures-judgments-knowing-acquisition-information/
10. http://www.amazon.com/Nature-Insight-Bradford-Books/dp/0262691876/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1322685079&sr=1-1
11. http://www.amazon.com/How-We-Decide-Jonah-Lehrer/dp/0547247990/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1322874286&sr=1-1

Work, Life And Side Projects

BY PAUL BOAG ❧

There is no doubt about it, I am a hypocrite. Fortunately nobody has noticed… until now. Here's the thing. On one hand I talk about the importance of having a good work/life balance, and yet on the other I prefer to hire people who do personal projects in their spare time.

Do you see the problem with this scenario? How can one person possibly juggle work, life and the odd side project? It would appear there just aren't enough hours in the day. Being the arrogant and stubborn individual I am, when this hypocrisy was pointed out to me, my immediate reaction was to endeavour to justify my position. A less opinionated individual would probably have selected one or the other, but I propose these two supposedly contradictory viewpoints can sit harmoniously together.
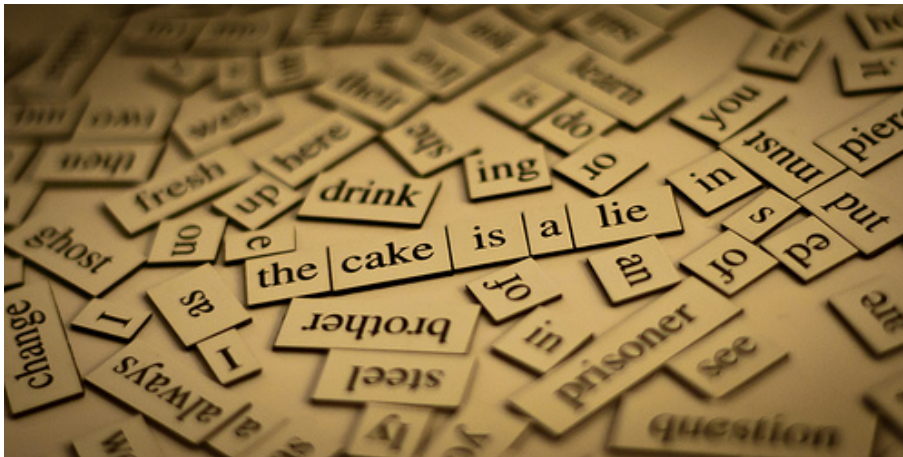
Can you have your cake and eat it, by working on side projects, holding down a job and still having a life beyond your computer? Image by GuySie[12].

To understand how this is possible we must first establish why a work/life balance is important and what role side projects play. Let's begin by asking ourselves why it is important to have a life beyond our computers, even when we love what we do.

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12. http://www.flickr.com/photos/76491533@N00/5353194240/

Why We Should Have A Life Beyond The Web

Generally speaking Web designers love their job. In many cases our job is also our hobby. We love nothing more than experimenting with new technology and techniques. When we aren't working on websites we are tinkering with gadgets and spending a much higher than average time online. Although in our job this single-mindedness is useful, it is ultimately damaging both for our personal wellbeing and career.

In the early days of my career, when I was young, I used to happily work long hours and regularly pull all-nighters. It was fun and I enjoyed my job. However, this set a habit in my working life that continued far longer than was healthy. Eventually I became stressed and fell ill. In the end things became so bad that I was completely unproductive.

This high-intensity working also sets a baseline for the whole industry, where it becomes the norm to work at this accelerated speed. No longer are we working long hours because we want to, but rather because there is an expectation we should. This kind of work/life balance can only end one way, in burnout. This damages us personally, our clients and the industry as a whole. It is in our own interest and those of our clients to look after our health.

This means we cannot spend our lives sitting in front of a screen. It simply isn't healthy. Instead we need to participate in activities beyond our desks. Preferably activities that involve at least some exercise. A healthy diet wouldn't hurt either. Getting away from the Web (and Web community) offers other benefits too. It is an opportunity for us to interact with non Web people. Whether you are helping a charity or joining a rock climbing club, the people you meet will provide a much more realistic view of how 'normal' people lead their lives.

This will inform our work. I often think that, as Web designers, we live in a bubble in which everybody is on twitter all day, and understands that typing a URL into Google isn't the best way to reach a website. Not that this is all we will learn from others. We can also learn from other people's jobs. For example, there is a lot we can learn from architects, psychologists, marketeers and countless other professions. We can learn from their processes, techniques, expertise and outlook. All of this can be applied to our own role.

As somebody who attends a church (with a reasonable cross section of people) and used to run a youth group, I can testify that mixing with non Web people will transform your view of what we do. Furthermore, the activities you undertake will shape how you do work. Reading a non-Web book, visiting an art gallery, or even taking a walk in the countryside, can all inform and inspire your Web work. There is no doubt, that stepping away from the computer at the end of a working day will benefit you personally and professionally. Does this therefore

mean you should shelve your side projects? Not at all, these are just as important.

Why We Should All Have Side Projects

I love to hire people who have side projects. Take for example Rob Borley[13] who works at Headscape[14]. He runs a takeaway ordering site[15], has his own mobile app business[16] and has just launched an iPad app[17]. These projects have been hugely beneficial to Headscape. Rob has become our mobile expert, has a good handle on what it takes to launch a successful Web app and puts his entrepreneurial enthusiasm into everything he does for us.

Rob's side projects such as iTakeout[18] has broadened his experience and made him an indispensable employee.

But side projects don't just benefit your employer, they benefit your personal career. They provide you with a chance to experiment and learn new techniques that your day job may not allow. They also provide you with the opportunity to widen your skills into new areas and roles. Maybe in your day job you are a designer, but your side project might provide the perfect opportunity to learn some PHP. Finally, side

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13. http://twitter.com/bobscape
14. http://headscape.co.uk/
15. http://www.itakeout.co.uk/
16. http://www.dootrix.com/
17. http://www.simpl.com/
18. http://www.itakeout.co.uk

projects allow you to work without constraints. This is something many of us crave and being able to set our own agenda is freeing. However, it is also a challenge. We have to learn how to deliver when there is nobody sitting over our shoulder pushing us to launch.

All of this knowledge from personal projects has a transformative effect that will change your career. It will increase your chance of getting a job and show your employer how valuable you are. It may also convince your employer to create a job that better utilises your skills, as we did for Rob. Rob used to be a project manager, but when we saw his passion and knowledge for mobile we created a new role focusing on that. Of course, this leads us to the obvious question: how can we have time away from the computer if we should also be working on side projects?

Is Hustling The Answer?

If you listen to Gary Vaynerchuk[19] or read Jason Calacanis[20], you maybe forgiven for thinking the answer is to 'hustle'; to work harder. They proclaim we should cut out TV, dump the xbox and focus single-mindedly on achieving our goals. There is certainly a grain of truth in this. We often fritter away huge amounts of time, largely unaware of where it is going. We need to be much more conscious about how we are spending our time and ensure we are making a choice about where it goes.

I don't think working harder is the long term solution, however. We can work hard for short periods of time, but as we have already established this can't continue indefinitely. We need downtime. We need time lounging in front of the TV or mindlessly shooting our friends in Halo. If we don't have that we never allow our brain the chance to recuperate and we end up undermining our efficiency. I don't believe the answer is "work hard, play hard". I believe the answer is "work smarter".

We Can Do Everything If We Work Smarter

Working smarter is about three things:

- Combining interests,

- Creating structure,

- Knowing yourself.

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19. http://garyvaynerchuk.com/
20. http://calacanis.com/

Let's look at each in turn.

COMBINE INTERESTS

A good starting point when it comes to working smarter is to look for commonality between the three aspects of your life (work, life and side projects). You can often achieve a lot by coming up with things that have a positive impact in each of those areas. Take for example the choice of your personal project. If you look at most personal projects out there, they are aimed at a technical audience. We are encouraged to "build for people like us" which has led to an endless plethora of HTML frameworks and WordPress plugins.

Maybe if we got out more there would be a wider range of personal projects and fewer of near identical jQuery plugins[21]!

If however we have built up interests outside of the Web, suddenly it opens up a new world of possibilities for side projects.

I wanted to get to know more people at my church. There are so many I have never spoken to. I also wanted to keep my hand in with code (as I don't get to code a lot anymore), so I decided to build a new church website in my spare time. This involved talking to lots of people from the church, and also gave me the chance to experiment with new ways of coding. What is more, some of the things I learned have been valuable at work too.

Look for ways of combining personal projects with outside activities. Alternatively, identify side projects that could make your working

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21. http://www.pixelzdesign.com/blog_view.php?id=55

life easier. This kind of crossover lets you get more done. However, by itself that is not enough. We need some structure too.

CREATE STRUCTURE

If we want to get the balance right between personal projects, work and life we need some structure to work in.

For a start take control of your working hours. I know this isn't easy if you have a slave driver of a boss, but most of us have at least some control over how long we work. You will be surprised, limiting your hours won't damage your productivity as much as you think. You will probably get as much done in less time. Work tends to expand to take as much time as you are willing to give it. Next, stop fluttering from one thing to another. When you are "having a life" don't check work email or answer calls. There is a growing expectation we should be available 24/7. Resist it.

One method to keep you focused is the Pomodoro technique[22]. This simple approach breaks your day into a series of 30 minute chunks. You work for 25 minutes on a single task free from interruption and then have a 5 minute break. Similar tasks are grouped together so that you spend 25 minutes answering email rather than allowing email to interupt other blocks of work.

The Pomodoro technique[23] is a simple way of staying focus on the task in hand.

Set specific time for working on personal projects and stick to them. Don't allow that time to expand into your free time. Equally don't allow

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22. http://www.pomodorotechnique.com/
23. http://www.pomodorotechnique.com/

work to distract you from your side project. Set boundaries. If you need to, set an alarm for each activity. Nothing will focus your mind on a personal project like having only 30 minutes until your alarm goes off. You will inevitably try and squeeze just one more thing in. These artificial deadlines can be very motivating.

Finally, make sure work, personal projects and recreation all have equal priority in your mind. One way to do this is to use a task manager like Omnifocus[24], Things[25] or Wunderlist[26] to keep all your tasks in one place. Often we have a task list for our work but not for other aspects of our life. This means that work is always prioritised over other activities. It is just as important to have a task to "finish that book" you are reading as "debug IE7". Providing structure won't just help with your side projects. It will also help with your sanity.

KNOW YOURSELF

Remember, the goal here is to have fun on side projects, broaden your horizon with outside activities and recharge with downtime. You therefore must be vigilant in keeping the balance and ensure that all these competing priorities don't drain you.

Part of the problem is that we spend too much time on activities that we are just not suited to. Its important to recognize your weaknesses and avoid them. If you don't, you waste time doing things you hate and doing them badly. For example, I just am no good at DIY. I used to waste hours trying to put up shelves and fix plumbing. Because I was trying to do something I was weak at, it would take forever and leave me too tired to do other things.

My solution to this problem was to delegate. I employed people to do my DIY. People that could do it much quicker and to a higher quality than me. How did I pay for this? I did what I was good at, building websites. I would work on the odd freelance site, which I could turn around quickly and enjoy doing. This applies to the side projects we take on too. Learning new skills is one thing, but if it stops being fun because you are just not suited to it, move on. Working on stuff you are not suited to will just leave you demoralized and tired.

Talking of being tired, I would recommend not working on personal projects immediately after getting home from work. Give yourself time to unwind and allow your brain to recover. Equally don't work on side projects right up until you go to bed. This will play havoc with your sleep patterns and undermine your productivity.

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24. http://www.omnigroup.com/products/omnifocus/
25. http://culturedcode.com/things/
26. http://www.6wunderkinder.com/wunderlist/

Finally, remember that side projects are meant to be fun. Don't undertake anything too large because not seeing regular results will undermine your enthusiasm. If you want to work on something large, I suggest working with others. There is certainly no shortage of opportunities[27]. Alternatively try breaking up the project into smaller sub-projects each with a functioning deliverable.

Am I Asking For The Impossible?

So there you have it. My attempt to have my cake and eat it. I believe you can have side projects, a life beyond computers and get the day job done. It's not always easy and if I had to pick I would choose having a life over side projects. However, I believe that personal projects can be fun, good for our careers and also facilitate a life beyond the Web. ❧

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27. http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2011/11/30/the-smashing-guide-to-moving-the-web-forward-community/

"I Draw Pictures All Day"

BY ALMA HOFFMANN ✏

"So, you do nothing all day."

That's how many people would respond to someone who says they spend the day with a pen or pencil in their hand. It's often considered an empty practice, a waste of time. They're seen as an empty mind puttering along with the busy work of scribbling.

But for us designers and artists, drawing pictures all day is integral to our process and to who we are as creative people, and despite the idea that those who doodle waste time, we still get our work done. So, then, why are those of us who draw pictures all day even tempted to think that someone who is doodling or drawing pictures in a meeting or lecture is not paying attention?

What does it mean to be a doodler, to draw pictures all day? Why do we doodle? Most of all, what does it mean to our work? It turns out that the simple act of scribbling on a page helps us think, remember and learn.

What Does It Mean To Doodle?

The dictionary defines "doodle" as a verb ("scribble absentmindedly") and as a noun ("a rough drawing made absentmindedly"). It also offers the origins of the word "doodler" as "a noun denoting a fool, later as a verb in the sense 'make a fool of, cheat.'"

But the author Sunni Brown offers my favorite definition of "doodle" in her TED talk, "Doodlers, unite![28]":

> "In the 17th century, a doodle was a simpleton or a fool, as in 'Yankee Doodle.' In the 18th century, it became a verb, and it meant to swindle or ridicule or to make fun of someone. In the 19th century, it was a corrupt politician. And today, we have what is perhaps our most offensive definition, at least to me, which is the following: 'To doodle officially means to dawdle, to dilly dally, to monkey around, to make meaningless marks, to do something of little value, substance or import and,' my personal favorite, 'to do nothing.' No wonder people are averse to doodling at work. Doing nothing at work is akin to masturbating at work. It's totally inappropriate."

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28. http://www.ted.com/talks/sunni_brown.html

It is no wonder, then, why most people do not have great expectations of those who "draw pictures all day." Or perhaps they are inclined to think that those who draw pictures all day are not highly intellectual and are tempted to say to them condescendingly, "Go and draw some of your pictures." As designers, many of us have heard such comments, or at least felt them implied, simply because we think, express or do things differently.

Why Do We Doodle?

Consider that even before a child can speak, they can draw pictures. It is part of their process of understanding what's around them. They draw not just what they see, but how they view the world. The drawing or doodle of a child is not necessarily an attempt to reflect reality, but rather an attempt to communicate their understanding of it. This is no surprise because playing, trial and error, is a child's primary method of learning. A child is not concerned with the impressions that others get based on their drawings or mistakes.
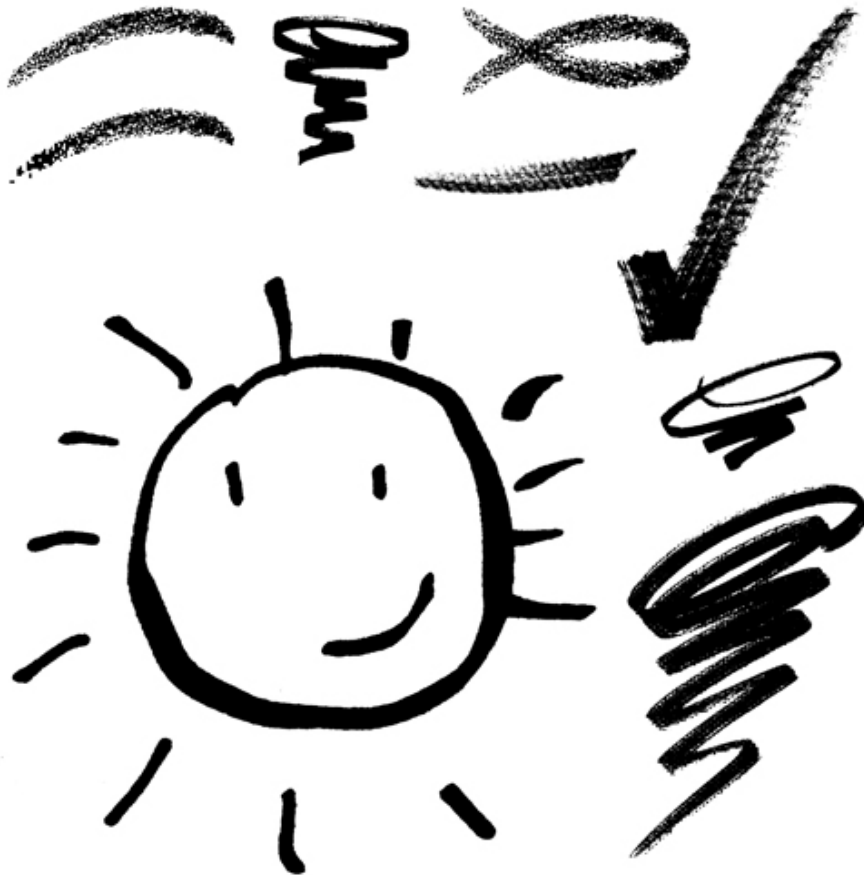
An example of a doodle.

Their constant drawing, picture-making and doodling is a child's way of expressing their ideas and showing their perceptions in visual form. It comes from a need to give physical form to one's thoughts. Similarly, an adult doodles in order to visualize the ideas in their head so that they can interact with those ideas.

Visual Learners

According to Linda Silverman, director of both the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development and the Gifted Development Center[29] and author of *Upside-Down Brilliance: The Visual-Spatial Learner*, 37% of the population are visual learners. If so many people learn better visually, we can expect, then, that some of them learn better by putting a speech, lecture or meeting into visual and tangible form through pictures or doodles, rather than by being provided with pictures or doodles (which would be the product of another person's mind).

Humans have always had a desire to visually represent what's in their minds and memory and to communicate those ideas with others. Early cave paintings were a means of interacting with others, allowing an idea or mental image to move from one person's mind to another's. The purpose of visual language has always been to communicate ideas to others.

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29. http://www.gifteddevelopment.com/

Secondly, we doodle because our brain is designed to empathize with the world around us. According to Carol Jeffers, professor at California State University, our brains are wired to respond to, interact with, imitate and mirror behavior. In an article she wrote[30], she explains the recent research into "mirror neurons" which help us understand and empathize with the world around us.

Cave paintings were our first means of communicating ideas to others.

Think of it this way. When you're at an art gallery and find a painting that intrigues you, what is your first reaction? You want to touch it, don't you? I thought so.

When I was a ballroom dancer, I used to sit and watch those who I considered to be great dancers, tracing their forms in space with my index finger as a way to commit them to memory. I used to go to galleries and museums and, at a distance, trace the lines and forms that I saw in the paintings and designs. I did this out of curiosity and a desire to physically record what I saw to memory.

Nearly 100 years ago, Maria Montessori[31] discovered the link between physical touch and movement and learning in children. Montessori education teaches children to trace the letters of the alphabet with their index finger as a way to commit their shapes to memory. My son used to trace forms that he found interesting in space. It's safe to say, then, that we doodle to visually commit to memory a concept that we want to both empathize and interact with.

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30. http://www.ijea.org/v10n15/
31. http://www.montessori-ami.org/

An experiment conducted by Jackie Andrade[32], professor of psychology at the University of Plymouth in England, demonstrated the positive effect that doodling has on memory retention. In the experiment, 40 people were given a simple set of instructions to take RSVP information over the phone from people going to a party. The group of 40 was divided in two. One group of 20 was told to doodle (limited to shading in order not to emphasize the quality of the doodles), and the other 20 would not doodle. The doodlers recalled 29% more information.

Doodling helps us retain information.

The study showed that doodling helps the brain to focus. It keeps the mind from wandering away from whatever is happening, whether it's a lecture, reading or conference talk. Still, we have become bored with learning.

Professor Emeritus at Cornell University, Joseph D. Novak argues[33] that this is because we have been taught to memorize but not to evaluate the information being given to us. In many traditional settings, the pattern is simple and dull: sit, receive and memorize. Many traditional educational systems do not encourage active engagement with the material. Doodling, drawing and even making diagrams helps us not only engage with the material, but also identify the underlying structure of the argument, while also connecting concepts in a tactile and visual way. Jesse Berg, president of The Visual Leap[34], pointed out to me in a

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32. http://interscience.wiley.com/
33. http://cmap.ihmc.us/publications/researchpapers/theorycmaps/theoryunderlyingconceptmaps.htm
34. http://www.thevisualleap.com/

conversation that doodling is a multisensory activity. While our hand is creating what might seem to be random pictures, our brain is processing the stimuli that's running through it.

Many of us are the product of traditional schooling, in which we were made to numbingly memorize dates and facts, and many of us continue this pattern later in life. While some of us were avid doodlers (I used to fill the backs of my notebooks with pictures and draw on desks with a pencil during class), some of us stopped at high school, others in college and others once we settled into a job. At some point during the education process, doodling was discouraged. Teachers most likely viewed it as a sign of inattentiveness and disrespect. After hard preparation, educators want nothing more than unwavering attention to their lectures. The irony is that, according to Andrade's study[35], doodlers pay more attention to the words of educators than we think.

In her TED talk[36], Sunny Brown goes on to explain the benefits of doodling and even offers an alternative to the definition found in the Oxford Dictionary:

> *"Doodling is really to make spontaneous marks to help yourself think. That is why millions of people doodle. Here's another interesting truth about the doodle: People who doodle when they're exposed to verbal information retain more of that information than their non-doodling counterparts. We think doodling is something you do when you lose focus, but in reality, it is a preemptive measure to stop you from losing focus. Additionally, it has a profound effect on creative problem-solving and deep information processing."*

How Can Designers Use This To Their Benefit?

As designers, we have a unique advantage when it comes to doodling. We don't just doodle to keep our minds focused — we also deliberately sketch ideas in order to problem solve and to get immediate feedback from clients and peers. Designers such as Craighton Berman[37] and Eva-Lotta Lamm[38] are two of the biggest proponents of the "sketchnotating" movement. Berman states[39] that sketchnotating "forces you to listen to the lecture, synthesize what's being expressed, and visualize a composition that captures the idea — all in real time."

35. http://interscience.wiley.com/
36. http://www.ted.com/talks/sunni_brown.html
37. http://studio.craightonberman.com/
38. http://www.flickr.com/photos/evalottchen/sets/72157625879612274/
39. http://www.core77.com/blog/sketchnotes/sketchnotes_101_visual_thinking_19518.asp

In 2009, I came across a book titled *The Back of the Napkin*[40] by Dan Roam. Roam is a business strategist and founder of Digital Roam, a management-consulting firm that uses visual thinking to solve complex problems. He uses a simple approach to solving problems visually. Every idea is run through five basic questions to encourage engaged thinking and to ensure a meaningful meeting. The process takes the acronym SQVI^. S is for simple or elaborate, Q is for qualitative or quantitative, V is for vision or execution, I is for individual or comparison, and ^ is for change or status quo. These simple choices are worked through with simple doodles in order to better understand the problem and find a solution. In his book, Roam says:

> *"What if there was a way to more quickly look at problems, more intuitively understand them, more confidently address them, and more rapidly convey to others what we've discovered? What if there was a way to make business problem solving more efficient, more effective, and — as much as I hate to say it — perhaps even more fun? There is. It's called visual thinking, and it's what this book is all about: solving problems with pictures."*

After discovering Roam's book, I decided to doodle again. Once a prolific doodler and drawer, I had become inactive in lectures and similar settings, often forgetting what was said. Taking notes felt too cumbersome, and I often missed words and ideas. I decided to give doodling another shot. Instead of focusing on specifics, I would focus on concepts, key words and ideas.

Since 2011, I have been actively promoting doodling in my design classes, making a deal with my students, saying to them, "Doodle to your heart's content, but in return I want you to doodle the content of my lectures." They are skeptical at first, but they soon realize that doodling is better than having a quiz. I reap the benefits of doodling, and by allowing them to doodle — with the requirement that it be based on the class' content — they become more informed of the topic and they engage in more meaningful conversations about design.

40. http://www.danroam.com/the-back-of-the-napkin/

A designer's best friend: a sketchpad.

The typographic novices in my classes naturally start to apply the principles of visual hierarchy and organization, grouping ideas either by importance or by category. They will group ideas with lines, boxes, marks and more. Headings and lecture titles might be made larger, more ornate or bolder, and key concepts might be visually punctuated. It is fascinating how natural and almost second-nature the idea of visual hierarchy is to all of us. The learning curve of typography is steep for some of us, but doodling and sketchnotating really makes it easier to grasp. Below are some doodles by students in my classes.
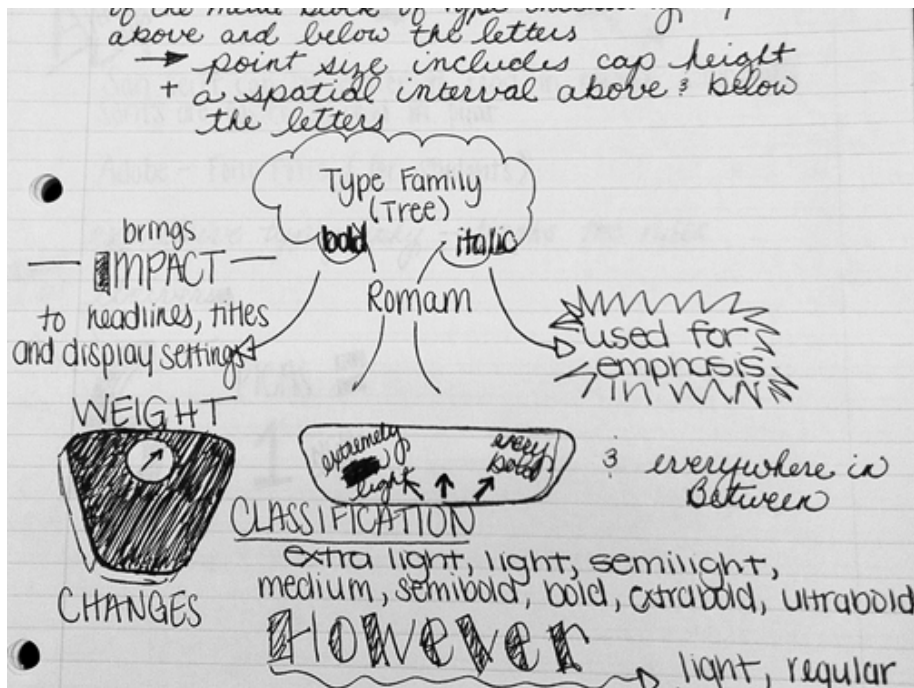
Doodle by Alisa Roberts from my "Introduction to Typography" course.

By picking out concepts, ideas and topics, the students start to establish a hierarchy by making visual groupings and start to use visual punctuation. By the time I assign work on typographic hierarchy, the sketches tend to show more astuteness. Transferring these sketches to the computer is a challenge for those new to typography, but once they naturally understand the relationships in what they are doing, they start to make smarter design decisions.
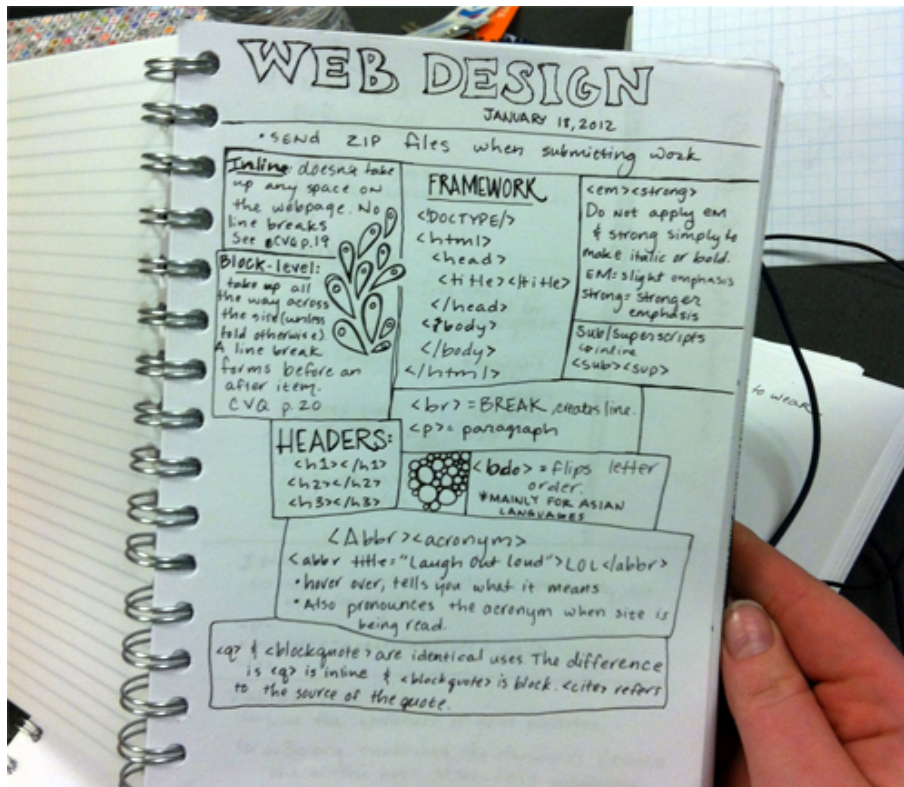
Doodle by Aubrie Lamb from my "Identity and Branding" course.
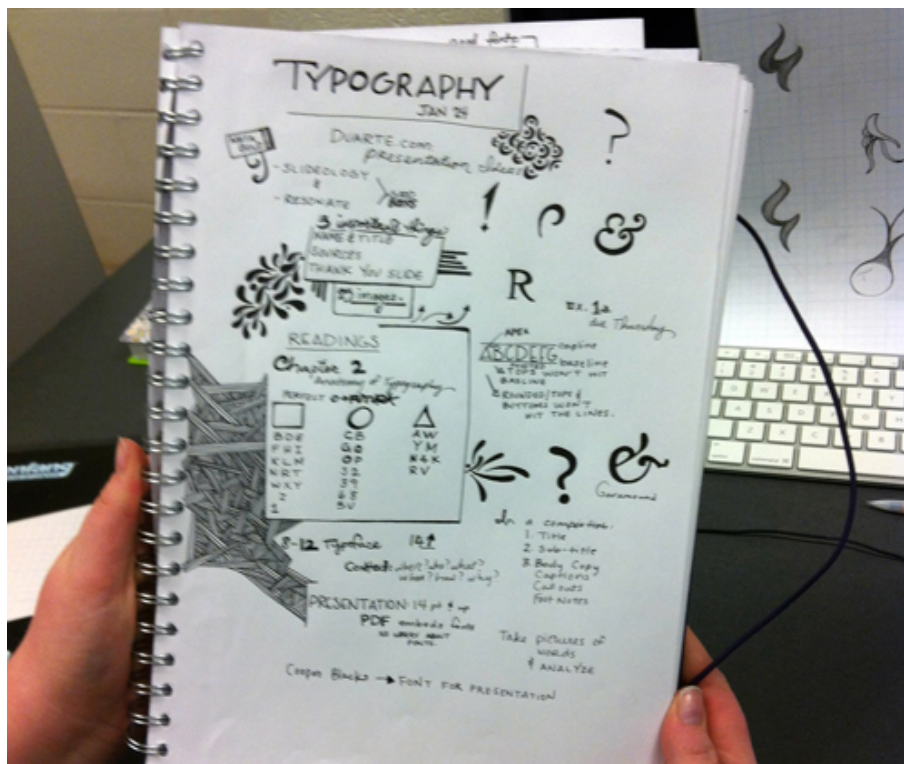
Another by Aubrie Lamb from the same course.

As we have seen, doodling has many benefits, beyond what designers as visual communicators and problem solvers use it for. Doodling also

helps our brain function and process data. Those of us who doodle should do so without feeling guilty or ashamed. We are in good company. Historically[41], doodlers have included presidents, business moguls and accomplished writers. Designer, educator and speaker Jason Santa Maria says this[42]:

> *"Sketchbooks are not about being a good artist. They're about being a good thinker."*

Doodling, drawing pictures and sketchnotating are about using visual skills to solve problems, to understand our world and to respond effectively. So, what are you waiting for? Doodle! ❧

Further Reading

- "Sketchnotes 101: The Basics of Visual Note-Taking[43]," Craighton Berman, Core77

- "Why Graphic Designers Should Learn to Draw[44]," Douglas Bonneville, BonFX

- "Get Smart: Doodle![45]," TimTim

- "Sketchnotes and Visual Note-Taking[46]," Eva-Lotta Lamm, SlideShare The slides are from Lamm's talk at WebExpo Prague 2010.

- "Sketch, Sketch, Sketch[47]," Joshua Brewer, 52 Weeks of UX

- "Idle Doodles by Famous Authors[48]," Emily Temple, FlavorWire

Unless otherwise stated, images are from Stock.XCHNG.

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41. http://flavorwire.com/147177/idle-doodles-by-famous-authors
42. http://v4.jasonsantamaria.com/articles/pretty-sketchy/
43. http://www.core77.com/blog/sketchnotes/sketchnotes_101_the_basics_of_visual_note-taking_19678.asp
44. http://bonfx.com/why-graphic-designers-should-learn-to-draw/
45. http://www.timtim.com/article/detail/id/46
46. http://www.slideshare.net/evalottchen/sketchnotes-visual-note-taking-webexpo-prague-2010
47. http://52weeksofux.com/post/346650933/sketch-sketch-sketch
48. http://www.flavorwire.com/147177/idle-doodles-by-famous-authors

Ignorance Is Bliss For A Creative Mind

BY KEN REYNOLDS ❧

The saying "Ignorance is bliss" originates in Thomas Gray's poem "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" (1742). The quote goes:

> *"Where ignorance is bliss,*
> *'tis folly to be wise."*

Face it: you were better off not knowing that, weren't you?

Generally speaking, ignorance is a detestable state of mind. The more knowledge you have, the better equipped you are to deal with life. But ignorance itself doesn't equal stupidity. For instance, I view myself as someone who is smart enough to realize his huge capacity for stupidity. I know there are massive gaps in my cultural and general knowledge. I would define my intellectual state as, at times, unaware. But who am I kidding? In some areas of life, I'm just plain ignorant, even if not by choice.

Many people would view this as a flaw or a hindrance, but it's simply human nature. There isn't a person on this planet who knows everything, despite the plenty I've met who think they do!

The fact that I'm aware enough to recognize my own ignorance gives me an immediate advantage, especially in design or any creative pursuit.

A lack of knowledge in any field can be a fantastic catalyst for learning. If I have the opportunity to work on a project that involves a subject I know nothing about, I jump at it! It's a perfect chance to fill in a few of my mental chasms.

Still, while I may benefit from this opportunity, is it fair for the client?

I would argue that they benefit more than I do. How many clients have you had who have asked for a *"fresh"* approach to their industry or business?

A person who knows nothing about a subject is far more likely to approach it from a new angle than someone who is hindered by the *"received wisdom."*

Obviously, this can be risky in some projects, and the level of success will vary from person to person. To be an effective *"clueless"* designer, you need the self-confidence to learn quickly and proficiently

enough to accomplish the given task. You need an almost insatiable thirst to learn and improve. Most importantly, you need to feel comfortable looking stupid.

Here are a few tips for embracing and using ignorance to your advantage.

Never Be Afraid to Show Your Ignorance

A lot of people fear looking stupid. People don't like to look weak or ignorant, especially in the workplace. This might have to do with the atmosphere of competition at most offices and studios. Freelancers perhaps have a bit more freedom, but appearing less than brilliant in front of a client is never a good thing.

Let me give you a small example of ignorance in the workplace. You are asked by your boss to make copies of a document and get them back to him in half an hour. This isn't strictly your job, and on the few occasions that you were shown how to use the photocopier, you were so distracted by the odd scuff marks on the paper tray that you didn't really take in the instructions. What do you do?

- **Option 1**
  Wing it. Tell your boss it's no problem. Try your best to complete the task. You'll probably end up screaming at the photocopier and giving it a good kick (which explains how those scuff marks got there). Ultimately, you fail to complete the simple task because you were to proud to admit your ignorance.

- **Option 2**
  Tell your boss that it's no problem. Then spend the next half hour going from person to person in the office asking for help. You might get the job done, but you've displayed your ignorance to everyone in the office.

- **Option 3**
  Come straight out and admit to your boss that you don't know how to use the photocopier. Then ask if someone could show you how to do it. You might look stupid for five minutes, but you would make a worse impression by not completing the simple task in a timely manner.

Options 2 and 3 are fine in my eyes, but I'd always go for the full-out admission of ignorance. I don't see any reason to be embarrassed for not knowing something, as long as you are willing to learn and improve.

Ask Questions (Endlessly!)

This one goes hand in hand with the last example, because asking a question is in itself an admission of not knowing something.

Questions come in all shapes and sizes: silly, obvious, insightful and, my personal favorite, awkward.

Asking a question that seems silly or obvious is better than leaving it unasked. Otherwise, you might be starting a job based on your own unfounded assumptions about the client and their business, possibly resulting in a lot of wasted time and a big slice of embarrassment.

When you're working with clients, questions are good. It shows you have a healthy interest in the subject. You display a desire to learn and to discover things for the client's benefit. Questions are the easiest way to gain insight into how a person thinks. The tricky part is figuring out the right questions to ask.

With plenty of practice, a good deal of experience and a total lack of self-consciousness, you will get the most out of the questions you ask.

Self-Initiated Learning

Recognizing the things you are ignorant about does no good if you are unwilling to improve yourself. Ignorance is only useful when used as a motivation for self-improvement. It should be used as a tool.

To a certain extent, we begin every new project with a certain amount of ignorance, even if the subject matter is a passion of ours. Every job and every client is different from the last, so a certain amount of learning is always needed. But this process can work on a grander scale.

Think of something you have no deep knowledge of. For me, it's sailing. If I were asked to design a logo for a company that makes sails, I would be quite stumped on where to start. This is the fight or flight moment of the design process. You can either dig in and find a solution or give up, citing lack of market knowledge. The latter is not a good

enough excuse. For starters, your client has enough knowledge of the market for both of you. It's up to you to get it out of them.

Then it's time to cast a wider net. After recognizing your ignorance, it's time to do something about it. This means tackling the dirty part of design, which people tend to ignore, even though it would be impossible to create without it: research.

Immerse yourself in the project and everything it touches on. Look at the company's competitors and its previous images and logos. Spend days in the client's offices and shops. It's up to your creative mind to see something in there that no one else sees, and then figure out the best way to communicate that. If you go in with a blank slate, with no pre-conceptions or typical assumptions, you will be shocked by how much easier it is to soak up information.

Be Honest About What You Don't Know (Yet)

One of the principles on which I try to run my business is honesty, especially concerning the things I can't do or don't know about. Hopefully, this won't seem odd to most of you. If I decide to outsource a task, I will always tell the client. I will make the case that I don't have the expertise to do the task, so I've passed it on to someone who I've worked with before, someone I trust. I always give the client the option to contact them directly, but more often than not, they would rather pay me to be the middleman.

Don't get me wrong. I don't burst into client meetings and confess all of my shortcomings. But if asked about something that I don't know about, I'll be up front and honest about it. Displaying my ignorance in this way helps me build trust and, hopefully, lasting relationships.

I treasure the things I don't know yet, because each is a learning experience. If you ever think you've learned everything, then you've just stopped trying. And if a creative type has stopped trying to learn, then their work will become stale and repetitive.

Ignorance needs to be embraced. Whenever you discover a gap in your knowledge, view it as an opportunity to learn something new, and

sell it as a genuine chance to create something surprising and unique for the client. ❧

The Big Think: Breaking The Deliverables Habit

BY ROBERT HOEKMAN JR ❧

Right there in the center of my boilerplate for User experience strategy and design proposals is a section that I glare at with more resentment each time I complete it. It's called "Deliverables," and it's there because clients expect it: a list of things I'll deliver for the amount of money that I specify further down in the document. Essentially, it distills a UX project down to a goods-and-services agreement: you pay me a bunch of money and I'll give you this collection of *stuff*. But that isn't what I signed up for as a UX strategist. Frankly, I don't give a damn about deliverables. And neither should you.

(Image: Snoggle Media[49])

Case in point: for months now, I've worked consistently with a particular client for whom I do almost no work on actual design artifacts (wireframes, prototypes, etc.). Rather, I hold frequent calls with the main designer and developer to go over what they've done with the product (i.e. poke holes in it) and what they should do next (i.e. help prioritize). Some days, they hand me wireframes; sometimes, a set of comps; other days, live pages. Whatever the artifact, our purpose is always to assess what we have now versus where we need to get to. We

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49. http://www.flickr.com/photos/snogglemedia/6254591338/sizes/z/in/photostream/

never talk about the medium in which these design ideas will be implemented; we focus strictly on the end result, the vision of which we established long ago and continually refer to. And in working this way, we've been able to solve countless significant problems and dramatically improve the client's website and products.

It's not about deliverables. It's about results.

Understanding why this works depends on understanding the real role of the designer and the deliverables they create.

A UX Strategist's Work

First, consider the role of a UX professional compared to what we actually spend most of our time doing.

What we are *hired* to do — the reason why companies seek out UX'ers in the first place — is what my friend Christina Wodtke calls "The Big Think": we're hired to solve problems and develop strategies, determining what needs to be achieved and making design decisions that help to achieve it. But because companies have a compulsive need to quantify The Big Think, UX' end up getting *paid* to create cold hard deliverables. Our very worth, in fact, is tied intrinsically to how well and how quickly we deliver the *stuff*. Heck, we're often even judged by how good that stuff looks, even when much of it goes unseen by a single user.

Is this how it should be done? Absolutely not.

Hiring a UX professional to create wireframes is like hiring a carpenter to swing a hammer. We all know that the hammer-swinging is not what matters: it's the table, the cabinet, the deck. Clients don't hire us to wield hammers, but to create fine furniture. It's not the process they need or the tools, but the end result.

In theory, companies understand this. In practice, not so much. They cling to the deliverables.

The Essence of Deliverables

So let's look at what a design deliverable really is.

The purpose of a design artifact, whether a wireframe, prototype or sketch, is to illustrate our thinking. Pure and simple. It's part of the thinking process. It's also, according to some, a record to look back on later to aid when reconsidering decisions, tweaking the design and so on. But let's be honest: people rarely look back at these documents once the design grows legs and starts walking on its own. More often than not, significant changes result in new wireframes, and minor tweaks

are made on coded screens, not back in the deliverables that we were paid so much to create.

(Image: HikingArtist.com[50])

Most of the time, design artifacts are throwaway documents. A design can and will change in a thousand little ways after these documents are supposed to be "complete." In terms of allocating time and budget, design resulting from UX initiatives can be downright wasteful. They can even get in the way; designers (UX or otherwise) could get attached to ideas as they transition to functioning screens, precisely when they need to be most flexible. Every design is speculation until it's built.

Like it or not — and some of you will surely disagree — we can survive with fewer deliverables. Of course, what this looks like depends on how you work.

Breaking the Deliverables Habit

The most important parts of any UX project are the vision of the end result, the requirements for it, the design itself, and a way to measure its success.

Interestingly, only one of these parts involves complicated design artifacts. The vision is merely a statement that describes the purpose and desired outcome. Requirements are but a list. Success metrics? Another list. The only part that involves more than a simple, concise summary is the design itself. And nothing requires that process to involve

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50. http://www.flickr.com/photos/32066106@N06/4885853065/

layer upon layer of wireframes, prototypes and comps before going to code. (More on how to change this in a minute.)
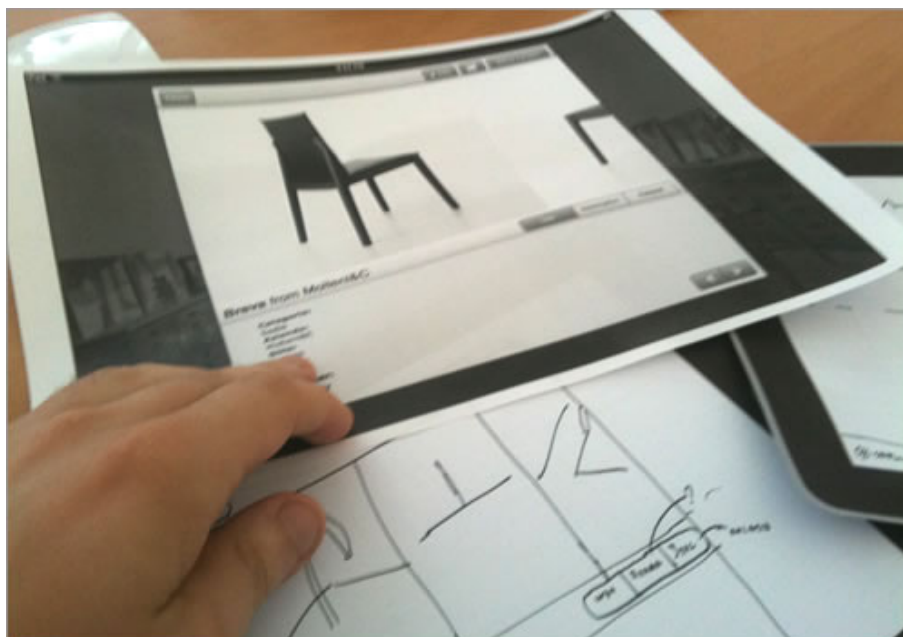
(Image: *lucamascaro*[51])

Comps, of course, are a must when graphics are involved; in addition to necessarily being the source of the graphic files to be used in the actual design, they define the visual language, the specifics of layout, spacing, typography, etc. Creating wireframes, on the other hand, as quick as it is compared to creating coded screens, can take much longer than going from sketch to code. So, consider cutting the load down to what's most essential and useful: the interaction model.

In other words, you don't have to create wireframes and comps for every idea or every screen; just for the toughest screens, the ones that define the most crucial interaction paradigms. Use them to iron out the model, not every last detail.

It's time for more design and less *stuff*. Consider the revised process below.

1. STRATEGY DOCUMENT

Distill your research on users and the business down to a short vision statement on what the user's experience should be like. Add to this a list of design criteria (specific guidelines or principles for the design), as well as success metrics (how you will know that the design is achieving

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51. http://www.flickr.com/photos/lucamascaro/4811714916/sizes/l/in/photostream/

your goals). You should be able to do all of this within just a couple of pages; and keeping it short will help to ensure that everyone reads it.

2. ACTIVITY REQUIREMENTS

Write a list of tasks that users should be able to perform, and functions that the system should perform that will benefit users. Prioritize the ones that will appear on the screen.

3. SKETCH

To apply the design criteria and meet (or exceed!) the requirements, sketch a dozen or so ideas — in Keynote, on paper or on a white-board — and then take pictures of the sketches. Sketch the toughest, most complicated and most representative screens first. These will frequently determine the interaction model for most of the design.

4. COMP AND CODE

If you're not doing the visual design yourself, collaborate with the graphic designer to iron out the details of the most representative screens and any other screens that require graphics. At the same time, collaborate with the developers to identify issues and areas for improvement throughout the process.

Forget the lengthy strategy documentation. Forget the deck of wireframes. Just short summaries (long enough to get the point across, but short enough to be able to do quickly), sketches and comps, limited to the things that need to be brought to a boil in Photoshop. Skimping on the deliverables can save a lot of time.

Untying Deliverables From Project Fees

Of course, sufficing with this shorter list of artifacts and untying deliverables from your fees require a change to the process. In short, we need to shift the emphasis from documentation to collaboration.

Set the expectation from the beginning that you will work with stakeholders collaboratively. They will help you think through the UX strategy at every step. You will not be a wireframe monkey. Rather, you'll focus on The Big Think. And you'll do it together. If the client is unwilling or unable to spend time and energy on the strategy and design as you develop it, find another client. A client who is too busy to get involved in the process is a client who doesn't care about their customers.

Collaboration is essential to great work. No one person can think of everything or always have the best ideas for every aspect of a product. It takes a group to make this happen. This might require you to occasionally browbeat the client into being available for frequent discussions on new and developing ideas, but the result will be infinitely better. And with the added input, you can focus less on stacks of deliverables and more on converting rough ideas into comps, prototypes and/or functioning pages that give undeniable weight to those ideas.

In practical terms, this means working closely and constantly with the visual designers and developers (assuming you're not doing this work yourself). And it means frequently reviewing what's being done and discussing at a deep level and at every step how to make improvements. It means talking through every detail and making sure someone has the job of being the resident skeptic, questioning every idea and decision in the interest of pushing the design further.

Break The Habit

By focusing on The Big Think, the deliverables will matter less. And for a UX professional, focusing on beautiful products is a whole lot more rewarding than dwelling on the step by step of deliverables. On your next time out, consider breaking the deliverables habit. Go from idea to code in as few steps as possible. Hefty amounts of collaboration can cure the sickly feeling that you're an overpaid wireframer, empowering you to build designs that you *know* are killer work. ❧

Changing Perspective: A New Look At Old Problems

BY STUART SILVERSTEIN ❧

> *Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.*
> — *Albert Einstein*

There is an old story of blind men and an elephant. The blind men all meet and are asked to describe the elephant. One says that an elephant is long and skinny like a snake. The other says that the first doesn't know what he is talking about and says an elephant is like the trunk of a tree, round and thick. The third says they are both wrong, that an elephant is wide and circular like a giant disc.

In some versions, they stop talking, start listening and collaborate to "see" the full elephant. When a sighted man walks by and sees the elephant, they also learn they are blind.

It doesn't take us very long to figure out that each of the men is talking about a different part of the elephant (trunk, leg and ear, respectively). The men are blind, so they fail to take in the *whole* elephant. Because their experience was limited to a certain part of the elephant, they assumed that the elephant was the part they could see. One could only feel that the elephant was a trunk, so he thought it was like a snake.

Being a creative is often like being a blind person. We are dealing with a problem that we cannot see. We talk about it, we look at it, and then we try to solve it understanding only the parts that we can see. The

problem is that we can get in a rut and start seeing the same problem and offering the same solution. What happens, though, when, either by choice or by circumstance, we need to come up with new solutions? What happens when we need to innovate? Innovation by its very nature entails coming up with a new approach to an old problem.

To come up with a new approach to an old problem, we often need to look at the problem differently. If we do the same things, we will get the same results. If we use our same bag of tricks, we will end up with the same magic show. In my experience, when a new solution was required, the best thing I could do (whether I was stuck or not) was to change my perspective on the problem. This could mean looking at new visuals, asking different questions or simply refining my language. Once you have explored new angles of a problem, be they visual, functional or strategic, you will often see something new, which will set you off on the road to creativity and true innovation. When all you see is the ear and leg, you usually just need the trunk to complete your view of the elephant.

A Little Neuropsychology

To answer the question of how a different perspective leads to a creative solution, we need to understand a little neuropsychology and what happens in the brain when you are solving a problem. According to Jonah Leherer in his book *Imagine*, the "A-ha" moment is essentially an abstract connection that the right brain makes between two disparate ideas. History has countless stories of people having amazingly innovative ideas from seemingly insignificant events. One of my favorites is the story of how Robert Sherman came up with the song "A Spoonful of Sugar" when his son came home from school one day after having his blood taken (they had given him a cube of sugar). Another story is Newton theorizing about gravity after an apple dropped on his head, or Archimedes and the bathtub, and on and on. Some event triggers an idea and the brain makes a connection to creatively solve the problem.

How does this process work? When you are faced with a puzzle, be it visual or functional, you solve it by first running through all of your usual solutions that are obvious — such as the e-commerce layout that you have used a million times, design patterns that you know, the button style that you love, the font that always works, etc. You first engage your left brain by recalling the obvious tried and true solutions. Sometimes these ideas work, sometimes they don't. As soon as your left brain has exhausted all ideas that don't work, you get frustrated and you hit the wall. The wall is the inability of your left brain to create new con-

nections from your old ideas. You are unable to connect the old ideas with fresh ones, to find different solutions with the same methods. The only way to get unstuck is to try to see the problem in a new way.

At the point of total frustration, your right brain engages. Your right brain solves problems with images. Once the left brain has gotten out of the way in total frustration, your right brain is able to freely associate in the language that it knows: pictures. Then, it hits — the connection is made, and all of a sudden, like magic, you are off and running, and everything falls into place. What you have just done is create a new connection in your brain, literally.

It usually happens at the most unlikely of times — when a participant in a research session says something that tips you off, or when your spouse shows you something, or when a friend tells you of a frustration and how they solved it. It comes unexpectedly, and two different objects are connected to create something new. Ultimately, most of the research and strategy phase is simply there to create these "A-ha" moments, which we then execute on once we reach the concepting phase.

How To Gain New Perspective

Below are a few of the tricks I have learned to inspire creative thought and to look at problems differently in order to help the brain create connections. While the first few suggestions are mainly for visual design, I find all of these useful for figuring out feature sets and defining scope, and they are completely appropriate for UX and visual designers alike.

PRINT OUT VISUALS

Printing a bunch of stuff and throwing it up on a wall is the single best way to see a new solution to your problem. Recognizing patterns is much easier when you are able to see visuals in close proximity than when relying on memory. Print-outs laid out in close proximity help the brain to make connections and generate ideas instead of merely retaining information.

What to print out? Two things in particular help: competitors and inspiration.

For competitors, if you are working on a product detail page for an e-commerce website, pick out 10 to 15 product pages from competitors and print them out on 11 × 17-inch paper, and look for things that work well. Also, observe things that do not work well. Your competitors have done you the good service of trying ideas before you, and you get to test drive their websites and evaluate their ideas without putting in months of development. Group together methods and design ideas that work well for competitors — and note your findings. There will also be a lot of failures to learn from, so note those as well. Seeing what is wrong on other websites could cause you to try something completely new. Seeing the cliches will free you from those tired ideas and allow your brain to run free on different ideas. Even if you are not in "competition" with anybody else, find the nearest verticals and you will make connections faster.

For inspiration, take 10 to 15 pages with various UI elements, print out the pages, cut out the pieces that you want to use, and put them on a board. Record your ideas on sticky notes, After doing this, you will start to see patterns, which you can use to visualize a solution. If you have done this and you are still stuck, put up some other relevant inspiration — be it a vibe, a similar layout or a design pattern — and see what happens. Just keep printing stuff out and rearranging it until you see something. When printing out inspiration, include some things that are totally different from what you saw in competitors to avoid copying what they did.

REFINE YOUR LANGUAGE

People often describe the same thing using different language. Individuals will get attached to the words they use to describe a problem, and then the group will get stuck on semantics. This is especially true when

defining new products and features. We'll often use a different word or two, and then everything will freeze. It could be the language used to describe user instructions, or it could be the label for a button. It could also be your names for particular objects in your project or particular attributes of those objects. Language is incredibly powerful. As visual designers, we might not be as tuned into it as we need to be, and we'll shrug it off as the domain of copywriters. But copy and visuals are intertwined so intricately that separating one from the other in Web design is impossible.

So, we need to make sure we've got exactly the right language, and we need to experiment. Start by changing the language on the page or refining the instructions. Additionally, you could labels things that did not previously have labels or update existing labels.

If you are working with a copywriter, get them involved in refining any language issues you have with the website. They will be a fabulous source of ideas on language, product terminology and refining instructions.

Language can also block teams. Using different words or phrases for the same thing, especially when working on products that don't yet exist, can lead to internal confusion. Using different terminology will divide a team rather than unify it. So, having team members define their use of words could help. If you step back and take a deep breath, you might find that you have already solved the problem and just needed to clarify the language in order for everyone to see it.

ASK DIFFERENT QUESTIONS

If you are stuck, it is probably because you need an answer. Trouble is, you might not be asking the right question. If you ask the same question over and over, you will most likely get the same answer. So, how do you rephrase the question or ask a new question to gain new insight?

Sometimes the problem is visual. Something in the layout is distracting or causing it not to work, so you need to address a different part of the layout. The root of the problem might be not the element you are working on but the surrounding elements. Here are a few things to try:

- Delete or remove other items on the art board and see what happens. This could reveal a solution to the problem.

- Try an illustration instead of a photo.

- Change colors.

- Break the grid.

- Emphasize different parts of the page.

- Try a whole new approach to the navigation, not just a new menu bar.

DOCUMENT DATA IN A NEW WAY

On a project I was on, we were having trouble pinpointing how to compare feature sets between products. We had several options but kept going around in circles debating on the right direction. Finally, I found a new way to display the comparisons and tried it out as an experiment. Wham! It showed the information in a new way that made sense to the team, and we all got it. So if you are working with data, how can you display or visualize the data in a new way? Could you look at new parameters? Could you reformat your deliverables? Looking at the data in different formats enables you to see new things.
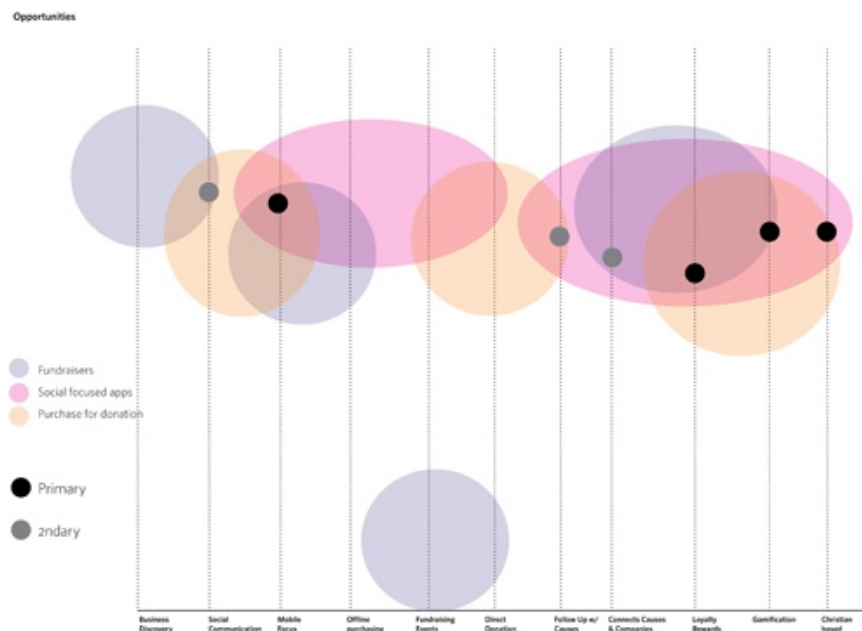
The magical data visualization: overlaying rankings of competitors based on key opportunities.

ANALYZE SOMETHING NEW

With there being so many techniques and models to display data, exhausting the entire bag of tricks in every project is impossible. If you are looking to see the problem differently, put the problem in a new model: a storyboard, a mental model, a new analytics report, perhaps even changing the format of the data. You will see different things with different models. It will add more detail to the strategy and help you understand the design challenge in the big picture, helping you discov-

er new risks and solutions. Adding data models could also help the business' decision-makers and team members uncover crucial risks earlier in the process.

ZOOM OUT TO THE NEXT LARGEST CONTEXT

Looking at the big picture can also lead to a new way of seeing the problem. When a problem is very specific, look at how it fits into the next largest context. In product or Web design, this could mean storyboarding how the app or website is to be used, including the location and psychographics of the user and what they are trying to accomplish. Better understanding how the business works might also help. Understanding design in the context of how the app fits into the big picture of the business can help you refine the strategy and eliminate options to arrive at a solution more quickly.

Zooming out sometimes helps me realize that I am asking the wrong question. If you are asking how your problem (say, one about a feature set or product requirements) fits into the big picture, you might find that the big picture is not big enough and has to be expanded (such as by revising the strategy or the user flow). Perhaps the feature set or product requirements don't make sense because you haven't zoomed out wide enough and don't understand the product in context. Once you look at it in the big picture, your entire team might realize that its approach is wrong — or perhaps right!

Final Thoughts

When approaching your next project, try to build in new ways to look at the problem. We've explored just a few here. You could also try new project workflows (such as lean or agile) or new tools (such as eye-tracking or usability tests or different software) or new music or whatever.

Going back to our story of the blind men, where is your team blind? Where can you look to make this elephant a little clearer. Design work is very much about feeling your way around and imagining the elephant. By looking at different dimensions (data, competitors, inspiration, language, context), you are able to see a problem more three-dimensionally. No design challenge is so simple that it lacks additional facets for exploration. You might just find the "A-ha" moment you were looking for or discover a major innovation as Newton did or uncover something small that allows you to focus and prioritize your team.

Remember, if you do the same thing, you will usually get the same results. Conversely, if you try new techniques, you may never go back.

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Collaging: Getting Answers To The Questions You Don't Know To Ask

BY KYLE SOUCY ❧

When conducting user research, we all know that asking the right questions is just as important as how you ask them, but how do you know exactly what questions to ask? What if the discussion topic is very personal? How do you get a complete stranger to open up? There is a better way to conduct an in-depth interview, and it doesn't involve a clipboard. Just imagine what you could discover if the participant's answers weren't limited to a predetermined set of questions. This is where collaging can help.

Collaging is a projective technique by which participants select images that represent how they feel about a particular topic. The participants then explain to the moderator the reason they chose each image. The collage becomes an instrument through which participants are able to express needs and feelings that they might not otherwise have been able to articulate. This information enables us to better understand the user's world and how to design for it.

A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words

So, you might be asking yourself, "Why should I have people make collages, rather than just ask them point-blank questions about their needs and feelings?" It's a great question, and the answer is, sometimes the most valuable answer is not in response to a direct question, but one that's elicited. An image can be a powerful stimulus that evokes a strong response, triggers a memory and draws out feelings that exist below a person's own level of awareness.

Gerald Zaltman, author of *How Customers Think*, states that "95% of our thoughts and feelings are unconscious." There is just so much that we carry around in thought but never share until something triggers it. When we ask a participant a set of pre-defined questions, we are predetermining the scope of the interview. Instead, by presenting a visual stimulus, we are letting the participant start the conversation and bring up topics that are meaningful to them.

There are also times when you don't know the right question to ask. Sometimes you do, but you don't know how to ask it. Depending on

what you're researching, participants might have difficulty opening up to you. The research topic might be too personal, controversial or sensitive for the participant to just open up and start discussing with a complete stranger. The collage becomes a catalyst for discussion, an ice-breaker.

WHAT YOU CAN LEARN

Collaging is a method of building empathy with your users. You gain an emotional understanding of the user's feelings, problems, state of mind and so on, which is imperative to know when designing for them. Collaging can also help you better understand the user's needs, in turn helping you to address them in your product.

The wonderful thing about this method is that participants might reveal stories that prompt a line of questioning about a topic that you never expected to explore (as we'll see in the examples below). You honestly don't know what you will learn from each participant's collage.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES

Collaging is not new. The method has been well used to conduct qualitative marketing research for at least 40 years. Its use in marketing has mainly been to assess feelings towards brands and products. Other projective techniques — tests such as the Rorschach, word and sentence completion, draw-a-person, and thematic apperception — date back to the early 19th century. All of these methods are rooted in psychology, but their application has expanded to other fields such as advertising, management, sociology, anthropology and, more recently, user experience (UX), to name a few. Collaging as a user research method has yet to be widely adopted in our industry, but I've seen a steady increase in its use and popularity over the past few years.

Conducting A Collaging Exercise

Listed below are all the steps necessary to conduct your own collaging study. Let's walk through them together.

1. CHOOSE YOUR TOPIC OF INTEREST

The collaging exercise should focus on a specific topic. You will be asking participants to choose pictures that reflect how they feel about this topic. For example, if I were redesigning a website, I might ask the participant,

"Select pictures that reflect how you would and would not want the new website to greet you."

You could word this in a lot of different ways, such as,

"Create a story about how you would want the website to communicate with you. What qualities should it have? What qualities should it not have?"

Or, to learn more about a participant's day-to-day struggle with a problem, you could simply say,

"Select pictures that reflect your experience with using [x]."

2. CREATE A COLLAGE BOARD AND GET PICTURES

You will need a board or a large piece of paper to which the participant can tape their pictures. It doesn't need to be fancy. In the past, I have just used 11 × 17-inch ledger paper. If I were asking the participant to create two separate collages, I would divide the paper by drawing a line down the middle. I've seen other people put a target on a collage board and ask participants to stick pictures on the board according to how closely they "hit home" for them. Feel free to be creative here, and find what works best for you.

Example of a completed collage.

Participants will need to be able to choose from a pool of about 150 to 200 pictures. The pool of pictures must be a mixture of random pic-

tures. They should *not* have a running theme (i.e. no pictures of just animals or people or medical scenes or nature, etc). The pool should be a good mixture of all sorts of pictures. You can use stock photography or even pictures clipped from magazines. Here are some online sources of free images:

- Flickr Creative Commons[52],
- morgueFile[53],
- FreePhotosBank[54],
- FreeMediaGoo.com[55],
- FreeDigitalPhotos.net[56].

Print the pictures small enough (approximately 3 × 3 inches) for participants to have plenty of room to put as many as they want in their collage. You'll also want multiple copies of pictures to replace the ones used by participants. In the past, I've printed pictures on stickers, which worked well but was a little more expensive.

3. MODERATE THE STUDY

1. **Set up the room.**
   Lay out all of the pictures on a big long table. Make sure they do not overlap so that the participant can see them all. Put the collage board, some tape and a pen on another table.

2. **Give the topic and instructions.**
   Instruct the participant to pick out at least four or five pictures that reflect how they feel about the given topic. Then ask them to tape those pictures to the collage board, and add a caption to each one explaining why they chose it.

3. **Leave the room.**
   I prefer to leave the room for five to ten minutes to give the participant time to peruse the pictures without feeling any pressure. When I reenter the room, I tell them to take as long as they need and to let me know when they have completed the collage.

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52. http://www.flickr.com/creativecommons/
53. http://morguefile.com/archive/
54. http://freephotosbank.com/
55. http://www.freemediagoo.com/
56. http://www.freedigitalphotos.net/

4. **Discuss the collage.**
The collage is finished. Now comes the fun part! Have the participant explain to you why they chose each picture. This is your opportunity to learn as much as you can about how the participant feels about the topic. Let the collage and the participant guide the interview. Be sure to follow up with questions and to probe deeper when needed and appropriate. Keep in mind that the experience can be very personal and revealing for some participants, depending on the sensitivity of the topic. The collage might make it easy for a participant to open a door that they don't necessarily want to walk through. Be mindful of the participant's comfort level when probing deeper into something personal.

4. CONDUCT ANALYSIS

When conducting your analysis, keep in mind that what's really important is not the pictures they chose, but why they chose them. The analysis and report should focus on what the collage reveals about the participant, not the collage itself. It would be interesting if multiple participants chose the same pictures, but even more interesting if they chose them for the same reasons.

When to Conduct a Collaging Exercise

Consider collaging during the *early* stages of product development, when user requirements are being gathered. The method is also helpful at any time in the product's development if you feel the design team is having trouble understanding and identifying with the users. Sometimes designers need to step back and remember exactly who they are designing for.

As mentioned, this method can be most useful if the topic is sensitive, but it's great for impassive topics, too. Collaging can be used if you just need a fun activity to put the participant at ease and break the ice before a formal interview. For example, I have conducted collaging exercises with cancer patients, with people dealing with chronic pain and even with women about their menstrual cycles and feelings about birth control. On the other hand, I've conducted collages to learn more about people's daily commutes and how they feel about public transportation — much lighter topics.

Collage Examples

The examples below are from collage exercises that I've moderated. Each one shows how a picture can change the line of questioning in an

interview. The topics, which were discussed because of these images, might never have been brought up in a traditional interview.
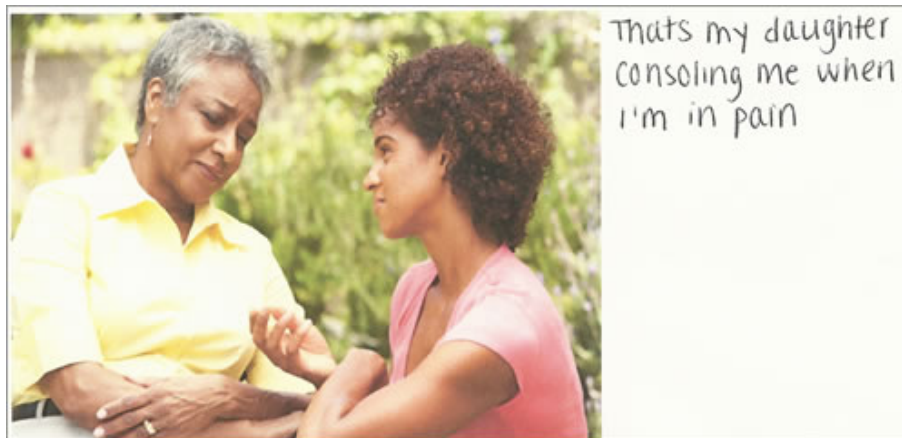
Picture from a collage done for research on people suffering from chronic pain.

The participant wrote the caption, "That's my daughter consoling me when I'm in pain." When discussing this picture, I was able to probe deeper into how the participant's pain affects their family and how they deal with it. We were then able to discuss what role family plays in how they manage their pain.
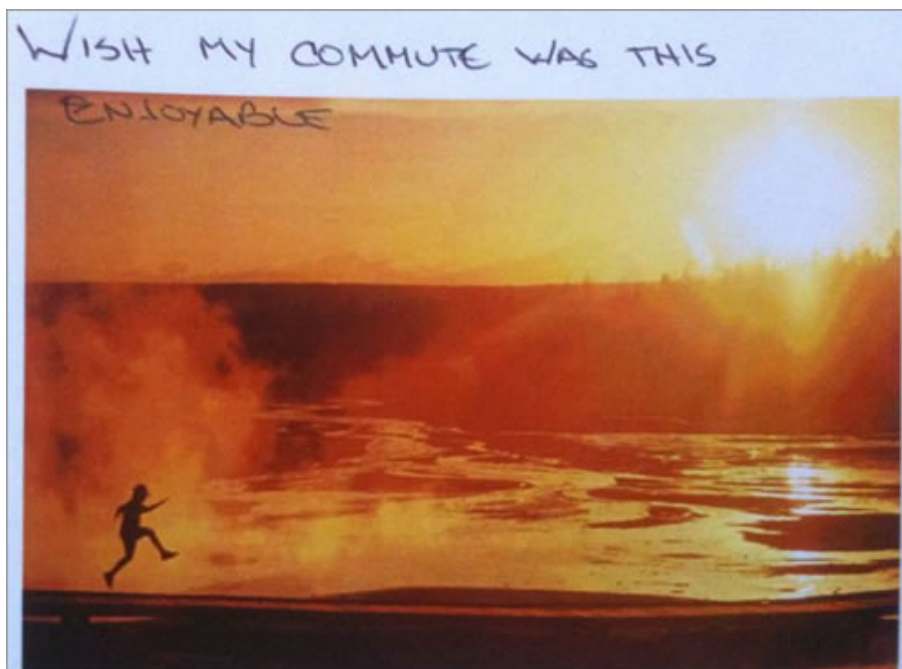
Picture from a collage done for research on how people feel about their commute.

The participant wrote the caption, "Wish my commute was this enjoyable." I was able to follow up with questions about what their ideal commute to work would be like and what they wished they could change about their current commute.

Picture from a collage done for research on cancer patients.

The participant wrote the caption, "Vomiting!" This led to a line of questioning about the side effects of the participant's cancer treatments and their coping mechanisms.

Pitfalls To Avoid

Sometimes a stimulus can be too strong and can disrupt a participant's train of thought and be a distraction. The example below resulted from two participants choosing the same image for the same study:

The participants wrote the captions "Disgusting" and "Gross." Their captions and their reasons for choosing the image were similar, but in no way did they relate to the topic of interest, which was pain management. The participants couldn't explain how the image related to what they felt about the topic, but they still chose it because they were drawn to it and it provoked a strong emotion. In this case, we decided to remove the image from the pool because it was obviously a distraction. When conducting a collaging exercise, remove any pictures that you find derail the participants.

Conclusion

Collaging is a great method for learning more about your end users. Depending on when the collaging study is conducted during the product's development cycle, your findings could do any or all of the following:

- Aid in persona development,

- Be used in early ideation for creating new products,

- Reveal how people feel about the experience of using an existing product,

- Help to define new requirements or enhancements for features.

The method might not be right for every user research initiative, but try it if you feel something is lacking from your traditional interviews. You will be amazed at what you can learn when you throw away the clipboard and let participants direct the interview. ❧

RESOURCES

- *How Customers Think: Essential Insights Into the Mind of the Market*, Gerald Zaltman

- *Customer Intimacy: Pick Your Partners, Shape Your Culture, Win Together*, Fred Wiersema

Creating A Lasting Impression

BY CAROLYN KNIGHT & JESSICA GLASER ❧

We can all agree that the work we do should inform, should be appropriate to the client and their audience and should, of course, look good. But there's a fourth attribute worth aiming for: creating a lasting impression.

Visual memory is fascinating — we often use it without realizing. If, for example, you ask someone how many rooms they have in their home, before answering, most will walk through each room in their mind's eye (possibly even with their eyes closed to aid concentration), adding up as they go. If graphic designers can tap into the benefits of this phenomenon, providing visual triggers to keep the subject matter of their work fresh in the audience's memories, they will surely enjoy advantages.

Categorically describing what makes a design memorable is almost impossible. As with many other aspects of graphics and typography, general principles rather than absolute rules apply. However, aspects of dynamism and the unusual and unexpected more often than not play a significant role in memorable designs. Not all visual mnemonics can be described as being aesthetically pleasing; some designs might be deliberately shocking or provocative in order to be talked about and remembered.

A wide range of variables can affect the probability of a lasting impression, although very often luck, coincidence or timing helps. Striking color combinations, arresting images and clever use of typography and language can be helpful, too, but what captures an audience's imagination and stays with them is frequently more complicated and possibly linked to the element of surprise. This chapter brings together a collection of memorable projects and try to identify how designers have made them unforgettable.

Creating Basic Memories

Professor Bruce Brown of the University of Brighton in the UK is an expert in visual memory. He describes letterforms as "meaningless signs, specifically designed to help us construct permanent memories for otherwise meaningless sounds so being the simplest and most powerful mnemonic system devised." For most of us, learning the alphabet is

part of our early lives and helps us to establish communication skills; in our early years, we work on the connection between signs, symbols and sounds until they are secured in our memory to be retrieved at will and in any order.

We become experts in using these tools to help recover ideas from our memories, bringing them together to create meaning. The importance of this phenomena must not be underestimated, and Professor Brown puts it well when he says:

> *"Without the ability to create memories we would perceive no more than each disjointed second of our isolated existences; we would have no language, no alphabet, no discourse, no identity and no culture."*

Witty And Shocking Designs That Leave A Lasting Impression

There's no doubt that information wrapped in a witty or shocking package is hard to forget, and the following examples are typical. Not only does the memory of them linger, but they're often so powerful that you'll want to share them with friends.

"ALL EYES ON YOU" BY BRITZPETERMANN

"All Eyes on You", a moving window display by Britzpetermann, Bonn, Germany. (View video[57])

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57. http://vimeo.com/33186969

About this project:

Schau, a series of interactive window displays by Britzpetermann, includes a window packed with large roving eyeballs. Each eye follows passers by in a strangely spooky manner that is not easily forgotten.

Why is this design memorable?

Eyes have a powerful significance, which always draw the viewer strongly into an image. So, being confronted by an array of giant eyeballs that seem to be dismembered and floating in space will certainly be very memorable. However, when the eyes appear to make active contact with you personally, following your every move, as if responding not only to your actions but perhaps to your every thought, then they become truly unforgettable.

"HAND MADE TYPE" BY TIEN-MIN LIAO

"Hand Made Type" by Taiwanese designer and illustrator Tien-Min Liao. (View video[58])

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58. http://vimeo.com/38349960

About this project:

"Hand Made Type" is an animated project that shows hand-drawn uppercase letters painted on hands, speedily and subtly converting to their lowercase equivalents in fluid movements.

Why is this design memorable?

This project has such an unusual concept and is fascinating to watch. Looking at the detail in these clever animations, we find ourselves flexing our fingers and trying to mimic Tien-Min Liao's careful movements. We are all able to use our hands in very expressive ways, and the combination of type and hands together is extremely powerful and, therefore, difficult to forget. We are also left wanting to know more: Where did this amazing idea come from, and how long did it take to achieve these marvellous results?

"CHAUMONT POSTER" BY SAGMEISTER

(Large version[59])

Poster by Sagmeister for its exhibit at Chaumont 2004-5.

59. http://media.smashingmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Chaumont_poster_Sagmeisterl.jpg

About this project:

This poster by Stefan Sagmeister (the "king" of highly mnemonic design) contains a number of disturbing images that are very hard to forget. Letterforms that appear to have been extruded from human flesh, people with intertwined body parts, and teeth that appear to have been cut into letters and numbers — all of these create shock responses.

Why is this design memorable?

We defy anyone to look at Sagmeister's typographic front teeth and not run their tongue over their own teeth to check that they are all still complete.

There is something innately fascinating about the human body. We are all very familiar with the curves, creases, surfaces and details of our own physique, but being presented with surprising, even shocking, close-up detail of some of the hidden areas of another person's anatomy can be irresistibly captivating.

AD FOR "CONCORDIA CHILDREN'S SERVICES"

About this project:

In this ad[60] by Young and Rubicam for Concordia Children's Services in the Philippines, the question is asked, "If you don't help feed them, who will?" The advertisement shows babies feeding from a sow like piglets and is intended to shock its audience into appreciating the dreadful plight of the many abandoned babies in Manila.

Why is this design memorable?

Seeing numerous babies in the extraordinary situation[61] of feeding from a pig is initially very arresting and shocking; but for us, the totally unhygienic environment is what really makes us squirm. In most societies, whether rich or poor, babies are treasured, cosseted, loved and kept distant from grime and germs; in this image, the newborns are shown fending for themselves. They are pictured grovelling in the mud and competing with each to feed. We defy anyone not to have a physical response to this ad and hold it in their mind's eye for a long time.

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60. http://media.smashingmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/concordia1.jpg
61. http://media.smashingmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/concordia1.jpg

When Movement And Interaction Make Designs Addictive

The designs showcased in this section have a compulsive quality about them. The imagery is fascinating and appealing, but the interactive nature of each example makes it hard to resist and highly memorable.

"KARLO JURINA SELBSTGESPRÄCHE" BY BRITZPETERMANN
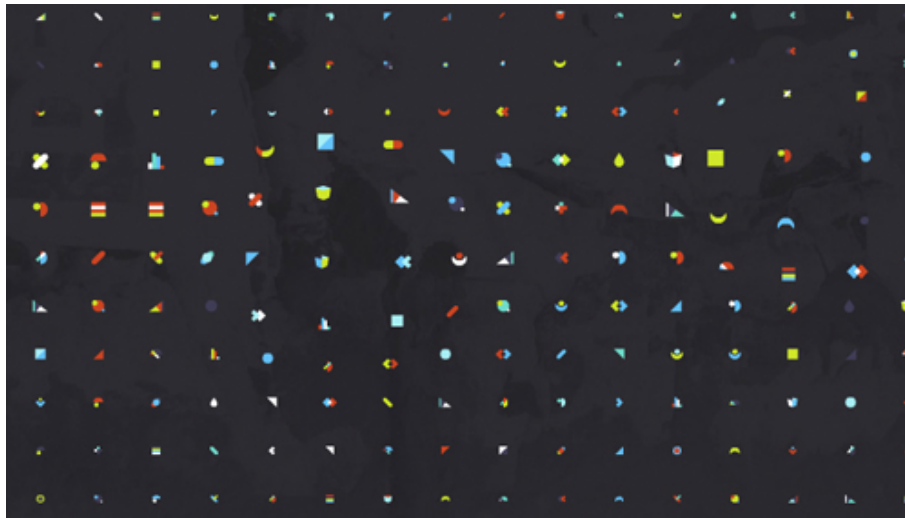
Still shots don't do this project justice. View a behind the scenes video[62] *on Vimeo, or visit the website*[63] *yourself!*

About this project:

Interaction and movement in response to outside stimuli are two aspects that can make Web design really memorable and enjoyable. This album visualization for Karlo Jurina Selbstgespräche by Britzpetermann is truly breathtaking.

Why is this design memorable?

Throughout each of the 15 tracks, a precise movement of carefully positioned, colorful symbols highlights every individual note, causing you to almost believe that you could be, or are, playing every stunning note yourself. The melodies of Jurina's beautiful acoustic guitar will resonate from your computer, while the arrangement of over 300 bright, individual and precisely ordered marks will seem to breath from your screen in response to the rhythm of the composition.

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62. http://vimeo.com/20284754
63. http://www.karlo-jurina.com

The idea of the personal response to the subtleties of sound and rhythm is what comes to the fore with this project, leaving you not only with a strong yet surprisingly subtle visual interpretation of music, but also the strangely satisfying idea that your own personal responses and movements could play a role in creating this wonderful sound.

Try out Selbstgespräche[64] for yourself.

"HIDDEN HEROES" BY GRIMM GALLUN HOLTAPPELS
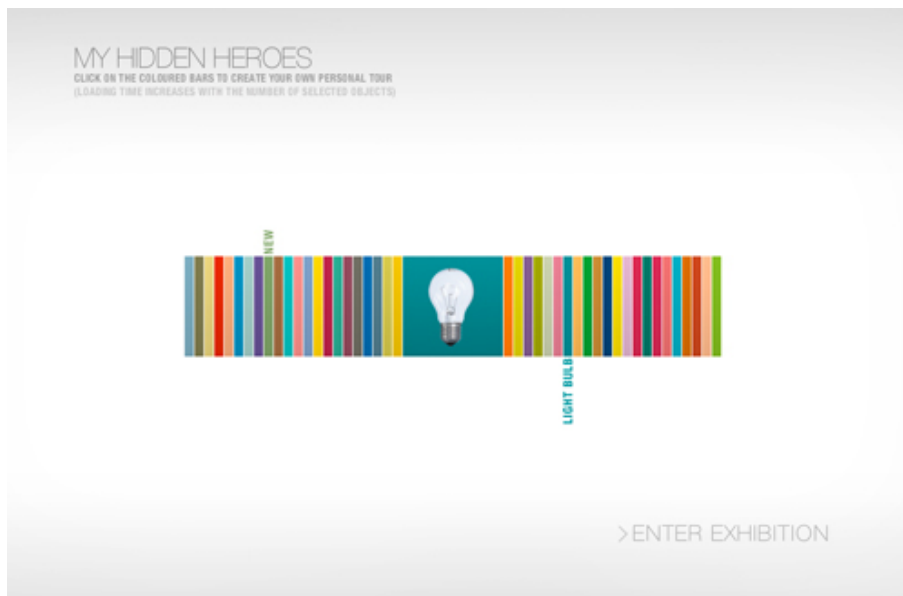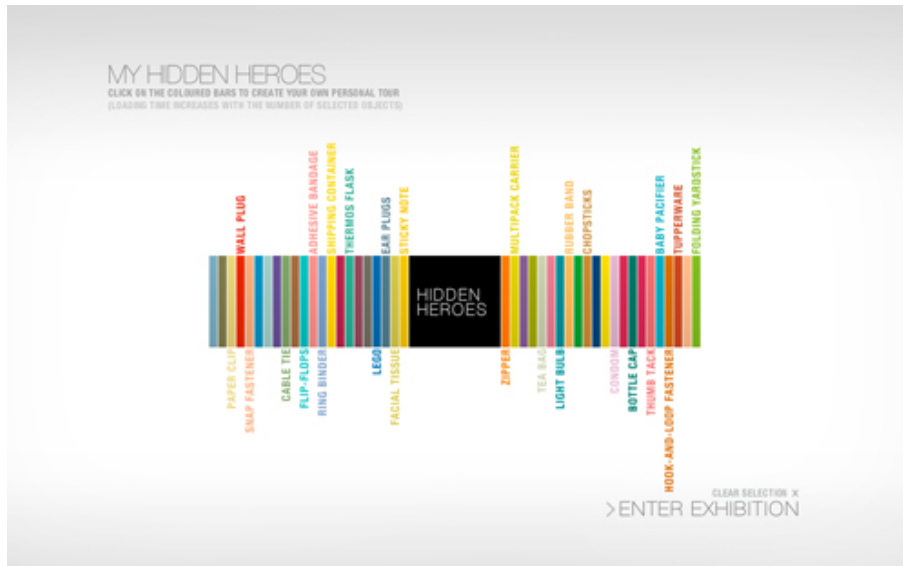
The award-winning "Hidden Heroes" online exhibit, designed by Grimm Gallun Holtappels.

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64. http://www.karlo-jurina.com

About this project:

Who has not at some point looked down at one of the myriad of products that make everyday life easier and thought, "Wow, that's clever. What a simple memorable design." The Hidden Heroes online exhibit, designed by Grimm Gallun Holtappels, pays homage to the zipper, the paperclip and many other such items.

Why is this design memorable?

Interaction with the exhibit is highly pleasurable because it stimulates several of the five senses. The design is beautiful and colorfully pleasing to the eye, while every action of the mouse creates a satisfying response and amusingly memorable sound that transports you right back to personal memories of using a particular Hidden Hero. Our favorite is the Flipflop, designed by Bernd D. Hummel around 1960; great noise — it transports us to sunny days and sand between our toes!

You can experience your own Hidden Hero[65], too!

WEBSITE OF "GRIMM GALLUN HOLTAPPELS"

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65. http://www.hidden-heroes.net/
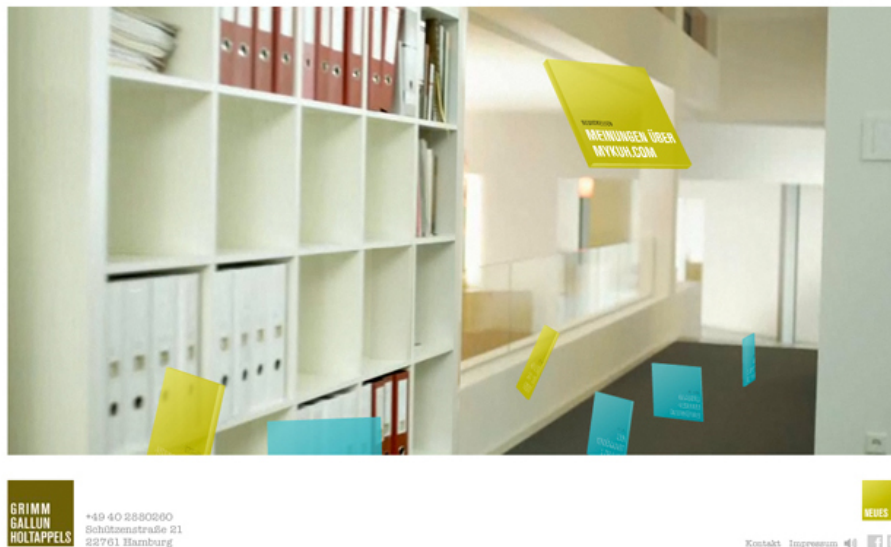
The lively and addictive website of Grimm Gallun Holtappels[66].

About this project:

Grimm Gallun Holtappels has created an almost addictive experience on its own website. By showing us around its office space, we are allowed to shuffle through a trail of files that fly through bright white rooms, giving off pleasingly subtle page-turning noises. Each file selected then speedily transports us to a new workspace and converts to a two-part three-dimensional box that can be rotated in different directions to reveal different details.

Why is this design memorable?

Experiencing the pleasures of moving through this online 3-D environ-

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66. http://www.2gh.de/#/kreation/FIELMANN/

ment is very personal and mnemonic. Looking at the office space, we are aware of the depth of field and of other rooms existing in the distance. The ability to turn and twist the three-dimensional boxes, revealing different planes and detail, is very reminiscent of experiencing and interacting with the intriguing puzzles and other captivating games of our childhood. For us, one of the most memorable and subtle aspects of this design is the constant gentle movement of the website, seeming to rise and fall as if in time with our breath, emphasizing the personal and sensory nature of this viewing experience.

Enjoy your interaction on the Grimm Gallun Holtappels website[67].

When Use Of Unexpected Materials Takes Your Breath Away

In this section, we highlight design examples that involve totally unexpected materials, plus extraordinary dexterity and commitment on the part of the designers. It is impossible not to be amazed by the workmanship that went into these venerable pieces, and one cannot help but get a lasting impression.

"BANANA WALL" BY SAGMEISTER

67. http://www.2gh.de/#/kreation/FIELMANN/

The various stages of Sagmeister's "Banana Wall" for Deitch Projects.
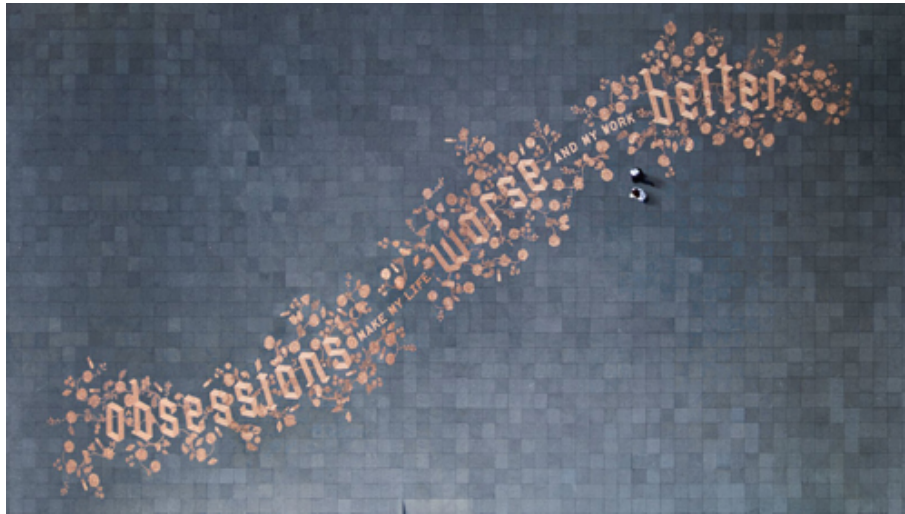
About this project:

Certain examples of highly memorable design not only stay with us, but make us think, "I wish I had thought of that." It is amazing to consider the dexterity needed to produce this huge design spectacle, in which the designer selected unusual materials for their capacity to ripen and change color. Green fruit is used to create border patterns, rules and letterforms that spell out "self confidence produces fine results" while yellow bananas create a contrasting background.

Why is this design memorable?

This project confronts us with piles of fast-ripening bananas, and the slightly infuriating fast-ripening aspect of this popular fruit is used to amazing affect by Stefan Sagmeister. All of us have experienced bananas ripening more quickly than we would like, but how many of us have thought to use the change in color of 10,000 pieces of fruit to creative affect? It's a great example of pushing something so common to the extreme, and it creates a memorable and unique experience. The clever, meaningful link between Sagmeister's quote and the color change is also a powerful metaphor. As Stefan Sagmeister says:

> *"After a number of days, the green bananas turned yellow, too, and the type disappeared. When the yellow background bananas turned brown, the type (and the self-confidence) appeared again, only to go away when all bananas turned brown."*

"OBSESSIONS MAKE MY LIFE WORSE AND WORK BETTER" BY SAGMEISTER

"OBSESSIONS MAKE MY LIFE WORSE AND WORK BETTER" BY SAGMEISTER

"Obsessions Make My Life Worse and Work Better" created by Sagmeister using thousands of coins.

About this project:

The subject of this piece by Stefan Sagmeister perhaps helps to explain the attention to detail in his other designs in this section. "Obsessions make my life worse and work better" at first glance appears to be a typographic design involving copper-colored letterforms that are elaborately embellished with floral decoration. However, upon closer inspection, this project makes highly unexpected and mnemonic use of materials. This time, small coins have been carefully and precisely arranged across a paving-slab grid structure.

Why is this design memorable?

As with the other designs in this section, the dexterity and patience necessary to produce this result is breathtaking. The vulnerability of this design is also plainly evident. The work is executed outside in a public space and is open to being disturbed by the weather and visitors. In fact, during the first night after completion, a local resident spotted passers by removing a souvenir coin or two and called the police. Unfortunately, the authorities responded quite dramatically, sweeping up all of the coins into black bin bags — supposedly to secure the work! We can hardly believe what it must have felt like to discover the blank space, and a part of remembering this piece is being able to identify with this experience.

"THE COMEDY CARPET" IN BLACKPOOL, UK

"The Comedy Carpet" located in Blackpool, UK.

About this project:

Many of the other mnemonic works in this section are made of materials that give them a fragility and vulnerability that make them mindblowing, almost literally. However, The Comedy Carpet by Gordon Young and Why Not Associates involves the memorable and amazing use of materials in a different way.

The carpet, a typographic work on an extraordinary scale, is a celebration of comedy, and it references more than 1000 comedians and comedy writers. The design itself takes its inspiration from traditional music-hall posters; it features songs, jokes and catchphrases in granite letters, carefully embedded in a concrete layer and displayed in carpet form in front of Blackpool Tower on England's northwest coast. Described by its creators as "A remarkable homage to those who have made the nation laugh, it's also a stage for popular entertainment that celebrates entertainment itself."

Why is this design memorable?

The answer to this question is the mixture of high-quality design, amazing manufacture, grandness of scale and outdoor setting.

The making of this extraordinary carpet certainly helps make the product itself so memorable. At first sight, the letterforms seem painted, but each of the 16,000 30-millimeter characters were cut by the carpet team in a workshop specially established for this project. For us, having the chance to walk on this beautifully constructed carpet of type makes for an unforgettable experience.

Executing this typographic detail at such a momentous scale in a famous outdoor environment is quite remarkable. Of course, those who understand English and recognize the comedians will enjoy another highly memorable feature: humor. Like the other works in this section, the Comedy Carpet turns the ordinary into the extraordinary, making it larger than life and totally immersive.

Using Color And Composition As Visual Triggers

Cleverly chosen colors and careful composition have the power to make a design distinctive and striking. The works in this section demonstrate a number of ways in which color and composition can have great impact and linger in the mind.

"ELEPHANT MAGAZINE" BY STUDIO8 DESIGN

*Elephant magazine demonstrates a compositional dynamic that is highly memorable.*

About this project:

Elephant magazine by Studio 8 without a doubt uses color, image and composition to effect, but the London-based design company's skill with composition is what prompted us to focus on this magazine.

Why is this design memorable?

Elegant typography, including text with a lightness of touch, is carefully arranged on pages, with letterforms headings used in unexpected ways to create beautiful imagery and dynamic spaces. Careful and precise alignment helps to bring the details together, fixing your attention on what is important, while leaving a pleasurable lasting impression that is sure to have you looking out for other issues.

"MAPS" BY PAULA SCHER
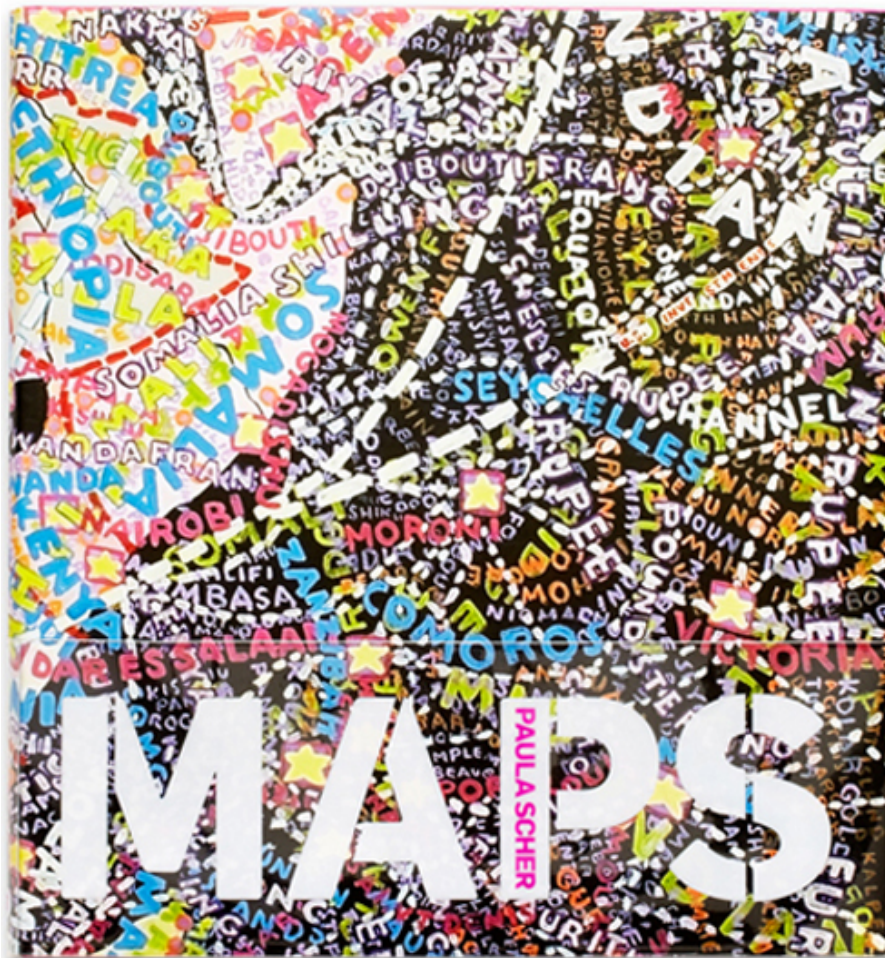
Paula Scher's Maps has an amazing interplay of color and pattern.

About this project:

In the 1990s, Pentagram's Paula Scher began painting colorful maps

with incredible layered detail. Her creations use hand-painted type to show countries, cities, oceans and districts, as well as cultural connections, in compelling patterns.

Maps is published by Princeton Architectural Press and highlights 39 of Scher's captivating works in great detail. Many sections are shown in full size, and the cover features a 3 × 2-foot poster of "World Trade" painted in 2010.

Why is this design memorable?

Compositions are packed with a huge amount of colored hand-lettering that overlays and interacts in an exciting way. Even without reading the words, the imagery is unforgettable, as the incredible detail, layering, color, composition and subject matter draw you into the depths of each work. As with many of the other designs in this chapter, the question springs to mind, "How did she do it?"

CONCLUSION

No doubt, many other examples could have been highlighted in this chapter, and hopefully you have been stimulated to recall favorites of your own. The dictionary says that a mnemonic design is intended to aid or improve the memory, which suggests that designers can never be sure of the impact their work will have.

Although we have categorized the works in order to tease out a number of common design decisions, an integral part of remembering a work involves such things as our personal experiences, culture and history and significant moments in our life. Designers can do their best to create fantastic designs and provide triggers that unlock memories, but having total control over whether an impression is lasting is impossible. ❧

RELATED LINKS

- "Posters[68]," Sagmeister and Walsh
  See more of Sagmeister's Chaumont poster.

- "Concordia Children's Services: Piglets[69]," I Believe in Advertising

- Portfolio: Schau![70], Britzpetermann
  See more of Britzpetermann's work

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- "Hand Made Type[71]," Tien-Min Liao
  Taiwanese designer and illustrator

- Karlo Jurina[72]
  Experience Britzpetermann's design for Karlo Jurina.

- "A Look Behind[73]"
  A look behind the project "Selbstgesprache" by Karlo Jurina and Britzpetermann.

- Hidden Heroes[74]
  An online exhibit designed by Grimm Gallun Holtappels.

- Grimm Gallun Holtappels[75]

- Banana wall[76], Sagmeister

- "Obsessions Make My Life Worse and Work Better[77]," Stefan Sagmeister

- The Comedy Carpet[78] Gordon Young and Why Not Associates

- Elephant Magazine: Issue 1[79], Studio8 Design

- Maps[80], Paula Scher, Pentagram

- "Author Q&A With Paula Scher: Maps[81]," Designers and Books

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About The Authors

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Alma Hoffmann is a visual communication and design educator in Alabama, US and a freelance designer. You can find her at studio2n.com[82] and follow her on Twitter @almahoffmann[83]. She has also wrote the article "Finding Alternative Structures for Typographic Layout based on our surroundings[84]", and you can visit her blog at Temperamental Muses[85]. You can find Alma on Google+[86].

Carolyn Knight & Jessica Glaser

Carolyn Knight and Jessica Glaser are academics from the University of Wolverhampton in the UK, graphic designers, and prolific design writers. Their numerous books focus on topics including the use of space in graphic design, mnemonics and memory devices and the understanding and creation of visual hierarchy. Their latest book is the best selling "Graphic Design Exercise Book", published in English by RotoVision and in Spanish by Editorial Gustavo Gili. Their company Bright Pink Communication Design[87], works in such areas as healthcare, construction, education, financial services and the public sector.

Jason Gross

Jason Gross is a freelance Web designer focused on creating clean and user friendly websites. Jason currently lives in Indiana and can be found on Twitter as @JasonAGross[88] or on the Web at his personal blog[89] and portfolio.

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87. http://brightpinkstudio.com/
88. https://twitter.com/@JasonAGross
89. http://jasonagross.com/

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Ken Reynolds is a graphic designer and illustrator living and working in the UK. He splits his time between branding, drawing cool pictures, writing and making comics. Find him on twitter (@kreynoldsdesign[90]) or visit www.kenreynoldsdesign.co.uk[91].

Kyle Soucy

Kyle Soucy is the founding principal of Usable Interface[92], an independent consulting company specializing in product usability and user-centered design. Her clients have ranged in industries from pharmaceutical giants like Pfizer to publishing powerhouses like McGraw-Hill. She has created intuitive interfaces for a variety of different products, everything from web sites to touch screen devices. You can connect with her on Twitter[93].

Paul Boag

Paul Boag has been working with the Web since 1994. He is now co-founder of the Web design agency Headscape[94], where he works closely with clients to establish their Web strategy. Paul is a prolific writer having written the Website Owners Manual[95], Building Websites for Return on Investment[96], Client Centric Web Design[97] and numerous articles for publications such as .net magazine, Smashing Magazine and the Web Designers Depot. Paul also speaks extensively on various aspects of Web design both at conferences across the world and on his award winning Web design podcast boagworld[98]. Website: boagworld[99]. Twitter: @boagworld[100]. You can also find Paul on Google+[101].

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Robert Hoekman Jr.

Robert Hoekman, Jr, is the author of *Designing the Obvious*[102], *Designing the Moment*[103], and *Web Anatomy*[104], and is the founder of Miskeeto[105]. He has worked with Adobe, World Trade Centers Association, Dodge, American Heart Association, Automattic, and countless others, and has spoken at industry events worldwide, including SXSW and Web App Summit. Website: http://www.rhjr.net[106]. Twitter: @rhjr[107].

Stuart Silverstein

A Los Angeles native, Stuart Silverstein's design career began in visual design and brand development — but a love of lifehacking and usability translated into a transition from visual designer to UX designer in 2007 and he hasn't looked back. Currently Stuart is a lead UX designer on Fandango.com. In his 11+ years in the design business, Stuart has worked with brands like Activision, Gateway, The Mattress Store, and The Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf. He is also a contributor to many periodicals as well as featured speaker for Internet Retailer, and the HOW Interactive Design Conference on strategy, design and process flow. His website is www.stuartsilverstein.com[108], where he blogs on all types of UX and design related topics. Twitter: @fetchcreative[109].

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About Smashing Magazine

Smashing Magazine[110] 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[111].

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.

About Smashing Media GmbH

Smashing Media GmbH[112] is one of the world's leading online publishing companies in the field of Web design. Founded in 2009 by Sven Lennartz and Vitaly Friedman, the company's headquarters is situated in southern Germany, in the sunny city of Freiburg im Breisgau. Smashing Media's lead publication, Smashing Magazine, has gained worldwide attention since its emergence back in 2006, and is supported by the vast, global Smashing community and readership. Smashing Magazine had proven to be a trustworthy online source containing high quality articles on progressive design and coding techniques as well as recent developments in the Web design industry.

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