

# NAKED DESIGN

02

**Does Design Matter?** There are many different forms of design: graphic design, interior design, fashion design, industrial design and architecture to name just a few.

In this issue we are talking about graphic design – it's perhaps the most ubiquitous yet little recognised, valued and understood form of design.

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## WHAT IS GRAPHIC DESIGN?

'Graphic design' can be an infuriatingly simple, yet complex thing. It is all around us; it is something that we are so accustomed to, and that is so integral to the way things are that we are barely even aware of its existence. Graphic design is logos, brochures, forms, signs, posters, packaging, tickets, business cards and stationery, reports, presentations, newsletters, magazines, websites, catalogues and so much more. We rely on it and interact with it all day every day.

Graphic design suffers from two serious challenges. The first is that much of it is invisible to consumers. It is so much an expected part of our daily lives that we hardly even notice that it's there, let alone recognise the value of its contribution. The second is that because we are largely unaware of its value, and because today anyone with a computer can create and publish information, it's something that almost everyone thinks they can do themselves.

But is it just about making things look smart or attractive, or does design have a real purpose and value beyond the aesthetic? Do we design just for design's sake?

Much graphic design is intended to facilitate other communication, and when it works well it goes unnoticed – a well-designed form that's easy to fill out, a brochure that presents information in an easy-to-read and easy-to-follow format, a website that navigates logically, a sign that gives clear and simple directions, a corporate identity that is appropriately understated. We're much more likely to notice poor design when it gets in the way of communication or functionality.

So design is a form of communication in itself and a facilitator of communication. In its simplest form it works to guide people through written communications. It acts as an aid to legibility and understanding by presenting information in a clear, logical, hierarchical way that assists readers. And at another level it acts as a form of non-verbal communication, using visual

cues and techniques to communicate something that can't otherwise be written or depicted. It creates impressions and perceptions, communicates status (or a lack of it) and is capable of saying in an instant what cannot be otherwise said. The choice and use of colours, shapes, imagery, typefaces, treatments and so on can say so much about the character or status of an organisation that it cannot say for itself. The design can say, "we're exclusive," "we're friendly," or "we don't care anymore" faster, more effectively, more loudly and more credibly than any copywriter, salesperson or spokesperson ever could.

# GRAPHIC DESIGN

## THE ROLE OF THE DESIGNER

If the role of design is communication, then the expertise of the designer is his or her ability to translate and interpret implied and explicit messages visually. In other words, the designer's role is to show you how to say what cannot be said in words using layouts, colours, typefaces, images, illustrations, treatments and so on. The designer is expert in understanding and using visual techniques to instantly create meaning.

One of the greatest challenges in creating design, for both the designer and the client, is that while it relies upon proven principles and practices, design remains a largely subjective craft – and neither the designer nor their client are designing for themselves, they are designing for the ultimate consumer – the target audience.

For both designers and clients the challenge is to set aside personal preferences, biases and even comfort zones, and to focus instead on what is the most effective creative solution from the perspective of the end consumer. And that can be very challenging for clients in particular.

This is where the relationship between designer and client can deliver the greatest value. The designer is not simply the computer operator capable of fulfilling orders, but an expert who is able to take a brief on the ultimate communication objective, and show how that can be achieved visually. In a relationship built on trust

and knowledge of the client's business, the designer can help the client to set aside their personal preferences and reactions to a certain design, and help them to respond in a more objective way. Sometimes that may mean taking the bold step of approving a piece of work that the client themselves does not necessarily like, but that they know is the most appropriate and effective option to achieve the desired result.

To achieve the best out of your relationship with your designer requires an understanding of the expertise that sit behind the design process. To illustrate, we recently came across a client that was setting up a new business and had approached a 'designer' to develop a new logo for the venture. The client had little experience in working with designers, and thought that this particular designer had done a great job by presenting him with nothing short of 40 different variations on the logo colours, composition

and typeface. To an experienced client or designer, what this says is that the designer had no idea how to communicate the business's brand visually, so they were casting the net as wide as possible in the hope that the client would like one of them!

All designers go through a comprehensive process of exploring the infinite possibilities before settling on the one, two or three options that they present. Those final options are carefully chosen for reasons of logic and emotion, both of which are within the expertise of the designer, and are presented as the most effective communication solutions. The value that a good designer brings to your business is in being able to identify those most appropriate options from a myriad of possible solutions, in the same way that a good manager sets the most appropriate options for the business's strategic direction, a good financial controller creates the most appropriate budgets and forecasts, and a good marketer develops the most effective marketing plan.

“It is very much more difficult to talk about a thing than to do it.”  
OSCAR WILDE

“ People need to appreciate at a much younger age that design must be integrated into the business. If it isn't, it will be subservient to the business, and you won't get your money's worth from it. Design is not a service function. It is integral.”

GEORGE FISHER, CEO – MOTOROLA AND KODAK

## LEARNING TO LOOK FOR WHAT DESIGNERS SEE

As a client, one of the most challenging things is to learn how not to react to design based on personal preferences. One of the most disheartening things for any designer, or any client who has had to present design work to their colleagues, is to put a thoughtfully produced piece of design on the table – every element of which has been considered and evaluated – only to hear, “Do we have to use orange? I hate orange!” Is there a way that non-designers can learn to assess design in a more objective way?

It is challenging, and there is much that is intuitive about the design process (which is why it is so essential to build a strong and trusting relationship with your designer), but there are a few steps that can be taken to more methodically and logically work through the assessment of design. Try working through some of these next time you're presented with a piece of design (or given the task of presenting it to your colleagues). Ultimately, it is a subjective decision – but it's important to remember that it's not often about what we as designers or clients want or like, it's about what will capture the attention and communicate with our ultimate target audience.

### TYPEFACES

- Typefaces have a role and 'personality' of their own, and often many hours are spent in selecting just the right typeface to communicate the desired tone and attitude.
- The typeface should be consistent across all materials, so choose one that has a large 'family', in other words, a number of variations such as bold, light, italic and so on to choose from.
- Using too many variations of the typeface in any one piece can hinder communication by creating visual confusion. Typeface size should present the reader with a logical hierarchy of communication. As readers, we understand different heading levels, for example, larger type for headlines, smaller for sub-headings and so on. When everything is the same size or weight, information competes for position and it leaves no clues for the reader as to how to tackle the content. On an A4 page or newsletter no more than three type sizes should be used.
- Typefaces that are different to those available as standard options in word processing packages have a more professional look.
- The way text is positioned on the page is also important – falsely justified might look tidy, but it can create unnatural spacings between words which can make it difficult to read; centred type can be the most difficult because it has no logical 'beginning' for the eye.

### COLOURS

- Colours are extremely important as they instantly catch the readers' eye – or not.
- Strong contrasting colours (such as black) can work well, as can lots of white space with a hint of colour. As with typefaces, more is not necessarily better, restraint can be more effective and eye-catching than a lot of colour and clutter.
- Establish a colour palette including primary colours (your basic corporate colours) and secondary colours (a limited selection of colours that complement your corporate colours). You need the ability to use more than one or two standard corporate colours on everything, but the discipline to ensure that the colours chosen are consistent and relevant.

### LOGOS

- It's okay to use parts of the logo to create 'elements' on the page, but don't let them dominate.
- Try to ensure that your logo is unique, there are some very common and familiar logo shapes and swirls that get overly used and do nothing to differentiate you.
- Always position your logo in the same place on all materials so that consumers can recognise at a glance that it's yours.
- Don't overuse the logo by having it on the same page or communication several times or feel the need to make it too large so that it overpowers the rest of the communication – again, restraint is more impactful than clutter.

“At every stage we strive to present an outstanding product to the market.”

DEBRA BURNS, MARKETING MANAGER  
MACQUARIE GOODMAN

## SO, ISN'T IT ENOUGH FOR A COMPANY TO LET THE QUALITY OF ITS PRODUCTS AND SERVICES SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES?

According to many leading companies, the answer is no, not if you want to present a credible image to the marketplace. Credibility gaps start to occur when consumers are faced with inconsistent impressions of your organisation – your products and services might be great, but if your sales materials, locations and other customer touch points are of a lesser quality, people will start to wonder why. It makes the job of building trust with your market that much more challenging.

Scope Design Group's client, Macquarie Goodman Group is a listed property group that recognises that graphic design plays an integral role in enhancing and maintaining its brand and positioning.

According to Marketing Manager Debra Burns, the Macquarie Goodman strategy is based on the delivery of consistent and high quality presentation. That doesn't just apply to its properties, but to all its marketing collateral, such as signage, brochures, website and emails. "At every stage we strive to present an outstanding product to the market," says Debra, "and that means presenting everything with the Macquarie Goodman name on it in a professional and consistent manner so that the brand is protected and enhanced".

## IS YOUR APPROACH TO DESIGN HELPING OR HINDERING YOUR BUSINESS?

We had a great response to the brand diagnostic test that we offered in the last issue of Naked Design – and it's a great tool for helping you to get an objective view of how well your design work is supporting (or sabotaging) your products and services.

Simply send us your suggestions for topics you'd like to read about in future issues of Naked Design or tell us what you thought about this issue and we'll send you our brand self-assessment tool – absolutely free.

Of course, we'd also love to learn more about your design challenges and talk about what we can do to help you get the best from your design investment, and how you can ensure that you're presenting a consistent and credible image to the market through all your customer and client touch points.

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## RECOMMENDED READING

### Design

- Open Manifesto Journals  
Editor: Kevin Finn
- The Brand Gap  
Author: Marty Neumeier
- The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing  
Author: Al Ries and Laura Ries

### Inspiration

- Who Moved My Cheese  
Author: Dr Spencer Johnson
- Ideas: Original Perspectives on Life and Business from Leading Thinkers  
Foreword: Matt Church
- Secrets of Female Entrepreneurs Exposed!  
Author: Dale Beaumont

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