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Graphic Design

Client Guide to Graphic Design

2023

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Introduction

This guide has been put together with the client in mind, it is not a definitive guide on how to but a guide on how to go about, whether you intend to do your own design production or commission a designer to carry out the work for you.

In either case it will give you a good idea on how design works and hopefully gives you the information you need to proceed.

What is Graphic Design?

Graphic Design is the art of communication through visual means, either by imagery or word and using a combination of both.

Sounds pretty simple right, well not as simple as it might sound. Getting the right feel to any given design project is essential by using the right images, text, font, colours and layout.

The human mind gets programmed over the years, subconsciously with all the imagery and information it takes in resulting in an automation of responses to other given imagery and information getting viewed.

With this in mind you need to embrace this programming already in place and use it to your advantage. The programming in place relates to colour associations, font shape and size meanings, layout for ease of processing information, volume of information for ease of comprehension.

Have you ever felt uneasy when viewing an advertisement asset or selecting a service or product on looks alone? This is due to your minds programming, all of which is automatic.

Advice to you.

Most small businesses find that the main design assets to start with are the likes of; flyers, business cards, social media posts and emails.

Don't try to splurge too much information on any given asset, this makes the viewer switch off with the feeling of too much to take in.

Don't try to be too out there with your message unless this is the style of product/service you are offering.

Use space to your advantage images and text blocks need to breathe, need to be clearly individual.

Don't rush the process, give yourself time with the flow of the asset; idea – design – review – revision – review – production. It is often a good idea to give the “review – revision – review” section a day between actions, this gives your mind time to process the information and formulate a given response to either improve or accept.

Typical Design Process

The following is the norm for designers when commissioned for a project, this process could take a day or even weeks depending on the scope and nature of the given project.

Brief – This is what the client wants, the aim of the asset, any specific information such as size of flyer/poster/advertisement, it also gives information on what is not acceptable or desired. Often examples of similar works are shown from the clients idea of what is needed.

Research – The designer will gain as much information from outside the clients brief as possible looking at examples of other works and ideas to formulate his own idea. A mood board may be constructed at this point to store all relevant information, colours, fonts, styles, layouts and so on all of which should match the clients brief.

Idea Formulation and Cull – This is where the designer will spend a little time sketching ideas on paper, taking into account key words, images and thoughts it could be any time from 30 minutes to an hour and results in many ideas quickly sketched out. This is followed by the cull, disregarding ideas that do not fit the client's brief of the designers idea of the clients vision reducing the idea pool to as few as 3-5 ideas.

Client Presentation – This is where the designer presents the client with the chosen ideas in the most basic form with no colour other than black and white if it is a graphic, or in a number of layouts and design ideas if a flyer/poster ect...

Clients Feedback – The client either accepts a design or rejects the designs, but ultimately they will give the client ideas to clarify more closely what they are looking for in either case the client will give the designer more instructions that will be on point for the desired results.

Revisions – The designer carries out any alterations to existing designs in line with the clients instructions or formulates more ideas with a clearer view of the clients wishes and vision.

Client Approval - The "Client Feedback and Revisions" stages continue until the client is happy with the final result of the revision stage, the client once happy approves the design for the production files to be finalised.

Deliverables – The designer produces the final design files either for upload for digital use or final files for the printer to print off.

Image advice

When you want to use existing images from any format, Photo, Jpeg, PNG, ensure they are of the best quality, only use images that have a resolution of 300dpi or higher.

Images copied from the internet are usually of low quality resolution, the standard being 72dpi and not really usable in any design process. We cannot increase the resolution of an image, the information needed just isn't there in the file.

Whenever using images use original copies, remember this: no resolution is lost when shrinking an image but resolution is lost when expanding an image. Lost resolution will make the image blurry and or pixelated.

Free image sites are available online but you need to be careful with image copyright as many need attribution as a minimum or cannot be used for commercial use.

Ideas

Put your ideas on paper, this helps you develop your idea, improve your idea and show you direction. It is much easier to work with a physical image than a mental image.

Once you have your idea or even if you have no idea, go online and search for ideas on what you want to do. This will give you a wide range of images to view and improves your vision of what you are looking for, at this point you can copy images to show a designer what you like and don't like.

Having seen other works similar to your idea will give you more ideas and will improve your initial thoughts, again get all this down on paper.

Best practice.

When giving a task to a designer you need to be clear with what you want, clear with what you are looking for, clear on what you don't want is also vital.

Make sure your ideas are available to the designer, no matter how basic they may seem. Your vision will be completely different than the designers without your ideas being put forward.

Work with the designer don't get upset if the initial presentation is not what you want, you either need to be a bit clearer with your instructions or evolve the design to get the required results.

This will only happen if you and the designer talk about the design with you highlighting what you like and don't like about any given presented work.

Listen to your designer, they have years of experience and will guide you away from the wrong type of result and may have a better way to put your idea forward. Ultimately it is down to you what happens with any design.

Design by yourself

There are many different platforms to use when you decide to do your own graphic design, I have used "Gimp" in the past and found it to be a very good design program but takes a little getting used to with doing things, but well worth the time spent if you plan on doing your own graphic design.

Canva, the cloud based design platform is ok for complete armatures, easy to use, but requires you to be a subscriber to produce anything close to quality. I strongly advise against using Canva for anything going to print, it is initially designed for digital use with social media in mind. You will not get high print quality from this platform.

There are a few good free design specific platforms but all take a little time to become familiar with, again it is worth the time and effort if you plan to do your own designing. Recommendations are Gimp or Inkscape.

Another outstanding platform is Affinity Design, this platform will cost you around £50. The Affinity suite is a good match for the Adobe creative suite with much the same feel and design.

Professional designers tend to use the Adobe creative suite, and the industry recognise these platforms from Adobe to be the industry standard. They are a little expensive for the occasional user with monthly subscriptions.

Design Principles

There are 7 principles in graphic design, as follows:

Balance - This refers to the distribution of the graphic design elements, such as shapes, text boxes and images, of a design evenly throughout a certain layout. Designers can choose between a balanced (stable) design or off-balanced (dynamic) layout. In the context of graphic design, balance is of three types.

- **Symmetrical** – This type of design is formed along a vertical axis and or horizontal axis, where the weight of the elements is evenly divided into both sides of the layout.
- **Asymmetrical** – This type of balance employs scale, contrast and colour to even out the flow of a layout. It is usually found in websites, where two sides of a webpage differ from each other but contain similar elements.
- **Radial**– Here, the elements of a design are placed in a circular pattern on the layout. This provides a sense of movement and dynamism to the eyes of the viewer.

Alignment - This fundamental aspect of a design which creates a visual connection between elements such as images, shapes or blocks of texts. Alignment helps develop a sharp and ordered appearance by eliminating any distortion within the layout. It represents the scale of each element by comparing their proportion and focusing on the elements that can have a strong impact on users.

Hierarchy - This method combines two aspects, dominance and priority, giving extra weight to certain elements of a design over others. It helps brands convey their message to the audience by focusing on a particular element of the design. Hierarchy can be achieved by:

- Highlighting the title using large or bold fonts;
- Placing the key message at a higher level than other elements;
- Adding shapes to frame the focal view;
- Implementing detailed and colourful visuals.

Contrast - Contrast is an important principle in any form of visual art as it guides the customer's attention to the key elements of a design. It is essential for maintaining the distinction between similar elements in a design, thereby enhancing a layout's overall legibility. Contrast is formed when design elements are placed in opposition on a layout, for example:

- Dark vs light;
- Thick vs thin;
- Contemporary vs traditional;
- Large vs small.

Rhythm - Rhythm brings together different elements to create a more organised and consistent look. Repetition of certain elements such as logos or colour can help make a brand easily recognisable and strengthen the overall look. Rhythm is classified into two types;

- **Fluid** – This adds a significant amount of variation to the design, keeping the flow in a single direction.

- **Progressive** – Progressive rhythm is based on a clear sequence which controls the visual movement of the audience between the different elements.

Proximity - Proximity helps in de-cluttering the overall design by creating a relationship between related elements. It forms a visual connection among important design factors such as colour, font, type or size, ensuring the layout is balanced to form a perfect design. It enables the audience to have a pleasant overview of what they are looking at, thereby offering a good user experience.

Colour and space - Choosing the right colour can help define the tone of the design. Designers can choose from a wide range of colour combinations for the background and text of the layout. Space refers to the area around or between the various elements of the design. It can either be used to create shapes or highlight the important aspects of a design. **Graphic designers** use a colour palette to choose colours that can create contrast or even work together to complement other elements.

Inspiration

There is a massive wealth of images online, use it to your advantage, if you are looking to make a flyer, search for examples of flyers in whatever industry you are in, if it is a logo then search for logo examples in your industry. You may find something that you really like, or find you like aspects of different images, the main thing here is not to copy exactly but to make something that is similar to.

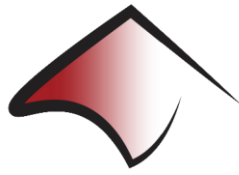
Put your own stamp on your designs, your logo, name, colours if you have any, what fonts do you prefer, is there a layout of text and images you like the look of, using the same fonts, colours and style over and over again starts to embed your brand, start to build on your commercial image.

Stuck or Not Sure

If you find you get stuck with an idea, design or how to do something or even not sure if your design is doing what it should be doing, I am here to share my wisdom.

I will be more than happy to help you. My advice and guidance is given freely with nothing in return expected.

The information given in this guide is information collated to be used in my “Graphic Design Introduction” course (free) soon to be available on Udemy.



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