

Chapter 1

The Right Stuff

Graphic designers, or graphic artists, create, produce, or generate graphics and designs to meet the specific commercial or promotional needs of their clients. They develop and make the designs for packaging, displays, or logos.

The definition of graphic designer has blurred in recent years. Today, graphic designers work in multimedia, graphic design, visual communication, advertising, animation, web development, and so on. They often create, maintain, and expand websites as another aspect of the business.

Graphic designers use a variety of mediums to achieve a variety of artistic or decorative effects. As artists, today's designer may use traditional methods, such as ink, paint, or charcoal on paper, to create a design. However, the majority use computers to create their designs.

Several decades ago, the graphic designer's portfolio was usually a large black book or oversized binder. The graphic designers carried samples of their best printed pieces to show prospective clients or employers their previous work. Over the last 20 years, however, the portfolios of most graphic designers have become digitized. Their portfolios are now accessed via a website on the internet, a CD, or a DVD.

WHAT IS GRAPHIC DESIGN?

Graphic design is visual problem solving. Using text and graphical elements, a specific message is conveyed. The goal of a graphic designer is to create designs and work that is pleasing to the eye. In addition, the finished piece should get the attention of its viewer.

But what you create can't just look cool. Your designs have to work as well. For example, consider a restaurant menu. If poorly arranged, customers cannot find appetizers, and the restaurant's sales of these items will diminish. If the beverage section cannot not be located or the prices are unreadable, patrons are not likely to order them. But a great design can entice the restaurant customer to order. As you can see from this simple example, a good design can increase orders and sales (and profits), or it can hamper sales and diminish the likelihood of profitability.

Graphic design is the art and process of combining text and graphics. The goal is to communicate an effective and efficient message with the design of text, logos, graphics, newsletters, brochures, posters, photos, images, signs, or any other kind of visual communication.

A Designer By Any Other Name

Graphic designer is just one name used to describe the person that creates graphic designs. Other terms include:

- ▲ Brand identity developer
- ▲ Content developer
- ▲ Desktop publisher
- ▲ Graphic artist
- ▲ Illustrator
- ▲ Interface designer
- ▲ Layout artist
- ▲ Logo designer
- ▲ Multimedia developer
- ▲ Visual image developer
- ▲ Web designer

THE NATURE OF THE WORK

Graphic designers (or graphic artists) plan, prepare, and create visual solutions to a wide range of communications issues. Designers decide the most effective way of delivering a message in various media. They work in print, electronic, and film media, using a variety of methods, such as color, type, illustration, photography, animation, and various print and layout techniques.

Graphic designers develop the final layout and production design of magazines, newspapers, journals, corporate reports, and other documents and publications. They produce all types of communications. They also create promotional displays, packaging, and marketing brochures for products and services, design distinctive logos for products and businesses, and develop signs.

There are an increasing number of graphic designers that work with developing material for the internet. Web pages, interactive media, and multimedia projects are now routine work for graphic designers. Rather than rely on a computer programmer to design the layout or look and feel of a website, a graphic artist creates the site.

Graphic designers also may produce the openings, including the credits that appear before and after audio-visual television shows, films, and movies.

Stat Fact

Among the five design occupations the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) describes in the Occupational Outlook Handbook, graphic designers are expected to have the most new jobs through 2014. However, the BLS believes the competition will be intense because the work is attractive to many people. "Graphic designers with website design and animation experience will have the best opportunities," the BLS says.



Fun Fact

The late Phil Hartman, who became famous for his TV and movie comedy, worked as a graphic designer. He created the logo for Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young.



Graphic artists develop new graphic designs by determining the needs of the client, the message the design should portray, and its desired appeal to customers or users. They consider various factors in planning and executing designs for the intended audience, and gather relevant information by conducting and attending meetings with clients and creative directors. Graphic artists also routinely conduct their own research to help create the final designs.

As part of their work, graphic designers routinely prepare sketches or layouts—by hand or with the aid of a computer—to illustrate their vision for the final design. Graphic artists select colors, sound, artwork, photography, animation, style of type, and other visual elements for their conceptual designs.

Designers also select the size and arrangement of the different elements on the page, product, film, or computer screen. They create graphs and charts from data for use in a wide variety of publications. Graphic designers consult with copywriters about the text that accompanies the visual part of the design.

When their design is complete, graphic artists submit it to their clients or art directors for final approval. For some graphic artists, their work is completed at this point. Others may work with commercial printers by selecting the type of paper and ink and reviewing the proofs for errors before final publication.

Computerization And Automation

Today's graphic artists do everything that yesterday's paste-up artists (and others, such as typesetters and camera workers) did. There is much more to current graphic arts jobs than ever before. It is much more technical and far less mechanical.

Graphic artists use a wide variety of graphics and layout computer software. The days of using mechanical paste-up, or actually assembling type and illustration images onto boards with glue or wax to produce finished pages for graphic projects, are gone.

Today's graphic artists work on computers to set type. They are highly trained and proficient in typography. Typesetters that sent finished type to

Bright Idea

Graphic designers also create signage systems, called environmental graphics. These systems are used for both business and government.



paste-up artists are gone. So are the paste-up artists. This work has been automated by computerization.

The graphic artists of today also manipulate photographic and other digital images as part of their regular work. In the past, other technicians or artistic specialists working with large cameras did that image work. Now the graphic artists must make sure images print properly, look nice, and are appealing to the eye. Yesterday's paste-up artists did little of this.

Fun Fact

Although it was called paste-up, graphic artists did not actually use paste, which was found to be unacceptable and unworkable. They actually used wax to place and slide type and graphic elements on the boards.



The computer programs that graphic artists use to create web pages or other interactive media designs are expanding and offer new features and capabilities. For example, computer-created animation is standard today. Gone are the days when artists would draw each film frame on a clear piece

of plastic, commonly called a *cell*. Today's computer software programs allow ease and flexibility in exploring a greater number of design alternatives. Combined with far less expensive computer hardware, the graphic artist's computer tools reduce both design costs and the time it takes to deliver a product or message to market.

Other Considerations

Graphic artists sometimes supervise assistants that work on parts of a project. Graphic artists who run their own businesses also may devote a considerable amount of their work time in developing new business contacts, evaluating equipment and space needs, and performing general and routine administrative duties. The need for up-to-date computers (both hardware and software) is an ongoing consideration for graphic artists.

WORKING CONDITIONS

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, working conditions and the places of employment for graphic artists vary: "Graphic designers employed by large advertising, publishing, or design firms generally work regular hours in well-lighted and comfortable settings. Designers in smaller design consulting firms or those who freelance generally work on a contract, or job, basis. They frequently adjust their workday to suit their clients' schedules and deadlines. Consultants and self-employed designers tend to work longer hours and in smaller, more congested environments."

Graphic artists transact business in their own offices or studios or in clients' offices. Those who are paid by the assignment often find themselves under pressure to please clients and to find new ones in order to maintain a steady income.

All designers—no matter how they are compensated or where they work—face frustration when their designs are rejected. Sometimes, their work is not as creative as they wish and becomes more routine as they work on larger projects.

Graphic designers may work under pressure to get work done. This could mean working evenings or weekends to meet production schedules. This is especially true in the printing and publishing industries where deadlines are routinely shorter and more frequent.

TRAINING AND OTHER QUALIFICATIONS

The Bureau of Labor Statistics says that in addition to training in graphic design, graphic designers must possess creativity and communication and problem-solving skills. Graphic designers also need to be familiar and proficient with the latest computer graphics and design software. A good portfolio—a representative collection of examples of a graphic artist's best work—often is the deciding factor in getting a job.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics described the formal education options:

Bachelor's of fine arts degree programs in graphic design are offered at many colleges, universities, and private design schools. The curriculum includes studio art, principles of design, computerized design, commercial graphics production, printing techniques, and website design. In addition to design courses, a liberal arts education or a program that includes courses in art history, writing, psychology, sociology, foreign languages and cultural studies, marketing, and business are useful in helping designers work effectively with the content of their work. Graphic designers must effectively communicate complex subjects to a variety of audiences. Increasingly, clients rely on graphic designers to develop the content and the context of the message in addition to performing technical layout work.

Art and design education is always desirable. This educational foundation can help throughout a graphic designer's career.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics says:

Associate degrees and certificates in graphic design also are available from two- and three-year professional schools. These programs usually focus on the technical aspects of graphic design and include very few liberal arts courses. Graduates of two-year programs normally qualify as assistants to graphic designers or for positions requiring technical skills only. Individuals who wish to pursue a career in graphic design—and who already possess a bachelor's degree in another field—

can complete a two-year or three-year program in graphic design to learn the technical requirements.

The National Association of Schools of Art and Design accredits about 250 postsecondary institutions with programs in art and design. Most of these schools award a degree in graphic design. Many schools do not allow formal entry into a bachelor's degree program until a student has successfully finished a year of basic art and design courses. Applicants may be required to submit sketches and other examples of their artistic ability.

Clients expect graphic designers and graphic artist to be familiar and proficient with computer graphics and design software. Graphic designers must continually keep up to date with the latest development of updated software, usually either on their own or through software training programs.

OTHER SKILLS

Graphic designers must be creative. They need to be able to communicate their ideas in writing, visually, and verbally. And because consumer tastes change quickly, graphic artists and designers must be well-read, open to new ideas and influences, and quick to react to changing trends.

Problem-solving skills, paying attention to details, and the ability to work independently and under pressure also are important traits for the graphic artist. Graphic artists and designers need self-discipline to start projects on their own, to budget their time, and to meet deadlines and production schedules. Good business sense and sales ability also are important, especially for those who freelance or run their own graphic design business.

Some graphic artists or designers leave full-time jobs to become teachers in design schools or in colleges and universities. It is common for many faculty members to consult privately or operate small design studios as freelancers to complement their classroom activities. Using their specialized skills, some experienced designers open their own firms. Others choose to specialize in one area of graphic design.

FUTURE JOB OUTLOOK

The BLS says that “the employment of graphic designers is expected to grow about as fast as average for all occupations through the year 2014, as demand for graphic design continues to increase from advertisers, publishers and computer design firms. Among the five different design occupations, graphic designers will have the most new jobs. However, graphic designers are expected to face keen competition for available positions. Many talented individuals are attracted to careers as graphic designers. Individuals with a bachelor's degree and knowledge

of computer design software, particularly those with website design and animation experience, will have the best opportunities.”

The opportunities for graphic artists and designers “should increase because of the rapidly expanding market for web-based information and expansion of the video entertainment market, including television, movies, video, and made-for-internet outlets. Graphic designers with website design and animation experience will especially be needed as demand for design projects increases for interactive media—websites, video games, cellular telephones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), and other technology. Demand for graphic designers also will increase as advertising firms create print and web marketing and promotional materials for a growing number of products and services.”

There has been a trend to outsource some design work. Based on information from the BLS, in recent years, some computer, printing, and publishing firms have outsourced basic layout and design work to design firms overseas. This trend is expected to continue. It could have a negative impact on employment growth for lower level, technical graphic design workers.

The good news is that most higher-level graphic design jobs are expected to remain in the United States. Those high-level jobs will focus on developing in-depth communication strategies, called strategic design, for clients and firms in order for them to gain competitive advantages in the market. The BLS says that strategic design work requires close proximity to the consumer in order to identify and target their needs and interests. It also says that graphic designers with a broad liberal arts education and experience in marketing and business management will be best suited for these positions.

EARNINGS

According to the BLS, median annual earnings for graphic designers is \$38,030. The lowest 10 percent earn less than \$23,220. The middle 50 percent earn between \$29,360 and \$50,840, and the highest 10 percent earn more than \$65,940.

Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of graphic designers are:

- ▲ ***Architectural, engineering, and related services:*** \$42,740
- ▲ ***Specialized design services:*** \$41,620
- ▲ ***Advertising and related services:*** \$40,010
- ▲ ***Printing and related support activities:*** \$32,830
- ▲ ***Newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers:*** \$32,390

RELATED OCCUPATIONS

The term graphic designer has become a generalized description of people who work with computers to create art or design. There are many other associated jobs

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or occupations closely associated with graphic designers that use graphic art computerization skills to create their work. They include:

- ▲ artists and related workers
- ▲ commercial and industrial designers
- ▲ fashion designers
- ▲ floral designers
- ▲ interior designers
- ▲ computer software engineers
- ▲ drafters
- ▲ desktop publishers

Other occupations involved in the design, layout, and copy of publications include those working in advertising, marketing, promotions, and public relations. Sales managers and marketing managers often work closely with graphic artists and designers. Photographers, writers, editors, printers, and prepress technicians also often work with graphic artists and designers.