



Get a Job!

**Getting a Design Job
2008 Edition**

By RitaSue Siegel, IDSA

idsa[®]

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The real issue is not talent as an
independent element, but talent in
relationship to will, desire and persistence.

—Milton Glaser

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Introduction

Welcome to the third edition of *Getting a Design Job*. This book was originally written as a series of articles from 1993 to 1995 for *Innovation*, the quarterly publication of the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA), and then became a stand-alone special issue available free as a download on IDSA's site and on my company's web site, www.ritasue.com. It was first updated in 2000 when information was added about how the digital world was influencing the job search process.

So why a revision in 2008? **You deserve to be as up to date as I can make you because, if you are reading this, I have the information that you need.** I am here to help whether you are about to graduate, a grad student who needs a little encouragement and some tricks of the trade to break into the world of design, a designer eager to get a better job, a design manager who was downsized, or a very senior person in the business who wants to stay involved.

Over the years, designers have asked me to include information about topics I didn't mention earlier, such as what to do when a hiring manager making you an offer says you will be able to transfer to company facilities in other countries and doesn't put it in writing. Then he leaves the company, and no one will honor his promise. The answer is: get promises in writing. In this edition I have endeavored to provide information on an expanded number of topics in a common-sense manner and will continue to provide updated information via www.ritasue.com.

Many teachers use the book in professional practices classes. Students and teachers often ask if they can translate the text into their local language—the answer is yes, and please send me a copy.

Thank you, IDSA, for this opportunity.

By RitaSue Siegel
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Introduction

Differences: Now and Then

Today, there is an understanding in the US that design adds value, not only to differentiate one organization's products, communications, environments, experiences and services from another's (an earlier mantra), but also that design can frame and mold the quality of the emotional and/or rational experiences people have with them at every touch point. Another realization is that having an innovation and design process embedded into an organization's DNA becomes a core competency and a sustainable competitive advantage. Companies can develop total customer experience and brand-building strategies that are integrated with business strategies by organizing, as needed, problem-solving, cross-functional or interdisciplinary teams



Crown ST 3000, SX 3000 and WF 3000 Series Stackers designed by Crown Equipment Corp. and Formation Design Group, Gold IDEA winner 2007

made up of smart, creative and talented individuals from design, marketing, engineering, technology and usability, for example.

An organization that can attract, manage, develop and motivate key people has to develop a set of integrated processes and practices that work at all levels to meet targets today and in the future. Designers can be key to creating such responsive, high-performance and sustainable organizations because the nature of their work requires integrating with most other functions.

Another important difference now is that designers' cognitive and communication skills are as important as their mastery of design fundamentals: form making, drawing skills, computer skills and general design talent. **Today, designers are held to a higher standard.** Their cognitive skills—thinking, imagining, remembering, learning, perceiving, making judgments and reasoning—are considered essential to getting the most from the design process, as well as in making a valid choice from alternatives that will impact an organization's bottom line —“economic, social and environmental.”¹

Roger Martin, dean of the Rotman Business School at the University of Toronto, wants business people to learn to think like designers. In his writing and presentations he presents the differences between how designers and business people think, and proposes a bridge.²

To deliver on a user-, customer-, or human-centered orientation (the latest mantra), designers need to collaborate with other types of specialists and recognize the advantages of doing so. Together, as an interdisciplinary team, they can observe and interact with people that will use, and/or buy, into what the team is then going to develop together.

1 Arnold S. Wasserman, “Human-Centered Innovation: What’s Next? *Deep Design & The Next Industrial Revolution.*” Summary of Remarks presented at The Copenhagen Prelude to the INDEX:AIGA Summit, Copenhagen, Denmark, August 23, 2007

2 www.rotman.utoronto.ca/rogermartin/

Introduction

Defining Terms

It is common these days to hear the terms design and innovation used interchangeably. It is a mistake to assume that innovation and design are synonymous. In my opinion, Arnold S. Wasserman, chairman of The Idea Factory, best explained the differences in an email exchange we had:

In recent years, both design and innovation have become a lot more complex, and what connects them is rather more interesting than what separates them. While it still is accurate to say that design and innovation are not synonymous, certainly in many organizations they are more tightly coupled than they were even a few years ago, and increasingly, they share common processes, methods and tools.

Nowhere is this linkage more apparent than in *BusinessWeek* magazine's coverage of design and innovation as a symbiotic pair—the Yin and Yang of organizational creativity in today's material culture.

Whereas design shares with the terms creativity and invention a connotation of that which is new, novel and non-obvious, the key idea that distinguishes innovation is *"implementation in the world and adoption at scale."* Organizations today expect their designers to play a central role in the job of innovation.

As for aesthetics, I long ago gave up trying to sell design by educating business managers and engineers about aesthetics. Twenty years ago, many designers still thought of design as design aesthetics; that is, a first order Platonic good, distinct and having a priori value within itself. Non-designers thought then and still think of design in a more instrumental sense: What is it good *for*? "I don't really know that I want design, so tell me how design gets me something else that I do know I want." So designers have learned to explain the value of design by how it contributes to innovation, branding, identity, positioning, ergonomics, communication, user experience, interaction, sustainability, emotional triggers, meaningfulness, aspirational behavior, the adoption cycle, etc.

Most recently, a small group of designers has turned to selling the design process itself—design thinking—as a service product having its own intrinsic value, giving rise to the new business of innovation consulting.³

In design schools, aesthetics increasingly has become subtext and students learn early to define and defend their designs in business terms (even where one might expect aesthetics to be paramount, as in fashion, home furnishings or even automotive design, the instrumental lingo of business, marketing and innovation have come to dominate design discourse).

Business has taken on design as a core competency in the way designers always hoped. In the bargain, subjective aesthetics, once the central focus of design, have become just one among many concerns of design: one tool in the innovation toolbox.

³ Examples of innovation consulting firms are The Idea Factory, Collective Invention, IDEO, Jump and Doblin Group.

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Head, Hands and Heart

A design teacher friend introduced his students to the idea of using “design thinking” to discover opportunities and solve problems without creating artifacts. He received pushback from students who said they came to school to learn the craft side of design and how to create the eye candy they see in anthologies of good design. His challenge is to integrate the old and new ways of learning and thinking about design. The Adaptive Path Blog⁴ has a lot of great feedback about the subject under the heading *Design Schools: Please Start Teaching Design Again*. Dan Saffer at Adaptive Path was reading “through resumes from design school students looking for internships and jobs and realized that quite a few design schools no longer teach design. Instead they teach ‘design thinking’ and expect that will be enough. The best designers,” he writes, “use heads and hands. We want designers who create thoughtful, meaningful designs that pay attention to details and have emotion and craft in them as well as reason and cleverness.” **Chuck Jones of Whirlpool says, “What the eye admires, the heart desires,”** which can apply to washers and dryers as well as the Lifestraw⁵ and the Condom Applicator⁶.

4 <http://www.adaptivepath.com/blog/2007/03/06/design-schools-please-start-teaching-design-again/>

5 A drinking straw that purifies water as it is drunk (www.lifestraw.com)

6 <http://www.designindaba.com/media/mboisa.htm>

Design Thinking

Niti Bhan summarizes the value of design thinking best:

Design thinking in business takes this problem solving aspect one step further [than human centered design]. Now the tools and techniques from the field of design such as ethnographic research, rapid prototyping and conceptual brainstorming integrate with the pragmatic business frameworks of strategy, analysis and metrics to create and provide roadmaps for business [service, policy, organization] innovation and competitive advantage. In this context, design has evolved away from traditional form giving to becoming an integral part of corporate strategy.⁷

In answering the question “Can anyone be a design thinker?” David Kelley, co-founder of Stanford’s Institute of Design and founder and chairman of IDEO says,

“Yes, it’s not just for ‘designers’ in the traditional sense of the word. It is unique and powerful because it’s not content specific. It is a way of taking risks and making creative leaps. It is the perfect complement to analytical thinking. Design thinking is based on insight, experimentation, and prototyping, while analytical thinking is data and planning based. By applying both design and analytical thinking together, the results are very different kinds of innovation.”⁸

7 Quoted from Niti Bhan’s blog, “Perspective 2.0” (www.nitibhan.com)

8 Design as Glue: Understanding the Stanford d.school, online interview (www.nextd.org)

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9 "Remaking the Way We Make Things: Creating a New Definition of Quality with Cradle-to-Cradle Design," by William McDonough and Michael Braungart, *Innovation*: Summer 2005

Green Design and Sustainability

I believe that most designers want to create, as William McDonough describes, "...safe, healthful, high-quality products right from the start."⁹ Just as I think student performance critiques should include the quality of their verbal and visual presentation skills, so should they include their consideration of the environmental impact of their work (or lack of it). Experienced designers with no training in how to design including "green" requirements should take classes, attend seminars and read relevant books. **Avoid eco-fatigue of colleagues, vendors and clients by employing the techniques that worked to educate that design goes beyond styling and over time, profits are not sacrificed.**



Eclipse 500 Very Light Jet designed by IDEO and Eclipse Aviation, Gold IDEA winner 2007

Globalization or Outsourcing

Some designers in America and Western Europe have expressed concern that design work is moving to lower-cost countries as if it were being outsourced like data entry.

Well, as organizations are being transformed into global entities, many have developed decentralized models for some functions, including design. Companies like Whirlpool, IBM, IDEO, General Motors, Procter & Gamble, Landor, Interbrand, Motorola, Nike, Continuum and other global American companies headquartered in the US employ designers from many countries in Asia and Europe, less in Latin America. In some cases, designers' salaries in Asian countries are lower than they are in the US, but in others they are the same if not higher, depending on the area of expertise. Salaries tend to be the same if not higher in Asia for design teachers from the US or western Europe. In Europe compensation is influenced by benefits packages (which vary from country to country) and vacation time. Some western European salaries are figured on a 13-month year. Most companies, regardless of location, pay salaries that are considered locally appropriate, which would include higher pay for superstars. Performance bonuses in Asia are not as common as they are in the US, but this will change.

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Many European companies not headquartered in the US, like Nokia, adidas, BMW, Nestlé and Renault, also employ designers from many countries in their offices around the world and in the US. Many Asian companies like Lenovo, Haier, Flextronics, Sony, Hyundai, LG, Nissan, Toyota and Samsung have offices in the US that employ designers from many countries and buy services primarily from American design consultancies, but from other countries as well. Some design consultancies based in Europe—like Dragon Rouge, Philips Design and Blue Marlin—have offices worldwide, including the US, as do US-based design consultancies.

My response to the concerned is:

1. Think about moving to where the best opportunities are.
2. Think about developing your skills in areas of practice that didn't exist before as they tend to attract higher salaries until everyone catches up.

Organizations develop competitive advantages based on their ability to locate key functions and manage them efficiently where there is access to:

- The best and lowest cost talent
- Proximity to key markets
- Literacy and language proficiency
- Information technology
- Innovation
- Reasonable costs
- Sympathetic tax structures

- Support services
- Sources of materials
- Infrastructure and production

The ability of an organization to function 24 hours a day has become a cost savings.

US designers, consumers and the tax collector benefit when Asian and European automobile companies open design and production offices in the US and build factories to manufacture cars using American workers. But using local design talent to uncover and design for local and regional unmet needs is smart. Over the past 10 years, markets in China and India have rapidly expanded for products like cell phones, software, tractors, soft drinks and diapers, as well as personal care and beauty products. The expansion of companies like McDonald's, HSBC, Starbucks, IKEA, H&M, Richemont and VISA, for example, is expected to continue.

"Global firms have to compete efficiently for global markets, in addition to retaining their positions in established markets."¹⁰
I have not learned of any company for which design is important moving their entire design staff to another country for the sole purpose of paying less for it. We work and live in a global economy. It makes sense that design for global companies be done locally and globally.

¹⁰ C.K. Prahalad, The Art of Outsourcing, *The New York Times*, June 8, 2005

Introduction

Buzzwords

Almost every day I hear a new buzzword or a variation on an old one. As designers have become more integrated into businesses and are collaborating more with co-workers in other disciplines, these words grow out of need, as did the many words the Inuit have for snow (or so I've heard). Few designers in 2000 used the term *experience* as in *experience design*. Today, almost no designer presents their work without including it. And some are overused like *brand*. At one point, I asked my co-workers to please not use the words *brand*, *strategy* and *interactive*, unless their use contributed to understanding or definition. Now *user-centered*, *ethnography*, *persona*, *scenario*, *belief system*, *storytelling*, *journey*, *co-creation*, *story boarding*, *sustainability* and *design thinking* have joined the lexicon along with *design planning* and one from the mid-80s: *design language*.

It's a good idea to understand the meaning of the language designers use before using it—in case you are asked to define or perform what one of the words or phrases describes. We think everyone knows what we mean, but the truth is that we all interpret words differently.

Most people cannot get through a presentation without using at least one of these words or phrases, and that's fine as long as the words are being used for a reason and not simply to impress. A graduate student told me he went on an interview with a consulting firm whose practice is steeped in design research. He did not know how they defined research. His school program's focus, and consequently his, was end product, not

process. While presenting his portfolio to the design office, he claimed to have done pre-design research, and he genuinely thought he had. When he described to them the ad hoc way he went about it, he was not hired and could not understand why. "They said I did not know how to do research," he told me, and I explained that he had not been exposed to state-of-the-art design research methodologies that enable designers to observe users in use today.¹¹

Strategic Talent Management

Successful organizations focus on where they are going and how to acquire aligned and engaged "talent" to get them there. Sourcing, recruiting, developing, managing and retaining new talent is part of most organizations' competitive strategy. In the 21st century, capital is easier to come by than talent.¹² "Competitive advantage lies in the ability to create an organization driven not by cost efficiencies but by ideas and intellectual know-how."¹³ An organization's culture is also a competitive advantage that dictates how it equips, trains, compensates, rewards and deploys its people to accomplish its mission.

Organizations building a leadership culture want to see talent and creativity manifest in every person they hire. Many designers think the words "talent" and "creative" were invented to describe them, but that's not true; designers are not the only types of people who may possess these characteristics. The capacity for creative thinking is common to all.

11 Patrick Whitney, the head of the graduate school at the Institute of Design says observational research and gathering data on insights and needs enables teams with diverse members to gain a common point of view and develop a shared vision faster than any other method. Microsoft/IDSA Designer Spotlight Series. "Innovation Bridge," February 15, 2007.

12 Roger Martin and Mihnea C. Moldoveanu, "Capital Versus Talent," *Harvard Business Review*, July 2003

13 Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones, "Leading Clever People," *Harvard Business Review*, March 2007

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Metrics

14 I use the word "organization" interchangeably with "business" to emphasize that businesses are not the only types of organizations that hire designers.

The focus on acquiring talent has magnified the strategic position of the human resources (HR) and talent acquisition functions. A new frontier for HR is the search for human capital metrics to measure, manage, maximize and protect an organization's huge investment in talent. Organizations¹⁴ are looking for people to become long-term, successful employees. The best way for them to do this is to hire people with talent in a critical functional area like design, but who also have a talent for the particular job. Doing this could mean that a competent designer can be hired into an organization and not be successful in their particular role because the role is not aligned with their design skills, preferences, personality or ambition. "Competency" means adequacy; "talent" means an ability of superior quality.

Theoretically, a company should be able to inventory the skills and behaviors of its current employees (like designers or salespeople). Then, the theory goes, they can search for prospective employees, test them, and hire those with skills and behaviors that have been identified as success drivers of the incumbents. Again, theoretically, the new employees should have a better chance to be successful than those hired without being tested against these criteria. This methodology is successful up to a point and is not a predictor of creativity or talent. Neither are conventional interviews. So an organization evaluating you in the context of their needs can be more complex than you imagined.

The following observation¹⁵ sums up the basic frustration for anyone involved in recruiting and assessment:

For designers to be successful in a job:

- Talent is necessary, but not sufficient.
- Passion is necessary, but not sufficient.
- Training is necessary, but not sufficient.
- Team orientation is necessary, but not sufficient.
- Knowledge is necessary, but not sufficient.
- Technical skills are necessary, but not sufficient.
- Effective management is necessary, but not sufficient.

Talent [and passion] are the only necessary conditions for job success that employers cannot provide to their employees and schools cannot provide to their students.

And there needs to be chemistry.

15 Bob Gately, IT recruiting consultant, Hopedale, MA, TechRepublic blog, March 2, 2006, modified for purpose of this chapter.

Not everyone is a design genius, but everyone can do something very well.

Do you know what makes you special?

16 "Candidate" is a term for individuals being considered or interviewed for a job.

The first step to getting a design job is to evaluate yourself as a potential employee. To get the design job you really want, you need a spectrum of core design skills, technical skills and a repertoire of personal skills that will allow you to work successfully with other people. Few designers have analyzed what their strengths are. One of the questions we ask candidates¹⁶ is, "What do you do best?" They are usually surprised and hesitate before coming up with an answer. By evaluating your skills, you will know what you do best, and you can highlight these things in the experience portion of your resume, the work you show in your portfolio and the stories you tell during interviews. In the course of inventorying your skills, you also will learn what skills you need to develop or improve.

17 Professor and Chair of Psychology at Wake Forest University. Sour Grapes from blog www.egonomicsbook.com.

According to Mark Leary's research,¹⁷ **"Success in life comes largely from matching one's abilities, interests, and inclinations to appropriate situations, jobs, and relationships."** People are not always clear about who they are and they can make some bad career decisions because of it. If they are not able to understand their shortcomings and weaknesses, how are they going to improve?

Reality Testing

Another designer's assessment of your strengths or skills will not necessarily be more accurate than your own; it may also be very painful. However, the alternative to ignoring other people's perceptions are preserving illusions and blocking progress. If a fellow designer or the person you report to rates your ability to develop meaningful form or a persuasive presentation as "marginal" and you rate these abilities as "outstanding," have a conversation about the discrepancy as soon as possible. Some people feel that if they have to change, they risk losing who they are. They may become frightened or they may get defensive. **If we are too defensive, we risk not getting any feedback.**

One way for students about to graduate and new graduates to get good feedback is by paying attention to the portfolio reviews held at IDSA conferences. You can develop acquaintances at local IDSA meetings and ask a few of them to give you an appointment for a critique of your complete portfolio if it's ready, or a small sampling of work. Ask them to also give you feedback on how you present. If you are interested in a particular area, like medical design, get together with an IDSA member in that area, armed with questions about day-to-day activities and whether or not your skill set is a good match. If not, you may be able to develop the skill(s) that you will need.

Self Evaluation

18 Chris Conley, "Leveraging Design's Core Competencies," Founding principal of consulting firm Gravity Tank.; Associate Professor and Track Lead, Product Design, Institute of Design, *Design Management Institute Review*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Summer 2004.

Designers' Core Competencies

How do others define designers' core competencies? It depends. Chris Conley, who teaches at the Institute of Design in Chicago, has presented seven competencies he believes are at the core of design.¹⁸

They are:

- The ability to **understand the context or circumstances** of a design problem and frame them in an insightful way
- The ability to **work at a level of abstraction** appropriate to the situation at hand
- The ability to **model and visualize solutions** even with imperfect information
- An approach to **problem solving** that involves the simultaneous creation and evaluation of multiple alternatives
- An ability to **add or maintain value** as pieces are integrated into a whole
- An ability to **establish purposeful relationships** among elements of a solution and between the solution and its context
- An ability to **use form to embody ideas** and to communicate their value

These competencies, Conley believes, can add value to a wide range of business initiatives, "even when there isn't anything in particular yet to design." He has also said that a person doesn't have to be a "designer" to learn and apply these skills. How do Conley's competencies feel? Can you think about yourself in light of them?

Are you more comfortable measuring yourself against a more traditional listing of core design skills and behaviors? They're here.

On the following pages is a list of what I consider core design, core cognitive and core behavior skills for designers, as well as complementary (those you really need) and correlative (those which are nice to have) skills. Rather than the usual tiered rating system, there is just a checklist. Since this is a self-evaluation, you can decide easily what you do well (strength column) and what you need to improve upon (need column), with your aspirations in mind. Remember, there are other competencies to cultivate in yourself to be successful in the design business aside from being a great form maker that will enable you to have success in the design business. There are many important roles other than hands-on designer to play.

Self Evaluation

Core Skills Assessment Worksheet

Strength	Need	CORE CREATIVE SKILLS
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagines
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Creates forms that convey meaning
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establishes aesthetics/design iconography
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Makes design decisions informed by emotional, social and cultural needs and values
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develops/implements design language
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hand sketches
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Iterates through rapid prototyping
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Uses physical modeling
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Creates simulations
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Has a repertoire of colors, materials, finishes
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develops design standards
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Designs to international supply chains
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Understands parameters: engineering, manufacturing, marketing, financial, purchasing, legal
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Considers environmental sustainability
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Considers inclusive design and ergonomics
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Influences technology to adapt to design need
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is up on the latest CAD technologies— 3D modeling/2D rendering

Strength	Need	COMPLEMENTARY CREATIVE SKILLS (Really Need)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Innovates consistently
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Anticipates
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Creates physical and psychological interfaces
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Integrates specific technologies
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensures system compatibility
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is continually aware of and/or uses new technologies, techniques and tool-kits
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Translates organization's brand into design expressions
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Applies design methodology to variable contexts

Strength	Need	CORRELATIVE CREATIVE SKILLS (Nice to Have)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Experience design
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Digital interface design
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Interaction design
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Software design
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Product development
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Design in context of prevailing ecosystems
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Awareness of continually changing cultural landscape and needs and desires of societies and cultural communities
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Consideration of effects on future-demographic development, aging, globalization, political power, economics, war

Self Evaluation

Core Skills Assessment Worksheet

Strength	Need	CORE COGNITIVE SKILLS
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Understands strategy and objectives of company/client organization
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Uses state-of-the-art design methodology
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Plans, implements or contracts out knowledge-building and information-gathering research
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Analyzes research results to discover opportunities or solve complex problems
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Interprets quantitative and qualitative research for insights and understanding to inform design decisions
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Observes, recognizes, becomes aware of, discerns patterns
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Recognizes or generates breakthrough ideas
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adapts ideas from one context to another
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Makes connections from past to present to future
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Uses empathy, informed judgment, reason
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Trusts intuition and perception
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Imagines alternatives
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Aligns design decisions with strategy and objectives of company/client organization
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Understands competitive landscape
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Considers needs of integrated business partners

Strength	Need	CORE COMMUNICATION SKILLS
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	English proficiency
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Effectively communicates ideas to others: visually, verbally, in writing
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Articulates value of design
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Convinces and persuades
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Listens carefully
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Knows additional language(s)

Strength	Need	MANAGEMENT SKILLS
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Likes people
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Trusts people and delegates responsibility
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sets priorities to achieve company/client organization's goals
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sets expectations for and evaluates performance
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mentors/coaches/enables individual development
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is politically astute
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	"Gives freedom to stray from process" (Dev Patnaik)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Builds team of complementary people
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Orchestrates teams
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develops and leverages networks
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Consults and negotiates to optimize results

Self Evaluation

Core Skills Assessment Worksheet

Strength	Need	MANAGEMENT SKILLS continued
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Collaborates across functions (marketing, engineering, technology, etc.) as appropriate
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is an evangelist of design's value
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develops design briefs
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develops and manages design function budget
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Manages projects effectively
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Perseveres despite resistance
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Selects and manages outside resources
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provides regular updates to staff, senior management, clients, customers, collaborators, vendors/partners
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is a key presenter of groups' accomplishments
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Advocates for teams' recommendations
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enables convergence on final design decisions
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develops design job descriptions (with HR)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Assures protection of intellectual property
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Negotiates for appropriate space, equipment, resources

Strength	Need	LEADERSHIP SKILLS
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Thought leader
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Change agent
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Drives results
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Acts decisively
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Anticipates risk, change, opportunity
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Assumes responsibility
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inspires
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is personally effective
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Trusts intuition
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is a people's advocate
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Recognizes strengths of others
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Incorporates diverse influences
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sets others up for success; holds people accountable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is mentally agile
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is results oriented
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Overcomes challenges
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is ambitious
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is competitive
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is influential in greater design community

Self Evaluation

Core Skills Assessment Worksheet

Strength	Needs	PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES*
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Confident and humble
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determined and persistent
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Empathetic
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Motivated yet patient
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Collaborative, a "we" person
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Positive attitude
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Passion for the work
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Willingly develops ideas of others
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Improves continually
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reaches out for help and to help
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Makes and keeps commitments
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Life-long learner
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Flexible—adjusts to change
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done right
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Good manners
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Respects views of others
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sense of appropriateness
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sense of humor
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Balances personal life to enable harmonious work life

*(Personal qualities that many employers have told us they are looking for)

Developing and Improving Expertise

Once you know what your strengths are and what areas you need to develop in light of your aspirations, rest assured that you can improve your performance in both; practice is the way that everyone can improve, even on their strengths. If you work hard with the goal of making improvements *by practicing correctly* whatever it is you are trying to improve, you will improve. There is no other way to do it.

Geoffrey Colvin in an article in *Fortune* magazine wrote, "We are not hostage to some naturally granted level of talent. We can make ourselves what we will." He says this is not a popular idea and that people hate to abandon the thought that if they found their talent, they would get rich and famous. **"That view is tragically constraining, because when they hit life's inevitable bumps in the road, they conclude that they just aren't gifted and give up."**¹⁹ This is important to remember.

Colvin's views, substantiated by a leading researcher in the field, Professor K. Anders Ericsson of Florida State University, is that natural talent is irrelevant to great success. Using as examples Tiger Woods, chess champions and leading musicians, he puts developing expertise into a context relevant to designers.

¹⁹ Geoffrey Colvin, What it Takes to be Great, *Fortune*, October 19, 2006.

Self Evaluation

Colvin states:

- There is no evidence of high-level performance without experience or practice.
- The most accomplished people need about 10 years of hard work, practicing or studying, before becoming world class.
- Many people work hard for decades without approaching greatness or even getting significantly better.
- The best people in any field deliberately practice—intending to improve their performance reaching for objectives just beyond their level of competence, continually observing results, getting feedback and making appropriate adjustments—for hours every day, roughly the same amount every day, including weekends.
- Tons of deliberate practice equals great performance.

Many individual competencies of a designer (e.g., presenting, negotiating, deciphering financial documents) can be improved with practice. According to this framework, the goal of the practice must be to get better at it, and the performance must be measured and plotted over time. With that in mind, the aggregate of capabilities (a few are listed) needed to be a designer and the synergies between them from the simplest to the most critical are improvable by practice:

- Making operational plans from strategy
- Doing research
- Finding information
- Analyzing

- Writing reports
- Sketching
- Visualizing concepts
- Creating form
- Persuading
- Collaborating

You can practice and improve your ability to make judgments and decisions in ambiguous situations where you have imperfect information.

This is one of the key differentiators between designers and many other types of specialists. Only by careful examination of the judgments or decisions you make from one situation to the next will enable you to improve your success rate when you make them. Experiments prove that learning by doing is better than the case study method.

Explicitly trying to get better at doing the job instead of just doing the job will enable you to process information more deeply and retain it longer. An amateur can take a singing lesson for fun, but the professional increases concentration and focus on improving performance during each lesson.

Getting informed feedback is a critical part of the equation. You need to know how successful you are during practice or how successful you are becoming, or you won't get any better and will stop caring. Designers usually get a lot of feedback about their work because most are working in teams with diverse members who are always asking questions, asking for justifications and reasons, and making suggestions. Make it part of your routine to actively ask for real feedback about all aspects of your performance, from teachers, peers you admire, an engineer you

Self Evaluation

are visualizing an idea for or a marketing manager to whom you are presenting a solution. And ask them later to compare your most recent performance to the previous one. **“Freedom comes from inviting reality checks while at the same time holding a positive self-view.”**

Deliberately developing expertise enables you to build a “mental model” of yourself as a designer and picture how all the elements you have to deal with every day are influencing your performance. As you practice, your mental model will keep enlarging and your performance will improve.

“If great performance was easy, it wouldn’t be rare.” Experts understand a lot about the behavior that produces great performance but don’t know where the behavior comes from. It’s also a mystery where the motivation comes from for an individual to make a huge investment of energy in deliberate practice.

How much of an investment are you willing to make to get even better at what you do well, and improve the design, cognitive skills and behaviors you are not so good at?

Roles

As new technologies appear and new elements of design are revealed, some designers are attracted to them,

have an affinity for working with them (user interface, for example), and become specialists. **Activities become areas of practice.**²⁰ Initially, they are in demand, and the job market offers them a premium. As technology and design continue to evolve, technologies and elements once considered new become commonplace while other new ones emerge and attract attention. Very soon every recent design grad will have enough of an understanding of green design, interface and customer experience design to incorporate them into their tool kit. Today, who would not do a bit of design research before lifting a pen, pencil or mouse?

The following is a list of specialties and domains that designers in any position should be aware of, some of which will have dedicated roles associated with them, depending on the organization. These terms and definitions are constantly evolving and some of them overlap. Some are excerpted from Wikipedia. Depending on context and individuals, they are sometimes used to mean different things.

20 Peter Jones Interview, NextD.org, excerpted from *Things You See*

Roles

21 Mark Hurst, Good Experience
Blog, June 7, 2007
(www.goodexperience.com)

Customer Experience

Customer experience design in the enterprise-wide context is concerned with the responses customers have to any direct or indirect contact with an organization, generally in the course of making a purchase, using a product or service and getting help. In the broadest sense the discipline has spread to the consideration of all touch points with business-to-business or business-to-consumer customers. Customer experience designers lead development of conceptual ideas, strategic design rationale and overall product experience on an enterprise level. The best way to get consensus about improving customer experience is to get all stakeholders in a room together to watch customers.²¹

Design and Innovation Strategy

The strategist builds relationships with experts in social research, design and business planning methods to help clients understand people, cultures and trends. They organize information collected into coherent frameworks of discoveries which may generate a large and varied body of new opportunities for growth, recommending the most realistic course of action.

The strategist develops a road map for clients to what's next in new products and services, new markets, new business models, reinventing existing categories, launching new businesses, and/or developing internal innovation management capabilities.

Design Evangelism

An evangelist demonstrates to internal and external stakeholders the advantages of their requirements of particular materials, processes, principles or software. They develop free participatory events and speaking engagements where product value can be demonstrated, inviting designers and engineers. They write articles and blogs and encourage experimentation with

the subject of their evangelism to stimulate conversion. They are able to help constituents transfer ideas from one context to another. They visit with key thought leaders. They bring back unanticipated needs for development. They have a passion for their subject and are outgoing, self-motivated networkers.

Design Management

Design management refers to developing and implementing a design strategy to support the strategic goals of an organization. The design manager orchestrates the development and design of services, products, environments, communications, systems and interfaces (whatever is appropriate) to deliver the quality of experience the organization has promised to its customers at every touch point. Design managers operate at the intersection of technology, marketing and finance, collaborating with other internal and external resources as appropriate. They are responsible for developing their designers and design teams and understanding and communicating the crucial role that design plays to fulfill their organizations' objectives to all internal functions. They establish budgets for their teams and document design use cases and how design can strengthen the organization. They put in place the most effective and efficient design processes. Design managers need strong leadership, collaboration, presentation and team-building skills and an aptitude for understanding and driving opportunities for the organization. Design management is about getting things done with and through other people.

LEARN MORE

www.dmi.org

www.designresearchsociety.org

Journal of Design Research (JDR)

ISSN (Online): 1569-1551

ISSN (Print): 1748-3050

www.designcouncil.org.uk

Roles

Design Operations

Design operations is involved with developing an internal design organization through building relationships with project management from various business units, corporate marketing and research groups; for example, domestically and internationally. The design operations manager develops strategies and methods for handling project timelines and checkpoints and prioritizes project involvement across multiple design disciplines and teams. These may include industrial design, graphic design, human factors engineering, experience design and design research. Work involves balancing workloads, shifting projects across teams and keeping things moving. Critical paths are negotiated with business units for completion of projects. Mentoring and project guidance are provided to design team members. Requirements include a broad understanding of a design-related field; design sensitivity; training or certification in professional project management; and knowledge of hardware, services and the software development process.

Design Planning

Design planning involves getting key customers as well as design, marketing and other key functions (software engineering or manufacturing, if appropriate) to work together to define design strategies, drive the creative flow of ideas and establish the role of design in strategies, plans and budgets. Design planning participates in organizing, building and facilitating the hierarchy of customer needs, defining products, solutions, offerings, ecosystems, roadmaps, strategies and plans. Design planners contract design research—both customer research and design trends—to support strategy, planning and architecture. They bridge user research and product design. They determine opportunities for the organization to differentiate and innovate (evolution and revo-

lution). They need experience working with designers, project and design management skills (including presentations), and the ability to understand and communicate customer needs showing connections to business strategies. They must be able to drive common understanding; negotiate with work partners inside and outside the organization; and translate customer, business and technology requirements into strategies and solutions.

Design Research

Design researchers have knowledge of various usability research techniques, including, but not limited to, heuristic evaluations, cognitive walkthroughs, task-based usability testing, prototyping tools and methods, experience with statistical analysis, project management and careful analysis of findings. The purpose of design research is to yield actionable results from the empathy the designer experiences from understanding users.

Experience Design

Experience design is the practice of designing products, processes, services, events and environments—each of which is a human experience—based on the consideration of an individual's or group's needs, desires, beliefs, knowledge, skills, experiences and perceptions. An emerging discipline, experience design (sometimes referred to as customer experience design) attempts to draw from many sources, including cognitive psychology and perceptual psychology, cognitive science, architecture and environmental design, haptics, product design, information design, information architecture, ethnography, brand management, interaction design, service design, storytelling, heuristics and design thinking.

LEARN MORE

www.goodexperience.com

Making Meaning: How Successful Businesses Deliver Meaningful Customer Experiences. New Riders Press ISBN 0-321-37409-6

www.experientia.com

Roles

Human Factors Engineering

LEARN MORE

Designing for Humans blog:
www.humanfactors.typepad.com
(provided by the IDSA Human Factors Section)

www.hfes.org (Human Factors and Ergonomics Society)

www.interaction-design.org

www.usernomics.com

www.ergonomidesign.com

www.iae.cc (International Association of Ergonomics)

The terms human factors and ergonomics are often used interchangeably to define a career path and research discipline. Practitioners may be designers, psychologists, scientists or engineers and they do analysis, experimentation and modeling of human interfaces.

The human factors engineer “discovers and applies information” and insights “about human behavior, abilities, limitations and other characteristics”²² to the design of hardware, software and environments to increase usability, efficiency, safety and acceptance.

“Physical human factors/ergonomics is concerned with human anatomical, anthropometric, physiological and biomechanical characteristics

as they relate to physical activity,”²³ including interacting with the environment.

Cognitive human factors/ergonomics is focused on human cognitive components such as the domain in which a worksystem is operating and their influence on interface design of complex, high tech or automated systems.

“Emotional human factors/ergonomics identifies intangible and often implicit needs” of people and interprets them so they can be developed into design elements of products, services, systems and environments to build customer loyalty, good word of mouth and the perception of increased value.

Interaction Design

Interaction design shapes the interaction of people with digital technology on a web site, product or system for work, play or entertainment. The generic term applies to analog situations as well. Interaction design shows people where they are in a system, what they can do next and what’s going to happen once they get there. It is achieved through a systematic and iterative process starting with research and discovery, including requirements, stakeholder and task analysis and prototyping of

conceptual models and ongoing inspection and evaluation methods for usability and emotional factors. Whether the objective is to play a game, order DVDs or program a fire alarm system, the interaction needs to be clear, intuitive and direct. The design elements involved include motion, sound, time, space and texture.

Project Management

Project management is the discipline of organizing and managing resources (i.e., time, budget, risk, people) in such a way that the project is completed within defined scope and quality, time and cost constraints. A project is a temporary and one-time endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, environment, system or service. The first challenge of project management is to ensure that a project is delivered within defined constraints. The second, more ambitious challenge is the optimized allocation and integration of inputs needed to meet pre-defined objectives. The third is for the project manager to be empowered to make decisions. In whatever field, a successful project manager must be able to envision the entire project from start to finish, understand the risks and have the ability to ensure that this vision is realized.

LEARN MORE

Designing Interactions, MIT Press, 2007, ISBN 0-262-13474-8.

Designing for Interaction, New Riders, 2007, ISBN 0-321-43206-1.

www.interaction-design.org

www.ixda.org

LEARN MORE

www.pmi.org

22 Chapanis, 1985

23 www.interaction-design.org

Roles

Sales/New Business Development

Sales/new business development specialists for large consulting firms find and go after significant engagements at very high levels in potential client organizations. Smaller firms may have less ambitious targets. Salespeople have to develop a deep understanding of their firm's unique offering and process and be a cultural fit. They participate in developing a sales strategy and a target list of organizations with firm principals. Sales and new business development specialists are proactive; they do not wait for calls to come to them. They are skilled at turning prospects into opportunities. They have an entrepreneurial spirit and attitude and the ability to rely and act on intuitive insight and gut instincts. They are also skilled presenters and negotiators and are very persuasive.

In some organizations, sales and new business development specialists are also expected to manage ongoing client relationships. In others, once a job is sold, it is turned over to the team that will be responsible for it. The position is often supported by a marketing capability, as well as partners/principals and senior staff who also participate in new business development.

User Experience

LEARN MORE

www.sigchi.org
www.UXNet.org
www.ACM.org
www.Interaction-design.org

See also: www.adaptivepath.com

User experience (UX) in relation to technology (not just web, software, etc.) involves translating business goals into creative solutions for interaction design, information architecture, usability and visual design. User experience designers lead interaction design and collaborate with internal and external design resources—corporate identity, editorial, usability and advertising. They plan, pri-

oritize, coordinate and conduct user requirements analysis, task analysis, conceptual modeling, information architecture design, interaction design and usability testing, and perform design reviews and usability testing during various phases of the product development process to evaluate and iterate designs. Requirements for UX designers include knowledge of user interface design processes and methodology, including user-centered design, ethnographic research, iterative design and visual communication design. They need strong, broad knowledge and advanced skills in visual design, information architecture, usability evaluation and appropriate technologies.

User Interface Design

The user interface designer is involved throughout the product development lifecycle in the overall process of designing how a user can interact with a product, site or system. They lead and participate in the planning, documentation and development of user interfaces and user experience concepts for key features and applications for products, systems and sites. They champion the end-user and promote user-centered design methodologies. They develop and document use cases, task flows, and screen and interaction design. User interface designers need skills in graphic design, information architecture, software engineering, the principles of cognitive psychology, cognitive modeling, technical writing, graphic presentation software and a wide variety of data collection and testing techniques.

Job Hunting Mode

Record Keeping

Before you respond to a single listing on IDSA's web site, Coroflot, Creative Hotlist, Monster, your college job board or a headhunter's contact about a position, think about record keeping. You are about to step into an abyss. Set up a spreadsheet or system with a reminder calendar to keep track of:

- Lead sources (e.g., headhunter, friend, job board, etc.)
- The source's email address and telephone number
- Title of opportunity and/or job number
- Job description
- Name of prospective employer (at first you may not know it, but when they respond to you, you will), along with a contact name, telephone number and email
- Whether or not you sent your resume (and the date sent)
- Whether or not you sent samples (and the date sent) or the URL where your samples can be found
- What response you received and when (e.g., rejection letter, request for telephone call, request for appointment)
- Your actions and when (e.g., returned call, left voice mail)
- Next steps; comments
- Resolution

Be Ready for Phone Calls

Your child is probably very adorable, but you will get job-related calls from individuals that are not interested in hearing them on your voice mail, or hearing your favorite song. What is appropriate is "Hello, this is Amanda Durdan. Please leave a message and a good time to return your call." Or "Hello, this is Amanda Durdan. You may try my cell phone at 917.606.3967 or my office number after 10 am EST at 212.672.3566, or leave a detailed message and I will call you back."

Expect to hear voices on your phone that you don't recognize.

If you are lucky, now that you are in job-hunting mode, this will happen often. Answer all calls as if they are from a prospective employer, in a business-like way, "This is Richard," or "Pam Tackey here." Not, "Yes?" or "Hey."

If you are on a cell phone and the reception is not perfect, ask if you can return the call immediately from a land line. The caller could be a hiring manager or assistant, a human resources person, corporate recruiter or a headhunter. If you receive a call and are unable to talk, say, "Thanks for calling. I can't talk right now. What is a good time for me to call you back?" When you return the call, introduce yourself as you would in a face-to-face meeting.

Remind those you live with that you are going to be receiving important calls that you will need to take in private. If you are out, they must please ask for and clearly write the caller's name, company and telephone number. Ask small children to refrain from answering the phone. If a child or barking dog needs to be removed from the vicinity of the call, ask the caller if you can call back in five minutes. You don't want to call back more than a few minutes later because if the link to a prospective employer is calling you now, that's when the individual has scheduled time

Job Hunting Mode

to speak with you. Later they will have another scheduled call or meeting. Avoid playing telephone tag.

It's ideal if you can refer to your tracking system when you get a call, figure out which position you have applied for that the call is about, what you have sent and when. Calls (and, of course, emails) are a natural outcome of making many contacts. If you don't have access to the system, take careful notes on the notepad you always carry, including the name and contact information for the person calling, and add it to the tracking system as soon as the call is finished.

For openers, try an enthusiastic greeting like, "I am so glad to hear from you. Thanks so much for calling." You won't have body language and facial expressions to help communicate, but enjoy the give and take, allow yourself to express it, and the caller will feel it. **Charming is a state of mind. Smile and reach out to the individual as if they were right there. Remember eye contact. You can't do that on the phone but you can visualize it.** Talking to strangers and defeating what could be less-than-ideal conditions for communication can be great fun. Be responsive, articulate, courteous and good humored. At the end of the call, if you are interested in the job, the company and the location, say so and ask when you will meet in person or what the next step will be.

As search consultants, we make lots of what are known in the sales business as "cold calls." It is how we contact potential candidates whose names have come to us through research or recommendation and others who have responded to a job posting with a resume that reflects that they may be qualified

for a current search. We introduce ourselves, ask if it is a good time for the person to talk, and ask a few questions to learn if the individual is qualified for a particular search. Our preliminary call may take only 10-15 minutes because the next step is to ask for digital samples. If those also match the requirements, we schedule time for a webcam or an interview in our office, depending upon candidate location. More than half of the candidates we talk with are eliminated from further consideration after the call because they are boring, give no chock-full-of-good information responses, have no sense of humor, or go on and on about nothing. To us, the challenge of finding new people who are terrific is one of the best things about being a recruiter. We go crazy when we hear that a client's call with a candidate did not go well. It takes only a little imagination, preparation and desire to make it work.

Calls from Headhunters

If you receive a call from a headhunter you haven't contacted, be nice (some people respond with, "Don't you ever call me again"). If you are not looking for a position, say so, but hear them out. You may know someone who qualifies for the position about which they are calling you. Give the recruiter a description of a job that might tempt you in the future. Building a relationship by providing names and becoming a source of information may pay off in the future with a call about a great opportunity that you might not have otherwise received. Show the same clarity, enthusiasm and courtesy as you would in a call with any valuable resource. **Headhunters are surrogates for prospective employers.**

Resume

First Impression

The first contact you initiate with a prospective employer or headhunter will usually include an emailed resume. It is a business document that traditionally supplies standard information—name, contact information, location, work experience and education. An emailed resume, usually sent as an attachment, must be written and formatted to capture the interest of a prospective employer in the first one to three inches, or it simply will not be read any further.

A brief cover letter is often appropriate, but most prospective employers or recruiters go straight to the resume to see if your experience meets their baseline requirements before reading the cover letter. **Clarity, brevity and relevance of content are important characteristics of a resume, as are organization, readability, quality of information, writing style, correct spelling and grammar.** Ergonomically speaking, the viewer looks first to see your name and then your location. What's expected next is where you are employed or have worked most recently.

This guide is meant to be like a checklist to ensure that you provide all the information a prospective employer or headhunter wants to see in a resume. It does not give design guidelines. Although an overly designed resume in Word or a PDF with a background pattern with lots of different fonts usually doesn't work, there are ways to use a simple typeface or two, the bold function, margins and line spacing that can make the document memorable, easy to read and informative.

Customize

The trick to getting your resume noticed is customization; not by design, but by content. If you are responding to a position posted on a prospective employer's web site or job posting site, the description will summarize the responsibilities of the position and the requirements needed to qualify. **If your resume does not present your experience in light of what the prospective employer is looking for, you will not get a phone call or email from them expressing interest.** If you are sending your resume to an organization you are interested in and not to a job posting, you will need to write a resume that will give them a reason to call you, and the reason cannot reside (only) in the cover letter.

Before beginning to write, design a simple resume format that will work in Word or PDF. Be religious about readability, clarity and brevity; don't go smaller than 10-point type. Don't use any background illustration or tone that will interfere with it being easily read. The resume has to be accessible to a wide variety of recipients—a CEO, human resources specialist, director of an in-house design group, principal in a design firm, or senior people in engineering, marketing, user experience, corporate communications or design research.

Resume

Write a “master” resume (the one you will later customize) using the following suggestions. You will need to customize it when applying for specific positions so that the information about your experience and objectives dovetails with the job opening’s stated requirements.

I am not suggesting that you distort or be untruthful. If you think about it carefully, you will be able describe your experience on each job in light of what the prospective employer is looking for. Your resume has to tell them that you can do what they are scanning resumes to find, at least in part, or you will not be selected for further investigation.

If you are not applying for a specific position but reaching out to an organization you are interested in, the resume must provide information about you that people in that organization will care about, even if you are a new graduate.

Format

The following describes an American-style resume format. People from other countries aiming to work in the US are encouraged to follow it.

Your resume should not be longer than two pages; one should suffice for a new graduate. Put your name, telephone numbers, web address and email address on the top of the first page; also put your name on the second page if using one. You can find formats for curriculum vitae (CVs) for teaching positions online.

Identification & Contact Information

Use a professional address. Addresses such as great_designer2@yahoo.com, or the one you share with family, like janmobobkaren@hotmail.com, will not encourage prospective employers to open your mail the way a straightforward one that clearly identifies who it is from will. Addresses such as charlessteinman@earthlink.net or janesmith@hotmail.com are the way to go.

It is OK not to supply your street address as long as you provide city, state or country. Don’t want to be called at work? Don’t provide your office telephone number. Don’t want to be emailed at work? Don’t email from your work email address or put it on your resume. If your current location and telephone number are temporary, indicate how long you will be there and provide a permanent location and/or telephone. Provide area codes, URL(s) and zip or postal codes where appropriate. Distinguish day or office numbers from cell and home numbers as appropriate. An email address makes it easy for the recipient to contact you at any time.

Resume

Summary/Objective

Follow contact information with a brief summary of your aspirations, interests, experience, skills and/or objectives. The summary/objective provides the perfect vehicle for customization and should be brief, at most three lines. **Include a summary only if you have a clear and meaningful one.**

Here's an example of a simple objective from:

A user experience designer:

"My Goal - To create revolutionary products that are beautiful, smart and easy to use."²⁴

A former managing director of a consultancy:

"Pragmatic, decisive general manager and brand building expert widely recognized for adding value in complex businesses and in domestic and international settings. Crafts strategies and programs grounded in consumer insight and customer focus and ensures impeccable execution. Develops and motivates individual and collective talents and instills a sense of employee enterprise, ownership, urgency and accountability."²⁵

A new graduate:

"Recent graduate with strong communication, problem-solving and critical thinking skill sets interested in project management or design career."

²⁴ From candidate's resume; identity protected by confidentiality.

²⁵ From another candidate's resume; identity protected by confidentiality.

Forget "looking for a challenge." Everyone is. Don't respond to a posting for a design position in a corporate setting with an objective stating a preference for a consulting office.

Work Experience

List your work experience in reverse chronological order (current/most recent job first). Start with name of the company and your title, followed by dates of employment (month and year). Start the description of your responsibilities with a brief description of the company or organization if not obvious: "Office furniture manufacturer," "Small brand design consultancy" or "\$50 billion consumer products company."

If you have had a great deal of experience and have held several jobs, plan a two-page resume containing full descriptions for the most recent 3-5 jobs. Bullet points rather than sentences are fine. Be specific about recent positions, but not about the ones held 15 years ago (unless one is more relevant than more recent ones to the job you seek). Describe the details of your role and responsibilities, how many people you supervised, or how many people who had responsibilities similar to yours, (e.g., one of three design managers), the reporting relationship(s) and what was accomplished (including business results). If describing work in a consulting environment, name clients and the projects or programs you led or were involved with. List temporary, consulting and contract employment if relevant to the position for which you are applying. Recent graduates should describe work experiences at summer, part-time, freelance and/or co-op jobs and clearly identify them as such.

As a general rule, describe the positions according to the time spent in them and their relative importance to your career. You may want to list, but not describe, very early positions held unless they add something important to your qualifications in relation to your current objectives. Leave them out or write "May 1978 to March 1985, various design positions."

Resume

Don't emphasize experiences you don't want to repeat. If you have had a wide range of responsibilities but only want to retain some of them in future jobs, write in detail about the ones you want to do more of and either ignore the others or mention them discreetly.

Education

Use reverse chronological order here too. List the name of the most recent educational institution attended and location followed by degree, month and year, major/specialization, dissertation, thesis title, grade point average (GPA) if excellent, and honors and awards received, if any. Including dates of attendance is optional. Recent bachelor's degree program graduates can include thesis subject and description, especially if relevant to their objectives. Do not provide a complete course list. Include high school only if it was geared to your professional objective.

List any additional courses or training you have had before or after receiving your degree(s) and certificates earned in this section.

Technical Skills (optional)

Don't include just a software list, but also task analysis, user profiles, usability testing, brainstorming moderator and so on. List any patents held.

If you have many awards, presentations, panels and/or publication credits, start a section called "Professional Activities." List organization and society memberships, conferences attended, professional licenses earned or studying for, exhibitions, travel, visits to factories in Asia or elsewhere and so on. Architects may put registration information here or after name at the beginning of the resume.

Architects with many years of experience may use a third page for a project list organized into project types.

Personal Information

Personal information is optional. It is against US law for prospective employers to ask questions about age, gender, marital status, religion, race, national origin, military service or health status before hiring. If there is cause for question, indicate your US and other work authorization(s) here.

Other Information

List anything else about you that will interest a prospective employer in the "other" section: language skills, special interests, knowledge or talents not evident from your employment history.

Ethics

All information you provide is easy to check and many large companies do check degrees claimed, former employers and dates of employment. They often do credit checks. An offer of employment to one candidate we recommended was withdrawn when the employer found he was one credit short of the degree he listed on his resume.

You Can't Hide

One last thought. Some people will take the time to look for you on Facebook or MySpace. Avoid posting content on these types of sites that may seem inappropriate to a representative of a prospective employer.

A portfolio is a self-explanatory strategic tool

for showcasing the type of experiences you've had, your core design ability and process, the needs you've addressed, the quality level of your technical skills, and your potential. Critical to making a successful portfolio are a well-organized archive, a strategy to determine what to show in a particular interview, a sequence plan for presenting visuals, and framing the storytelling of the context and circumstances. Visuals and text have to support one another.

The portfolio is a vehicle to make your value offering so obvious that it makes the competition irrelevant.

Every designer needs a portfolio; even design managers, design directors, vice presidents of design and chief creative officers who may have not been doing hands-on design for a while. These individuals' portfolios show projects and programs that resulted from their vision and direction. Teachers' portfolios, in addition to showing their own work, contain photos of the work of their students. Design operations and project managers who participated in establishing effective patterns, cut time and cost, and were significant profit drivers should show the results of their collaboration and contribution with numbers and visuals of the design accomplishments involved. Account and marketing managers, strategic consultants, new business developers, design researchers and design planners can do the same.

Students should begin early to collect and carefully store materials—online or in paper folders—relative to the best projects from the classroom, freelance, summer jobs and personal work. Label folders with project name and dates and include the statement of the situation, your research, digital and/or by-hand concept sketches, photos of preliminary models, form development, wire-frame drawings and interface design (if appropriate), renderings of final design, drafting, materials and manufacturing specifications, “green” and “inclusive” considerations, any testing, and whatever else was done to actualize it. Archiving is a good habit to develop as is keeping the content safe.

A portfolio is a work in progress. Its content will evolve and change as you gain experience, learn about what you do well and what you want to do more of. It is not a trip down memory lane. Just because you designed something doesn't mean it is portfolio material. **If there is anything in the portfolio you have to make excuses for or are not proud of, get rid of it. (When in doubt, take it out.)**

After you have had 3-5 years of experience, school work will be replaced by “real” work. Prospective employers are not interested in how you used to do something, unless it relates directly and positively to what they need you to work on, and doesn't look dated. Potential employers want to know what your abilities are at that given moment. Never show to anyone, especially a prospective employer, any work considered confidential by an employer or client. Always be clear and truthful about your responsibilities or contributions on a project.

Portfolio

Customize

What is customizing? If a job description calls for someone who sketches excellently by hand, be sure examples of hand drawing are in your portfolio, hopefully integrated into the presentation of a project. If not, show them separately. If you are an automobile designer and want to have other types of consumer product design opportunities, change your traditional automobile design portfolio. Instead of nothing but automobile design, stop and think about the series of integrated products and systems that make a car or truck a most complex consumer product. Show and talk about the research you engaged in or used the results of to develop a vehicle or products a vehicle contains. An instrument panel, steering wheel, entertainment and vanity consoles, storage systems, seating, lighting and so on are products within a product. Supplement the portfolio with sketches of the other types of product design opportunities you are looking for. Very often students who are graduating think the portfolio has to consist of work done in school or on the job. There is no law about this. Develop content to showcase who you are and what you want to do in design terms, and create a broad picture of your talents.

When you are presenting a portfolio and the position for which you are interviewing calls for a strong team leader, what should you do if you haven't played that role? Explain what your role on the team for each project was, and the contributions of other team members. Describe what you would do differently, if anything, or what you learned from the team leader. Say, if it is true, that you are ready for a team leader role as your next step.

General vs. Industry-Specific Portfolio

Once you've graduated (or if you're graduating from a school having majored in automotive design or furniture, for example), you'll have to decide whether to have a portfolio featuring a range of subject matter or one to show to industry-specific employers. **Our experience shows that for a new graduate, a completely industry-specific portfolio can impede a career under some circumstances.**

- What if there are very few jobs in the office furniture or toy industry when you graduate?
- What if a parent's ill health confines you to a geographic area where no firms are engaged in designing footwear?
- What if, after making the rounds, none of the automobile companies offer you a position?
- What if no one will hire a design researcher without a master's degree?

My colleagues and I advise diverse portfolio content, in case you need to seek employment outside your area of first preference.

Keep out the wider range of work until you need it, or include it if it adds quality and depth to your specialized portfolio. In the final analysis, you may find happiness working on projects and programs you never dreamed you'd be interested in.

Portfolio

Formats

Trust me: There is no need to ponder the creation of the greatest container of all time or the slickest web site or PowerPoint; it's the quality of the work and the design and strategy of the presentation of content that matters.

I've seen more than 70,000 portfolios and heard years of feedback from clients about what they wanted to see and what was missing.



PalmPeeler™ designed by Chef'n Corp., Gold IDEA winner 2007

Once you accept that fancy presentation techniques are less important than content, you are free to think about your core presentation and what you want to communicate. You also need portions of content that are customizable to match the requirements of a particular job for which you are interviewing. Before you are offered a coveted position, you may have to show your portfolio to people who understand what they are looking at, as well as those who don't. Plan the content around visual materials of completed design work, preceded by the research and thinking involved. Include how you visualized concepts, developed solutions and created forms to express ideas and value rather than the usual rectangles with rounded corners. The content will showcase your approach to discovering opportunities, solving problems, understanding context, integrating parts into a whole and your ability to commence work despite not having all the information or resources at hand. The latter demonstrates your ability to deal with ambiguity, something designers are supposed to be very good at, as well as technical skills like hand sketching of concepts, model making, computer concept visualization and modeling, and any other ways you visually communicate information. Some designers add sketches of projects in other areas of interest they have not had the opportunity to fully explore.

Portfolio

Words and Type

Because it doesn't occur to most recent graduates that one day they might be interviewed in a room where eight people will be sitting around a conference table, they are still making 8 ½ x 11-inch or smaller hard copy portfolios. And because they do not understand that many of the people who will be involved in the decision to hire them are over 40, they are using 8-point type on resumes and web sites, in laptop presentations and portfolios. This is a health hazard. Many clutter their presentations with graphic elements that are simply a distraction. Judicious editing to the most relevant bullet points is more appropriate than lots of text, as no one has time to do much reading when looking through a portfolio.

Select a typeface or two to use consistently and develop a standard labeling and explanation protocol. Keep words to a minimum when putting words together with visuals; keep it simple and design for readability. A typical beginner's error is to stack a block of type with too many words, justified left and right, with no indentation for paragraphs and no space between the lines, rendering it unreadable. Of course, use spell check and grammar check and ask another person to proofread every word in it.

Use a layout or sequencing method that allows you to make changes easily, like Post-it notes or the digital equivalent.

When sending 5-10 PDFs or JPGs or a PowerPoint presentation as a preview to headhunters or potential employers, simple written explanations under each image may be helpful. The same is true with online portfolios posted on job sites.

Content

For new grads, about five months before graduation is time enough to create the portfolio to help get you your first "real job." This is where your archive comes in. Go through the most recent folders (real or digital) first. Your latest work is usually best, but you need to dig deeper. Select diverse projects ranging from the simple to the complex. While looking through the folders and deciding which projects you want to include in the portfolio, make notes about what additions or revisions are needed for each project. Set aside time on your calendar over the following weeks to make the changes. Improving schoolwork using feedback from critiques in class and your latest, more mature thinking and technical skills to make some of the projects memorable is permitted.

New graduates do not need to use expensive materials, printing methods or the latest digital tools to develop or display content for their portfolio. In fact, being able to tell a design story with modest means is an advantage.

Experienced designers can select content from the archive of work designed or directed on the job. Some will already be in your portfolio. If you have the time and inclination, starting from a blank slate is a good idea. Divide the potential content into a core presentation: a big picture overview of your experience and projects you can insert when it is necessary to customize the portfolio.

Portfolio

To prepare for a particular interview, select samples to put into your portfolio that match or closely approximate what that prospective employer is seeking. Show projects that met or exceeded objectives and talk about that; show projects representing breakthroughs as well as those that made incremental improvements. Show before-and-afters, and, if you are so inclined, put in some conceptual or aspirational work in sketch form. You can also show solutions you proposed to what was selected by your employer at the time or the client organization.

No matter what format is used, the core presentation should include at least three major projects or programs. Each should have the simplest, clear description of the opportunity or problem; success criteria, research methodology, actionable findings, strategy to meet the needs discovered; the design process—ideation, iteration, modeling, prototyping, refining—shown through sketches and photos; and the relationship of the final design to the larger context and whether or not it was successful. There are many ways to do this, and you have to decide how much to show for each project or program based on how it feels when the portfolio is finished. When showing the portfolio, you want to talk about your knowledge of relevant tools and standards, drafting and detailing where appropriate.

Information, data and/or diagrams can be shown digitally along with final models, a video or animation of a manufactured product or system of products in use, or a walk-through of a designed environment. Individual brochures can communicate findings of projects entailing user research that was product centered, culture centered and/or activity centered, with or without an integrated digital presentation.

Container

The selection of a container depends on the core projects you plan to put inside. If using a binder with acetate leaves, an attaché case or a digital presentation, the show needs a beginning, middle and end, like a book. If choosing a plastic or leather binder, with or without a zipper, containing a spine that opens and closes to accept perforated acetate sleeves, 11 inches by 14 inches should be the minimum size. Choreograph what you take out of an attaché case and when (individual project binders or brochures plus mounted individual or sequenced visuals), and how they synchronize with a laptop presentation. Videos inserted appropriately are very effective. Use a layout or sequencing method that makes changing easy, like Post-it notes or the digital equivalent.

Every so often an experienced designer shows up with a battered briefcase from which work samples are extracted or a binder with worn edges, containing torn and scratched acetate sleeves. This is a misplaced Humphrey Bogart-type of nonchalance that doesn't work. **The thought that will run through the head of a prospective employer is, "Is this how this person would make a presentation to a client?"**

New graduates can include personal projects like photos of activity during a summer spent in rural Indonesia building community centers. Evidence of experiencing other cultures and unfamiliar behaviors is an advantage. Leave out fine arts projects unless the examples are magnificent. Figure drawings or photos of fully or partially undressed significant others are inappropriate.

Portfolio

When you finish the layout, ask yourself, “Have I shown:”

- My thinking process?
- How I do and use research?
- Opportunities I have discovered?
- How I visualize concepts and begin to explore them?
- How I select a concept, do multiple iterations and refine one to finish?
- My understanding of materials and manufacturing?
- Model making?
- Drafting?

Also ensure if your layout is hard copy, everything is spotless, or if it is digital, each image is easy to see and understand.



Fuego Outdoor Grilling System designed by Pentagram Design and Fuego, Gold IDEA winner 2007

Safety

A hard-copy portfolio contains precious and vulnerable cargo. Design it to be safe from the wear and tear of normal use, weather, coffee spills and greasy fingers. It should travel well and fit into an overhead compartment or under an airplane seat. Never trust it to the baggage department. Before you travel with it or leave it behind, copy it with a digital camera. Copy the digital files to a CD/DVD to keep at a friend's place, in a safety deposit box or park it on the web. Do whatever is necessary so that you can recreate it in case of fire or theft. Do the same with precious documents in your archive folders.

Writing Samples

If you write well, bring examples of proposals, road maps, strategies, contact reports, articles and presentations you've written to leave behind after an interview for reading at another time (vetted, of course, if confidential). If you find yourself continually asked at interviews for certain types of materials, make sure you provide them at the next interview.

Get Feedback

You will know soon enough if the portfolio helps or hinders your ability to get the job you want. If it doesn't help, keep working on it until it does.

Portfolio

FAQs

Q. Do I have to show sketches, or can I just show finished work?

A. Always show sketches. The ability to draw well is magical and, if you have it, adds enormously to your allure and value. A sequence of drawings is one of the best ways to show your thought process. Drawing is thinking through your hands. Good drawings help the ideas flow. Also show your visualization skills using digital media.

Q. Why must the portfolio be designed to be self-explanatory?

A. Because sometimes you will be asked to drop it off at a local prospective employer's office or ship it or send digital samples before an interview is arranged. Abbreviated versions of portfolios or bound color copies can be substituted for the original. Don't ever ship your original hard copy portfolio; the risk of it getting damaged or lost is too great.

Q. How do I get samples of my work for my portfolio from employers or clients?

A. Ask for them. If they are not forthcoming, take digital photos in an unobtrusive manner before work leaves your desk. If something is being printed, make one for yourself. Employers who are not generous with samples for designers' portfolios encourage devious practices. Some designers use evenings and Saturdays to make copies for themselves. Product literature can sometimes be obtained from clients or retailers/distributors/dealers that show photos of finished products or find the photos you need on the Internet. If you can't get to the trade show or museum exhibit you designed, ask someone who will be there to photograph it for you. Email a copy of your written reports, research, planning documents and presentations to yourself unless you have signed an agreement that you will not.

Q. How many projects should I show?

A. Enough to tell your story. Don't over-edit or overwhelm. It is better to have too much than too little.

Q. How about online portfolios?

A. Always bring an abbreviated hard-copy back-up in case of malfunction and a projector (or ask in advance for one to be available) if you expect more than one interviewer.

Q. If I want to be a toy designer but haven't yet designed any toys, what should I do?

A. Create at least five toy designs for your portfolio, documenting all phases of the process. Speak to parents and toy retailers. Observe children. Select one or two focus areas, like preschool or girls. Ask parents and children to critique your concepts and present them and the final designs in the portfolio.

Q. I've been working in the automobile business for five years and I never want to see another car as long as I live. How do I get out of this?

A. Select a few categories of products where what you have learned about designing cars is transferable: operator cabs and controls, seating, lawn and safety equipment, metal forming and plastics, sharing digital files and working in real-time with designers in other locations, human factors, what appeals to consumers, color forecasting, finishes, accessibility for repair and maintenance, project management (if any), and so on. Then do concepts and development of ideas for at least five different non-automotive products, carrying three of them through all phases of the design process, and add the results to your portfolio.

FAQ's

Q. The automobile business pays very well. Can I ask for a raise in the next job if it's not in that business?

A. Usually not. When changing from one specialty to another you may actually have to take a cut in pay. Be thankful for the opportunity; you'll catch up fast enough.

Q. All the work I've done in the past three years is considered confidential and won't be on the market for another year. What can I show?

A. Do not betray confidences. Explain the confidentiality situation to the prospective employer. Ask one or two individuals working for the former employer if they are willing to give a good reference for you when called. Or, if you are still employed, ask a trusted colleague or one who recently left the same workplace to be a reference. You can develop projects that are similar to the confidential ones but do not contain betrayals. When you know you are working on things you will not be able to show for awhile (or never), arrange to do freelance, volunteer or conceptual design work to be able to show your current level of thinking and skills.

Q. Can I show school work now that I have been out of school for a few years?

A. It depends. If you have three to five or ten years of experience and the only project you have that relates to a prospective employer's needs is something done in school, show it as is if well done, or make it better. Remember, most old work looks old.

Today there are so many opportunities to apply design thinking and skills.

There are so many industry sectors that employ industrial designers. The list expands each day as more companies concern themselves with finding ways to uncover and satisfy customer needs, enhance their customers' experience with their products and services, and become more innovative for long-term sustainable advantage. How do you find companies you want to connect with? There are a number of ways to generate a target list. The important thing is to make sure you have at least 20 target companies on your list, not just your top three. The process is imperfect. If you don't find what you are looking for with any of the first 20, prepare to proceed to the next 20. To help you begin to generate a list to work with, there are a variety of factors and sources to consider.

Industry Sectors

Some recent grads may not be aware of the many industry sectors that employ designers. The sample list provided on the following pages is not meant to be exhaustive, it's just to make you aware that the only limits to how you can use your skills are your own.

Research

Industry Sectors

3-D PACKAGING

Consumables / sterile / protective / promotional

CONSUMER PRODUCTS

Accessories

Eyewear / handbags / belts / jewelry

Appliances

Small appliances: grooming / food preparation / cleaning

Large appliances: kitchen / laundry / temperature control / air quality

Children/Baby Products

Care & feeding / transport / furniture

Electronics

Audio / visual entertainment equipment

Cameras

Mobile devices: cell phones / MP3s / accessories

Gaming equipment

Computers: notebook / desktop / handhelds / calculators

Printers / scanners / copiers / fax

Gift/Tabletop

Home décor: frames / clocks

Collectibles

Home

Bath

Building / ceiling / wall / flooring

DIY: tools / hardware

Kitchen / cooking / serving

Lawn / garden

Plumbing / fixtures / faucets

Storage / organization

Luggage

Soft bags / backpacks

Business cases

Office

Furniture / storage / organization

Supplies / staplers / hole punches / writing

Pets

Accessories / care / toys

Sporting Goods

Accessories

Apparel

Equipment

Footwear

Protective

Toy / board games / hobby

EDUCATION

ENTERTAINMENT

Animation

Interactive

Gambling

EXHIBIT

Events

Museums

Environmental graphics / signage

Tradeshows

FURNITURE

Home

Outdoor

Office

Healthcare

Hospitality

HEALTHCARE / MEDICAL

Instruments

Medical / dental / veterinary / diagnostic / lab equipment

Mobility devices / enablers

Rehabilitation equipment / environments

Workflow and dataflow: processes and systems

HOSPITALITY/LEISURE

Hotel / restaurants / bars

Theme parks

INDUSTRIAL

Construction equipment / tools

Manufacturing

LIGHTING

Fixtures / systems: consumer / exterior / enterprise

MILITARY / SAFETY / GOVERNMENT

Communication systems

Protective / rescue gear

Temporary structures

Weapons

RETAIL

Branded environments

Department store / specialty

Fixtures / systems

Point-of-purchase / merchandising

Kiosks / ATMs

ROBOTICS

SERVICES

Broad band

Telecommunications

Financial

Internet search

Email

Cable TV

Radio

Music sharing

Delivery

Car, van, truck rental

Help desk

Fast food

Industry Sectors

SERVICES cont.

Food delivery
Photo sharing
Online DVD rental
Printing and copying

TRANSPORTATION

(interiors / exteriors / accessories)
Aircraft
Automobile / truck
Motorcycle / snowmobile / bicycle
Specialty vehicle / safety and rescue / military

Tractor / forklift / earth moving
Mass transit: train / bus
Watercraft: yacht / cruise ship

TECHNOLOGY

Hardware
Software
E-commerce
Telecommunications
Service solutions

Making a Target Company List

To find out what particular companies do, look them up on Hoovers.com²⁶ (requires an inexpensive membership) for their business context information including competitors and contact data. Examine the web site of a company you are interested in to see how it describes the business or organization, their goals and values. Company web sites may or may not contain job postings. Check out the link to the “News” section for information being distributed through press releases or articles. Also look the company up on a search engine as well as in the archives of newspaper, industry and trade publication sites. The research will enable you to ask intelligent questions if you get interviewed.

²⁶ Hoovers and other business research sites are likely to be available in your school or business public library.

Trade Shows/Trade Magazines

Most trade show directories are available on line. The CES (Consumer Electronics Show), Macworld, automobile shows etc., are reviewed thoroughly on blogs and online news services.

Trade magazines are sources about trends in a sector. Order the previous year’s worth of issues, or go through its online archives. If you don’t know which trade magazines are relevant, ask an appropriate IDSA member or look up the information using a search engine.

Research

Business Press

Business magazines (web sites too)—*BusinessWeek*, *Fast Company*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *IN*, *Inc.*—write about companies that are failing or improving, special individuals, industry trends and technology, from which you can get ideas to develop leads. Many publish lists of companies by industry, showing how they compare with one another in their category, as in the Fortune 500. There are also features on the best companies to work for, the most innovative, etc. *Harvard Business Review*, McKinsey, Wharton, Rotman School, etc., all have publications and web sites full of information about innovation management, business strategy, case studies, leadership, attracting and retaining talent, education and training, globalization, marketing, emerging markets and so on. Business school and consulting firm magazines also contain original research about all aspects of business. The Project Management Institute has a good magazine.

Prioritizing the List

Passion and Values

After selecting industry sectors that appeal to you, you will already know some of the names of companies in those sectors, and you can look up others. When making a selection, consider if the organization's image and offerings match your values and passions. This is as good a way as any to start, provided you look beyond your limited sphere of information. Think beyond the obvious names like Apple and IDEO that are so attractive to all designers, as the competition for opportunities with companies like these is fierce.

Design and the Organization?

The best source of first-hand information about where design is positioned in an organization is to check for design leaders' presentations in the online archives of design conferences. If you cannot access the presentations because you are not a member of the organization, your network can help you here too. Learning about this will become much easier once you have worked in an organization for a while and begin to understand what to look for.

Consulting or Corporate?

Most recent grads and those with only a few years of experience look at the job universe and see it divided into design consulting firms and corporate design offices. They believe that more creative people work in consulting because of the variety of clients and projects they are exposed to. They also believe that corporate jobs are less creative, because they will be working on projects that involve the same product, environment or service, and they will get bored. Another myth is that corporate jobs are more secure and subject to fewer layoffs. None of these stereotypes is true.

Research

Those who think that most designers working at Apple, Nike, Whirlpool, Nissan, Cisco.com, McDonald's, Intuit and Samsung are less creative or challenged than designers at consulting firms like IDEO, Continuum, Altitude, Smart and Teague, for example, should not voice this opinion too loudly because it doesn't match up with real life. Think of Nike, which has morphed into a global footwear, apparel, equipment and accessories company, from the time we placed two industrial designers there in the 1970s to design sneakers. Nike was one of the first customer-focused companies sending designers to engage with kids in inner-city neighborhoods to anticipate trends. In addition to designing its own stores, it inspired revolutionary advertising and sports photography, transformed the idea of athlete sponsorship, and created an online community. The company's evolution, and its innovations in imagery, media and product have always been designer-led. It has been a great run for long-time employees who are not siloed, and continues to be an innovative environment.

27 In conversation March 29, 2007.

Rick Robinson, a founder of design research consulting firm eLab, sees working "inside" as an opportunity to aggregate work—to collect or gather separate units into a whole. He has "a bias for longitudinal research, connecting one project to the next," which, he said is usually not done on the consulting side.²⁷

Location

Choosing a location is another way to prioritize your selection of target companies. People are very selective about where they want to live. But be realistic, if it is automobile design in the US you want, the Detroit area, other parts of Michigan and southern California are most likely the only places in the US you will find a job. If you are interested in other aspects of transportation—rail, aircraft or marine, for example—the geographic net is wider. Some designers—for family or other reasons—are not able to relocate, or don't want to.

IDSA divides the US into regions: Mideast, Midwest, Northeast, Southern and Western. Some designers say they don't have a geographic preference and that they will go anywhere, but that's not really true. In our experience, there are certain places almost no one wants to go to, like Cleveland, OH; Louisville, KY and Anderson, SC. I have been told that these places are lifeless and limited if one wants to mingle with like-minded people with an element of design sophistication. But some may have a bad reputation that doesn't match reality. Reputation-challenged areas or less trendy ones can often provide a lower cost of living, especially in housing. If you are earning a salary on par with your experience (not what you settled for because the area is cheap to live in), the quality of life may become appealing after a while. If it doesn't, get another job and move.

Some designers tell us they won't move from where they are, yet a year later, we learn that they are working 3,000 miles away, happy in a new job. Some designers want to live in other countries and no matter the impediments—no visa, no local language skill and so on—will pull it off by sheer willpower and stick-to-it-ive-ness.

Making Contact

How do you find the people to talk to?

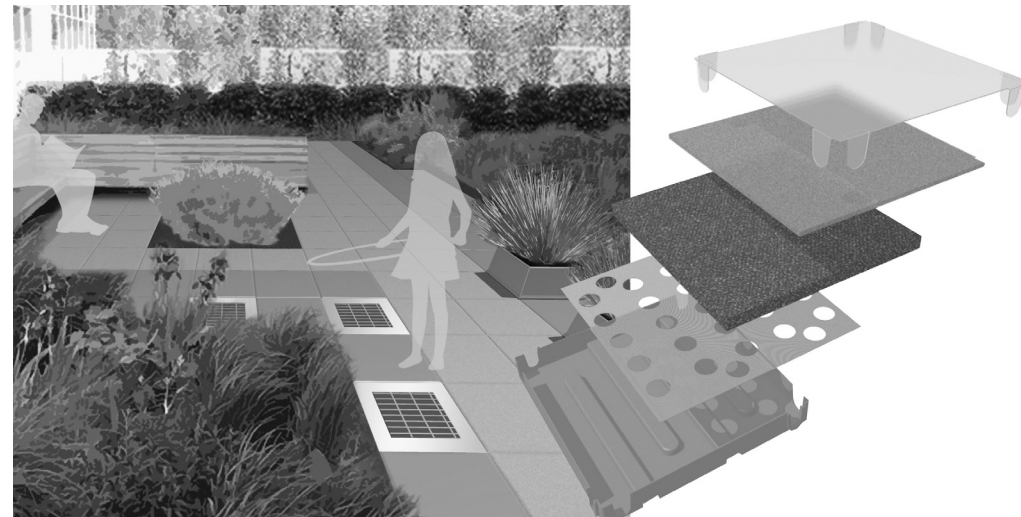
Once you have prioritized your list of target companies, you're ready to find the names of people in them to contact for job leads or information. Some of them will be in articles or conference programs. Here are some other sources.

- IDSA membership directory by company
- Organization's web site job section—follow instructions
- Call the organization and ask to speak with the director of design. If this doesn't work, ask for their name and email address.
- Call a name in the executive summary of Hoovers. The vice president of design's name is not likely to be on the list, so try marketing and ask if they can help connect you with someone in the design organization.
- The IDSA mentor list (on IDSA's web site)
- **Use your imagination**

No, I didn't forget those of you who want to start your own company, or freelance. You can use this information to find potential clients. In the main, I advise people who are just graduating and haven't had the exposure to the world of work one gets by participating in sequential paid co-ops at the University of Cincinnati, for example, to get at least two years of paid work experience under their belt to learn influencing and collaboration skills before trying to work independently.

Networking

When I make presentations to students I say, **“Look to your left and your right, and behind and in front of you. If you don't know it, ask for each person's name and tell them yours.** Most jobs are the result of referrals from personal and professional networks, and one of these people may be the source of a job lead now or in the future.” Although many of you have online networks, in-person networking allows you to know others on a more intimate level, and vice versa. Be brave. If you don't have business cards, print them. Don't sit at any of these events; stand. Reach out your hand to the person nearest to you and say, “Hi, my name is Leslie, what's yours?” And give the person your card. “I'm here to learn about jobs in design. What do you do?”



Verdi Landscaping System designed by Insight Product Development, Gold IDEA winner 2007

Don't let fear prevent action.

Contact presenters at conferences before the conference and ask them to meet with you there. People of achievement are flattered by interest in their work and they love to talk about it. Once they get started, you won't have to say much.

Conferences

(see www.ritasue.com for a list of recommended conferences)

Conferences offer benefits and opportunities you can't get elsewhere.

- Socialize with people you might not otherwise have access to (e.g., speakers, other attendees)
- Opportunity to compare notes with people in similar roles about compensation, interesting work, career path, equipment and facilities
- Job leads
- Fresh information from speakers often not available elsewhere—they haven't written the book yet!
- Skill building workshops
- Ideas (I have never come away from a conference without at least one gem of an idea or insight)

I recently met with an old friend, a designer in his 60s with a successful early career in design management, who now serves as an expert witness. **He described how he got his first job where he grew to be vice president of design.** When he first graduated, he decided to go to the IDSA national conference although he had very little money. He was very disappointed by the keynote speaker on the first day and left the auditorium. He sat in the area just outside being furious with himself for wasting his money. A short time later, three other people also left and walked toward him. He could hear them talking about their disappointment with the speaker. One of the men was Jay Doblin, formerly of the Institute of Design at IIT and the founder of Doblin Group. My friend joined their conversation and introduced himself. By the time the next session began, one of Doblin's companions invited him to interview at the company where he was vice president of design, and eventually hired him. **That was the start of a great career.**

You don't get a second chance to make a first impression—an old cliché, but so true.

Every interview is a business meeting, plain and simple. Whether it takes place in person, on the telephone, by webcam or videoconference, it is a business meeting: a serious encounter between two or more people, each with a purpose. If you forget this and think it is just a conversation, you could be in trouble. The designer or interviewee wants to find out more about the job and the organization offering one, and have the chance to present evidence for why they are a good fit. After a few minutes, you may learn that you have no interest in the job or organization. The prospective employer, represented by an interviewer, is looking for an individual whose skills and past work experiences are relevant to its needs, one who shares its values, and is a good cultural fit, to support the achievement of its objectives. **An interview is a discovery process for both.**

Types of Interviews

Telephone interviewing is an increasingly important part of the qualifying process. Before authorizing travel expenses, prospective employers often want to have a telephone interview with candidates. The duration of these calls is often more than one hour. They are as important as in-person interviews, maybe more so, because if you don't perform satisfactorily, bye-bye prospect. Refer to the question and answer notes you've prepared. Ask the same questions you would if you were in the same room and provide information about yourself in the same way. You don't want to take off two days from work to fly cross-country to find that you, the job and the company are not a fit.

A webcam interview, or one by video conferencing, is becoming more common and should be taken in stride. Just relax. If you make a fuss or are intimidated, you signal that you cannot roll with the punches. Smiling is good. If you are having any trouble seeing or hearing say so, so the equipment can be adjusted.

The Interview

No Meeting is “Just a Formality”

Here’s what happened to a recent candidate who passed the first screen in an interview with a peer in user experience architecture. The second interview was with three people: the peer’s boss, the hiring manager and the director of marketing. The third interview was with a group of peers. The final interview was described to the candidate as a “short meeting” with the chief marketing officer (CMO). We asked the candidate how he thought it went and he said it went well, that he seemed to have “established a rapport” with the CMO. He mentioned that she told him she didn’t know why they were meeting since he had met with so many people and had received positive feedback. They “chatted” about his background for about half an hour. He told us she didn’t ask any probing questions. After the “short meeting,” the CMO told the hiring manager that she didn’t think the candidate had what it takes to influence senior management.

These days, in addition to a base-line skill set and a knockout portfolio, employers are looking for another dimension—influencing skills. They want people who can convince other people.

As a designer, first you spend time understanding what you are going to do, then you spend time doing it, and then you must explain what you came up with and sell it to a variety of stakeholders.

Employers also want people who collaborate, who build a network throughout an organization that isn’t confined to designers but includes people in marketing, engineering, anthropology, user interface, advertising, technical writing—whatever expertise is relevant to getting the job done successfully. This is one reason interviews are often with a series of people and why prospective colleagues’ opinions are part of the hiring decision. Educate yourself on what is most important to marketing, engineering, technology and business strategists so that your exchanges with them are meaningful from their point of view.



Gourmet Settings at Costco designed by Kerr & Co and Hahn Smith Design for Gourmet Settings, Gold IDEA winner 2007

The Interview

Preparation

Coaching

Every business meeting requires preparation, and we have agreed that an interview is a business meeting. Most business presentations are made by individuals with experience and expertise, but sometimes the most junior person on the team gets to make or contribute to a presentation. Expertise is developed by carefully observing, learning from those who have it, and practicing. When first graduating, most designers do not have a lot of experience watching experienced people present themselves and their work in a business setting unless they have had good internship or co-op experiences. For a new graduate, being coached in and practicing personal presentation techniques can be very helpful. Every skill is improved by coaching and practice: tennis, playing an instrument, leadership, dancing, rendering, acting or delivering speeches.

If coaching is not offered, why not ask your school design department chair to recommend that teachers include a critique of how you present yourself and your work in class if this is not part of the process now? Or propose that the career services or placement office develop a short course, for six weeks, two hours a week, on personal presentation.

Do-it-yourself coaching can also be accomplished quite effectively in a professional practices class. Two students can interview each other in front of the class. One plays interviewer, one plays the designer being interviewed. They should use a real position description so that each can develop the strategy for how they will behave. The audience should also see the job description. The portfolio the two of them are looking at (hard copy or digital) should be projected so that everyone in the class can

see it. The session should last 20-30 minutes. Those watching can offer helpful criticism, after which another two can give the interview process a try.

Questions to Practice Answering

Regardless of the interview format, interviewers may ask you some simple questions to get the process started, like:

- Tell us about yourself.
- What is your current employment situation?
- Why did you leave your last position?
- Why do you want to change jobs?
- Why are you interested in us?
- What do you think you can do for us?
- You've been working for a consulting office for the last 10 years; what makes you think you will be successful in a large company?
- You have been working in a large company for the last 10 years; why do you think you will be successful in a small, entrepreneurial, hands-on environment?
- How do you describe your leadership style?
- What do you do best?
- If it's a service organization, they may ask, "Can you bring any business with you?"

The Interview

There are no right answers to these questions, but there are those that will work better for you than others. Make notes about the answers to them.

Accents

If people mention that your accent is difficult to understand, they are doing you a favor. Pay attention. Job performance is dependent upon being able to collaborate with others and to explain and persuade. If you are not easy to understand, you will not be happy at work because people won't take the time to listen to you—if they hire you in the first place. Can you afford an acting coach or speech therapist that specializes in neutralizing difficult accents? There are reasonably priced or free resources that guide you in pronouncing words in English. Borrow them from the library. Instead of music, listen to them carefully and repeat the words out loud while you walk, shop, drive, bike, take the bus or subway. Also record yourself reading, and make notes of the words on which you need to work. Practice with a native English speaker listening to you read, and imitate them when they say words correctly. You don't have to speak English perfectly, but you have to be instantly understandable. The chief creative officer of a Korean company speaks what could be described as "choppy English." But he is easy to understand.

In contrast, we interviewed a creative director for a user experience director role. According to his resume, he had the experience to do the job and his work was very good, but an important part of the criteria was the ability to convince and persuade. He was in the habit of running all of his words together so quickly that we had trouble understanding him.

The Job Assist

A position description provides information you need to be successful in an interview.

It usually starts with a brief description of the company. You can fill in the details from their web site. It then spells out the responsibilities—what the company wants the individual in the position to be responsible for, and lists the criteria for the ideal person for the job.

When the prospective employer, including the hiring manager, develops and writes the position description with the ideal candidate in mind, no one expects to find that perfect person. The description is often aspirational.

Because of this, if after a few weeks into a search we find we are having difficulty finding candidates with most of the qualifications the client is asking for within a specific salary range, we will ask the client, "What are the absolute must haves?" "What are you willing to give up?" And if appropriate, "Will you pay more?"

The job description contains a list of what you need to demonstrate to qualify. Study the responsibilities and qualifications and list them on a small index card. Take one last look before the interview.

Think about it this way. I have to:

- describe myself so that the interviewer is convinced that I can do what the company needs doing
- describe my design process
- take one project and explain the problem I was trying to solve, show the process, the design explorations and the selected result, and talk about its effect on the business. If showing school work, you can't explain the actual business value, but you can show that you understand it by other means—the estimated cost savings of your proposal, the new customers that might be attracted to the service, the time saved by the new process for doing something that you suggested, and so on.



Aliph Jawbone Bluetooth Headset Packaging designed by fuseproject for Aliph, Gold IDEA winner 2007

- demonstrate my ability with form, computer rendering, hand sketching, interaction design, information design.

Another way to think about it is, “If they want me to be responsible for planning, I have to take examples of plans with me, or reports I have written, that may contain that type of information (deleting confidential information). If they want someone to lead a team, well, I haven’t, but I have carefully studied how our engineering manager does it, and I am confident that I could do it and I will explain why. I will be brief and to the point on answers to questions asked of me and will ask if they want me to expand on anything about which I have told them or showed them.”

On a recent search for a design center operations director, a top candidate brought examples of how distributed design work flow was tracked and managed among three countries.

By having a strategy for organizing your presentation of yourself and your work, and the opportunity to practice it, you will be more confident and more impressive.

Here are two examples of real job descriptions. You will see how they are dissected later.

The Interview

The Job Assist: Altitude Job Description

SENIOR INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER

Company: Altitude, Inc.

Location: Boston, Massachusetts

Field: Industrial Design

Job: Design, 3D Modeling, Creative Direction, Client Management, Mentoring, Program Management, Photo-real Illustration, Strategic Design

Job Level: Senior Staff

Description:

Altitude is a strategic product development firm dedicated to assisting companies in creating breakthrough products that deliver exceptional customer experiences and personify their brand.

We are looking for a dynamic individual who is highly creative and passionate about creating breakthrough products. You will be responsible for leading creative teams, translating consumer insights into compelling product experiences and creating tangible manifestations of our clients' brands. Your sketching and visualization skills will be world-class along with your sensitivity to form, color, finish and materials. Adept at developing work plans and schedules, you will have full fiscal responsibility for your programs and meet with clients to understand their needs and lead a team of people to execute their vision. You will create and deliver powerful client presentations and are highly proficient at expressing your ideas in a verbally succinct, engaging and entertaining manner.

We offer a dynamic and collegial work environment of creative professionals as diverse as the products we design. At Altitude we understand that people are the difference, and we are committed to helping you develop your individual talents and achieve your career goals. We offer competitive compensation, generous holidays, vacation, a company matching retirement plan, plus excellent medical coverage. To view our online portfolio, please visit our web site at: www.altitudeinc.com.

Specific Skills:

- BA/BS in Industrial Design.
- Minimum 5+ years experience as an Industrial Designer is required.
- Consultancy experience a plus.

- Willingness and ability to work in a fast-paced environment.
- Superb visual communication skills.
- A strong team player with excellent mentoring skills.

ALTITUDE RESPONSIBILITIES LIST

- Create breakthrough products
- Lead creative teams
- Translate consumer insights into compelling product experiences and tangible manifestations of clients' brands
- Develop work plans and schedules
- Have P&L responsibility for programs
- Meet with clients to understand their needs
- Create and deliver powerful client presentations

ALTITUDE QUALIFICATIONS LIST

- Creative, passionate and fast
- Degree in Industrial Design and minimum five years experience as Industrial Designer
- Consultancy experience preferred (if you don't have it, describe what experience you do have in terms of responsibilities, fast turn around times, collaborating with marketing and R&D, working with outside vendors)
- World-class sketching and visualization skills
- Sensitive to form, color, finish and materials
- Highly proficient verbal skills-engaging and entertaining personality
- Team player and mentors
- Superb 3-D modeling, prefer Rhino, MAYA experience helpful
- Strong PhotoShop and Illustrator
- Understands manufacturing processes and limitations

The Interview

Now you know what to emphasize in an interview with Altitude when describing the contents of your portfolio, your experience, and your philosophy of life and work.

- This product was unique in its category, because...
- I led a team of three and my role in this program was...
- We started with contextual research...
- Or, in school, my team didn't have a budget for research so I went to a CVS (drugstore chain in the US) and talked to customers while they were buying insulin meters. I asked them to tell me what brands they preferred and why. Then I called a diabetes association and was referred to a specialist who told me what the meter measures, what questions patients ask him most often about them, what features they prefer or complain about, and we talked about possible alternatives.

Let's look at a more junior position description.

The Job Assist: Google Job Description

USER EXPERIENCE RESEARCHER - Mountain View, CA

Help us find out about our users! Google is looking for User Experience Researchers at all levels, to design and conduct user research studies throughout the product cycle. You will use a range of methods, working closely with UI designers and product teams to define new products, assess the usability of prototypes, and influence the future direction of existing products.

You will have the opportunity to work on products of all types: web sites like Google search and AdWords, web applications like Gmail and Google Maps, client applications like Picasa and Google Earth, and mobile services like Google SMS.

Qualifications:

- B.S. in Human-Computer Interaction, Cognitive Psychology, Computer Science or related.
- Academic or practical knowledge of user research methods, including lab-based usability studies, field studies and usability inspections (heuristic evaluations or cognitive walk-throughs).
- Excellent analytical ability, especially with regard to observation of user behavior.
- Strong oral and written communication skills; can present findings concisely and effectively.
- Can work independently and effectively prioritize time between multiple projects.
- Flexible: can adapt to changing schedules and different types of products, and develop new user research methods where needed.
- Can work well in cross-functional teams, including Engineers, Product Managers and UI Designers.
- Training in research methods and statistics.

Knowledge of or experience with any of the following is a big plus:

- Early-stage user research methods such as contextual inquiry, paper prototyping, card sorting, personas.
- Working with product teams to ensure that user research findings are tracked and acted on.
- Design and analysis of experiments or surveys.
- International user research or remote user studies.
- Accessibility and universal design.
- Analysis of web server log data.
- Web design/HTML.

The Interview

Google Job Description cont.

- Programming/scripting.
- Eye-tracking.
- Testing applications for mobile devices.
- On-line communities and social computing.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Design and conduct user research studies

- Ensure user research findings are tracked and acted on
- Design and analyze experiments or surveys
- Analyze web server log data

Use range of methods

- Contextual inquiry, paper prototyping, card sorting, personas
- Lab based usability, accessibility and universal design studies
- Field studies

Work with UI designers and product teams to

- Analyze observations of user behavior
- Define new products
- Influence future direction of existing product

Work on

- Web sites
- Web applications
- Client applications
- Mobile services

Knowledge or experience a plus

- Test applications for mobile devices
- Eye-tracking
- International user research or remote user studies
- On-line communities and social computing
- Web design/HTML
- Programming/scripting

This is a great opportunity for a person who has studied user research methods as an undergraduate or graduate student, or has experience doing it as an intern.

In an interview it would be appropriate to talk about how you became so interested in user research (and why), and why the opportunity to work on their products is ideal for your skill set.

- One totally unexpected result of my analysis of the findings in this study was...
- In the middle of evaluating this interface design, we suddenly had to shift gears because...
- When I worked on this project with others from usability, engineering, UI design and product management, I knew I could be the most persuasive when we had to sell our solution to the business strategists because...

As a recent graduate, your personal style, your passion for the work, eagerness and willingness to learn and cultural fit may be more important than your technical knowledge although you need to have basic knowledge of and talent for the field you've chosen.

The Interview

Strategies

Positive Behaviors

Checklist: Here is a simple checklist of positive behaviors to remember when entering a room for an interview.

- Stand up tall, shoulders back
- Smile
- Make eye contact
- Put out your hand and shake hands as if you mean it—take hold of the other person’s hand firmly, and look into their eyes
- Say your name clearly (spelling it if necessary)
- Speak clearly and slowly so people can hear and understand you
- Be brief in your responses to questions—don’t ramble
- Smile again
- Make frequent eye contact
- Sit up straight
- Let’s try it again from the beginning

Feel good! On the morning of the interview, play music that’s uplifting and makes you feel good.

Be clean. For most of you, hygiene is not an issue. For the small percentage who were absent when these things were taught, here’s some advice: Before you go to an interview take a shower or bath; wash your hair; brush your teeth (carry mints or cough drops just in case); clean your fingernails (elaborate decoration on or very long length of fingernails are inappropriate in a business context); if you use highly fragranced antiperspirant, perfume or after-shave lotion, apply it sparingly, if at all, or try unscented products. Many people are very sensitive to fragrance.

Dress appropriately. For men, a suit and tie are always appropriate. If you usually dress elegantly, why not do so for an interview? If you’re not sure about what is considered proper interviewing attire, call the receptionist or assistant to the person you are going to meet to check local custom, especially in places with extreme temperatures. Jackets, with however casual the shirt or pants, usually make an outfit safe for an interview.

For women, business-like suits or a combination of pants, skirt and jacket, or dresses. Midriff-baring tops and spaghetti straps, except when hidden under jackets, are not considered proper business attire. Neither are low-rise pants or skirts that are too short, or anything too tight. The color black, which is considered quite fashionable for every occasion in New York, doesn’t always look correct in other parts of the world. No dangling or noisy jewelry, either. Wear make-up, if you usually do. If not, don’t. Shoes should be simple and comfortable—no sandals or flip flops for interviews, although I am sure there are parts of the US where this is acceptable. I never feel comfortable talking about a big fee with my toes sticking out. If you are comfortable in extremely high heels you may certainly wear them, but no one expects you to.

Clothing should be neat and comfortable, not attention-grabbing. In an interview you want the focus to be on your mind, experience and portfolio, not on your outfit. Exceptions to a business-like dress code are often found in the entertainment or fashion industry. You can always dress as the locals do, or not, once you are hired.

The Interview

A candidate was once rejected because he showed up for an interview at a company in Cleveland without a jacket. Even in hot weather, men should put on a jacket where one is expected, especially once in an air-conditioned reception area. One southern California design consulting firm eliminated for consideration a candidate we sent because he arrived in a suit and tie. The principal said he didn't do his homework about her firm. There are no hard and fast rules, but the interview is a business meeting, and knowing the culture of in the organization you are meeting with is critical.

Smoking. If you smoke, quit. There is nothing worse for non-smokers than being confined in a conference room with a person whose hair and clothing reek from smoking.

Know the logistics. A few days before your scheduled appointment, get driving directions or any other type of travel directions you may need, especially if you are taking a taxi. If there is extreme weather, prepare your schedule and yourself accordingly. Get the location of recommended parking and a parking permit, if needed. If flying to an appointment at the request of a prospective employer, inquire about whether or not you will be picked up or are expected to rent a car, take a taxi or catch a bus. Ask if the client would purchase the ticket in advance so you don't have to put it on your credit card. We always suggest this to our clients. Some new grads do not have a credit card, and if one is needed in any planned transaction, like renting a car, find out what measures have to be taken before the situation arises.

Arrive early. Plan to arrive at the site of your appointment between 15 and 30 minutes before the scheduled time. Planes and trains can be late and traffic, especially in extreme weather, can be unpredictable. You or the taxi may have difficulty finding the address, or parking in a building complex or office complex. Increased security in big US cities makes it easier to find places. Once you enter a campus or a building you will be asked to show identification and will be given directions.

But not too early. Give yourself time for the many variables that might slow you down en route, but respect people's schedule and don't distract by arriving too early. Sometimes security will make a call and a person will come to take you to the site of the meeting. If it is very hot you will welcome the extra time to cool down in the reception area or restroom. If it is raining, you will be able to unwrap the protection on the laptop and/or portfolio you are carrying, remove wet clothing and foot-gear, and have time to re-groom yourself. If it is cold and snowy, you can remove the protective gear you are wearing, change from boots to shoes and hide all of your wet stuff in a closet. In good weather you can arrive at the reception desk only five minutes before your appointment. Arriving too early to an open office situation can be distracting.

The Interview

Be patient. If you must wait for the person you are scheduled to meet, use the time wisely. Read over your resume. Review the cards with points you plan to make and questions you want to ask. Read the organization's materials that are usually provided in the waiting area. Be interested in your surroundings. Give people the benefit of the doubt. If the person you have an appointment to see keeps you waiting, there is usually a good reason. Don't be angry. You want to stay in a positive frame of mind for when they do arrive. If the waiting time becomes excessive and you are local, explain to the receptionist that you are leaving and will call to make another appointment. If you are not local, ask the receptionist if they can arrange for you to see a different person while you are there, or connect you by phone to the assistant of the person you are scheduled to meet with, who may be able to help.

Smile. Be nice to everyone, including parking lot attendants, receptionists and telephone operators. Make as many friends as you can throughout the interviewing process.

Make eye contact. A frequent complaint from employers in reporting the results of an interview is that the candidate did not make eye contact.

Giving and getting information. First, turn off your cell phone. Once inside the interviewing room, hotel room, hotel lobby, airport conference room, company conference room, restaurant, search firm's office, cafeteria or hiring manager's office, where the meeting that could determine the course of the next few years of your life may be decided, take a deep breath, let it out, smile and ask some good questions.

Be a good listener. Ask open-ended questions (questions that can't be answered with a "yes" or "no") to draw people out so you can learn about them, the company, the opportunity and how you may meet their needs. Be lively and expressive.

Establish a balance between talking and listening.

Don't try to dominate the interview. Don't over-explain, pontificate or lecture to the people who are interviewing you, even if they are not doing their job well.

Relax a bit. Otherwise you'll speak in a monotone. Don't be afraid to laugh.

Show interest and enthusiasm. If during the meeting you decide you want the job, say so. Show interest and enthusiasm; be honest and direct. Ask about next steps. Be eager to establish rapport with your interviewer(s); they are evaluating whether or not you will be a good fit with their group.

If you don't make a good first impression, you will not get a follow-up meeting.

The Interview

Ethics. Never “bad-mouth” your current or past employers or clients or divulge any confidential information. Need we say more?

“Small talk.” If you are spending the day with a potential employer, which usually involves dining with a few of the employees, sharpen your conversational skills. Be prepared to discuss a few of subjects most people are interested in, such as music, sports, movies, novels, vacation spots, etc. Stay away from politics, politically incorrect subjects and discussions of a personal nature. Remind yourself to relax, take deep breaths and be open, candid, direct and friendly, but appropriately discreet and business-like. Being nervous is natural to the interviewing state, and with practice, one gets less nervous.

Communicating in multilingual situations. Use simple, easy-to-understand language. This is especially important if there is an interpreter present. Speak slowly and clearly but in a natural manner to ensure that you are understood. Avoid jargon, trite expressions and clichés.

Believe in yourself. If you’re not excited and enthusiastic about yourself and your portfolio, no one else will be.

Manners matter. Offer your hand to shake when someone comes into a room to meet you. If you are a man, let women precede you going through doorways; hold the back of a chair for them when they sit at a table. Be aware of the good manners expected when you are visiting a new culture. The information is very available. “Please” and “thank you” are universally appreciated.

Send thank you notes. Mail personalized (not generic) “thank you” notes to everyone you interview with and promptly follow up any requests made during the interview for additional information or samples. State your understanding of and continued interest in the opportunity and how and why you would be a great fit. A “real” thank you in an envelope with a stamp makes more of an impression than an emailed one, though email versions are acceptable.

Be persistent. If you have been interviewed for a position, and the people you meet are enthusiastic about you and your work, keep in touch with them. Call or email them every week or two and send clippings, links and/or notes about matters that may interest them until they make their decision. They may not hire you for that position, but you have been given an opportunity to begin a relationship with them. Add them to your mailing list, and make them part of your network to help others as well as yourself.

Be positive. You really have no choice. Persistence and a positive attitude influence your ability to get a good job. There may be a lack of local opportunities when you are unable to relocate, a bleak economic situation overall or in your location or specialty of choice, or restrictions imposed by your personal situation.

Don't give up.

The Interview

Take Charge

The interview becomes a waste of time when the interviewer does not ask direct questions to gain deeper knowledge of the interviewee, and the interviewee sits back and waits to be asked. If this happens—and you will know it in a second—you, the interviewee, must take responsibility for the situation. If you don't, you are wasting everyone's time. Take charge of the interview. Talk about and demonstrate your passion for what you do, how you collaborated with others to achieve a goal and the process you use to discover opportunities and solve problems. Tell stories about the presentations you've made that changed people's minds, and the business value of the solutions you developed.

Appropriate questions to ask the interviewer(s) are:

- What is the organization's structure?
- What is the design organization's role in meeting the business objectives of the company?
- What is the primary reporting relationship for the position, and who else does the person work most closely with?
- Who does the person have to influence on a regular basis?
- Who is involved in making the hiring decision?
- What objectives do you want the person to achieve in this job?
- What are the most important qualities you are looking for?
- What are the must-have experiences?

- What kind of people do best in your company?
- How will the person's performance be measured?
- Will I be able to meet the people I would be working with day-to-day before an offer is made?
- Is this a new position?
- How long have you been trying to fill it?
- What are the main reasons you have rejected candidates?
- If appropriate, what are some of the reasons candidates have rejected your offer?
- Where does the company want to be in five years?
- What are possible career paths for the person in this position?

After listening to the answers, you can say, "Why don't I tell you about myself and my accomplishments and see if I am what you are looking for? I am looking for a new position because..., I am interested in your company because..., I think my experience at X would be very valuable to you because..." and so on.

In some cases, you have to be prepared to help the interviewer make the connection between your experience and what they need to accomplish. Provide answers to questions you may not be asked but you know are important because the information will enable you to become a viable candidate for the position.

The Interview

Interviewing with HR

Sometimes the first person you meet or speak with in a large consulting firm or a company of 25 or more people, is a human resources (HR) specialist. HR leaves the assessment of your so-called “professional skills” to hiring managers and peers and others with whom you would work closely. They interview you from the perspective of cultural fit. Sometimes they arrange for drug testing and/or personality tests. **We have known some extremely savvy HR people who are an integral part of their organization’s strategy to acquire and retain the top talent needed to grow a company. They partner with an organization’s business and design leaders.** They provide information to recruiters and candidates about company culture, goals and values, compensation structure (including bonus system, stock grants or options [if any]), health and other benefits, education reimbursement, vacation, sabbatical and relocation policies, visa transfers, visas for significant others, and so on. They verify degrees and do credit checks, often by third party and sometimes check references (some hiring managers prefer to speak with references directly). They provide links to housing, cost of living information and local amenities. If you have come from another location and are not familiar with the area, HR may arrange a real estate/relocation consultant to show you the variety of neighborhoods you could live in and/or commute from; housing costs, available schools, houses of worship and recreational opportunities, etc. Whirlpool hires local consultants who do this extremely well for candidates who are not familiar with their southwest Michigan location and high quality of life. We have recommended this to other geographically-challenged employers.

HR assesses or learns about other attributes: what motivates you, your short- and long-term goals, how well you adapt to change, how educable you are, your energy level, personal and lifestyle situation (within the bounds of equal opportunity standards), collaborative skills, if you have the potential to become a leader, and whatever other characteristics have been determined to be important to succeeding in the company. There are a few companies that will not interview anyone who does not pass their online test(s) because mastery of the material has proven to correlate with success in the company. Alas, some designers cannot pass them, and not because they are stupid. In some organizations designers are exempt from having to pass them, but not from taking them.

A few companies engage outside consultants through HR to administer psychological tests to determine if a candidate has the personal characteristics and motivation that correlate with success in the position. We often work closely with HR during engagements. They track and coordinate getting information to the right people, getting feedback for us, providing interviewing schedules, and so on. Like everything else, some HR professionals are great to work with, others are not. Other duties of HR involve manpower planning, change management, equal opportunity compliance, assessment and training, and minimizing the potential for legal problems when letting people go.

The Interview

Interviewing with RitaSue Siegel Resources

We are a premium design search firm retained by clients to find the best people to work with them. We are engaged on an exclusive basis as trusted advisors. The jobs are usually for senior people. Like other consultants, we are paid to do the work that most of the time results in us finding the winning candidate; but sometimes this is not possible. **To find people, we brainstorm and research companies where individuals with the skills and experience our client has specified may be working. Then we call to interest them in considering an opportunity with our client.** If they are, we interview them to see if they have the experience, personal characteristics and type of talent our client wants. If so, we recommend that our client interview them.

Of course, we have a database containing information about people we have met at events or interviewed as candidates for other positions, as well as people who have applied for positions posted on our web site or have told us they are interested in making a change. We are focused on finding the right candidates for our clients, but we can only do that by continually building relationships with designers. Very rarely do we introduce an individual to a client without being retained by that client for a specific search.

In our company, we interview designers in person if:

- They are possible candidates for current searches
- They happen to be in town, and on paper (euphemism for emailed resume and a few digital samples) they look like they fit into categories we are often looking within
- One of us has met them at a conference or while traveling and they seem promising
- They are visiting from a foreign land and look good on paper (we like to know what's happening in design worldwide)
- They have been recommended to us by people we respect

We expect strong personal presentations from candidates we interview by webcam after we have preliminarily qualified them by telephone for a particular position. They have received the position description by email and we have seen their resume and samples (where appropriate). When we interview people in our office, we want a portfolio presentation as well. We ask additional questions about the candidate's experience and aspirations depending on the responsibilities and qualifications in the client's job description.

The Interview

In the interview we want to learn:

- Their personality type
- If they have a sense of humor
- How ambitious, entrepreneurial or savvy they are
- What their design process is like
- If they are aware how others feel about working with them
- Their unique selling point

Our questions allow opportunities for candidates to: demonstrate how they navigate obstacles, describe anecdotes about collaborating and convincing, illustrate the quality of their presentation skills, reveal their knowledge base, and understanding of context, and show that they are able to give brief, on-target answers to questions. If we believe the candidate is a match for the position, we write a summary of the interview to send to the client with their digital samples (where appropriate) and a resume.

It is a sign of respect and good judgment to dress appropriately for a meeting with a search consultant, recruiter or prospective employer in person, by webcam or video conference. Many candidates who work in New York meet with us during the day dressed in their usual work clothes and that's perfectly acceptable.

In our experience, most designers from the UK (including heads of consultancies who want to set up shop here) are usually more casually dressed than Americans; they even wear jeans to meet with us. How would they dress for an interview with a prospective employer or bank loan officer on the East Coast or the Midwest? The West Coast is more casual about clothing. It is especially important to dress in a business-like manner in Asia and continental Europe.

You should take the business meeting with a recruiter seriously; you don't get to meet their clients if they are not convinced that you are a match. Even if they don't think you are the person for the position you have discussed with them, they will be inclined to contact you about future opportunities if you've impressed them.

Serendipity

There are many more tips about successful interviewing preparation, and a lot less. What I mean by this is sometimes you just have to be in the right place at the right time. You may not have the number of years or the type of experience the prospective employer is looking for, but the chemistry is right and you do other things very well. **You and the interviewer both know you would be a perfect fit.** The best example I can remember was when Thomson Consumer Electronics bought the RCA brand. The most senior person of the North American company and the hiring manager called us to find a director of design to work corporate headquarters in France. The most important requirement was both management and consumer products experience. The individual who had been designing keyboards for IBM was hired. Why did we send him? We knew he could do the job and convinced them to see him. He was selected as a high potential person at IBM; he was very smart, focused, articulate, talented, mature and motivated. He had great chemistry with the hiring manager although he had no management or consumer products experience. He worked in Indianapolis at the RCA headquarters because his wife did not want to move to France. While in this role, he directed influential ground-breaking design work for home entertainment products and later developed Thomson's multimedia capability.

If the first interview with a prospective employer is successful,

they will usually tell you (or you can ask about) the next step. “We want you to come back and meet some other people.” Or, “Why don’t you think about what we’ve discussed and get back to me with any questions you have?” A successful first telephone, webcam or video conference interview usually results in an invitation for an in-person interview at the prospective employer’s expense. If you are interested in the opportunity, say so.

If the interviewers are not interested in proceeding with you to the next step, they may say so directly, or say “We’ll get back to you,” “Thanks so much for coming,” or they may say nothing. There are no rules.

If they do not communicate an interest in you before two weeks have elapsed, email a thank you to them for taking the time to meet with you and include either, “I am still very interested in the opportunity we discussed, I enjoyed our meeting and wish you good luck,” or whatever is appropriate to the situation.

Salary Negotiation²⁷

Most designers I meet want to make a lot of money. They also want to do great work and/or make a difference. When I was a student at Pratt, my husband’s first job paid \$125 weekly, the amount of our monthly rent. We had a used car, went camping on weekends, ordered in pizza at will and had friends over for dinner. I earned my tuition with part-time jobs; his was paid by the GI Bill.²⁸ In the evenings, we’d sit on the top step of the brownstone we lived in and wonder what we would do with more money because we were able to do whatever we wanted. It’s not so simple anymore.

Today, the cost of living in a big city consumes a far greater proportion of salary. Recent grads with student loans to repay and those without them need to carefully calculate their fixed costs and know beginner’s salary ranges before discussions with a prospective employer, so you don’t have to wait tables at night and you know how frugal you have to be.

The Context

Understand what’s going on in the world, the local economy and your field. Is there a demand for people like you? Are many people with your skills, interests and experience out of work? You will have some leverage negotiating a compensation package if the economy is good, there are lots of jobs, a strong demand for your skills and few good people available.

²⁷ RitaSue Siegel, *Communication Arts* magazine, August 2007. This section is from “You Can’t Always Get What You Want but You Can Try.”

²⁸ Korean War veterans received a fixed monthly government stipend to pay tuition, fees, books and living expenses.

After the Interview

Salary Range Information

Never rely on a single source for salary information. Search online, network and review salary surveys from professional societies (such as IDSA), industry associations and trade magazines. Many surveys just provide averages and do not account for total compensation, years of experience, type and size of organization. Other important sources of salary information include word of mouth and your network in the geographic area where the job is. For recent grads, last year's graduates and your school's career services office are also good sources. The recruiter who introduces you to a potential employer will know the salary range for the position and will help you negotiate.

Salary surveys cannot take into account if you are a bloody genius, a good performer or if you just get by. Your portfolio and an interview is how a potential employer learns this. A top talent (and our definition includes a marked innate ability for design accomplishment plus a collaborative work style and terrific communication skills) will get double the salary of an average designer with four to seven years of experience, two and a half times more with 10-15 years, and three times more with 15 and more years. Bonuses will range from 10-100 percent of salary and sometimes also various ways of obtaining additional value through stock.

The reputation of your school may affect an offer as might possession of a graduate degree and where it is from. If you worked for a well-known organization, a potential employer correctly thinks you'll bring know-how, sophistication and connections from working with top professionals and important clients, and this is worth money.

These days, most very senior positions don't offer astronomical base salaries, but do offer bonus potential and stock situations that can make them very lucrative. A base salary of \$185,000 plus a guaranteed bonus of 35 percent is a healthy total yearly cash compensation of \$249,750, plus benefits and stock warrants. (At least it was in summer 2007 for a director of customer experience with more than 10 years of relevant experience.)

When to Discuss Salary

The best time to discuss salary is after you've convinced an employer you can do the job, you really want it and you can feel that they really want you.

This usually happens during the second interview. If you are asked about salary before an interview or during the first one, it may be a ploy to eliminate the most expensive candidates. If pressured to respond, say you are negotiable within the range of X to X, depending on benefits and bonus potential, but be sure the bottom of the range is an acceptable amount and the top within reason.

Here are some other things to say:

- Let's talk about salary when we are both sure I am right for the job
- My requirement depends on the responsibilities, fair market value, benefits and bonus potential
- What salary range does the company usually pay for an individual with my qualifications for this position?

If asked about current salary, be truthful and include benefits and bonus. Be prepared to make the case for your asking package if there is a big discrepancy between it and what you earn or used to earn.

What's Negotiable

Some recent grads are so excited about being offered a position they may be too quick to accept. Remember, if the prospective employer didn't think you could do the job, they wouldn't make you an offer. Personable, intelligent new grads with passion for their work, who are hard working and motivated, who speak and write well in English, and are mature in manner are in the minority and with talent on top of that, are very employable.

For designers with more than three years experience, employers usually pay relocation expenses. Company policy determines the amount and how they are paid—flat amount or reimbursements from receipts.

Some negotiable items:

- Base salary amount
- Sign-on bonus
- Professional memberships
- Conference attendance and expenses
- House-hunting trips, temporary housing for individual and significant other
- Home or laptop computer, PDA or cell phone including subscription and fees
- Car including fuel, maintenance and insurance (investigate tax implications)
- Competition entry fees and credits
- Reimbursement for further education and training
- Title
- Schedule review earlier than standard
- Number of first-year vacation days
- Waiver of customary waiting period for health benefits
- Travel
- Significant other's job-hunting trip expenses
- Non-paid time off for yearly visit to home country
- Expenses for obtaining or transferring visa
- Transportation, dependent care or similar types of pre-tax deductions
- Domestic partner benefits
- Expenses incurred buying and selling a residence
- Potential of transfer to other company locations

Evaluating the Employer

Will you be happy there?

Good signs include:

- Designers participate at the front end of the development process, framing problems and discovering people's unmet needs
- Other specialists do not question the value of design
- Budget, facilities and equipment are sufficient for the work



The Access designed by J. Ryan Eder of the University of Cincinnati, Gold IDEA winner, Best in Show and People's Choice 2007

Most people want to live a balanced life, and if that's important to you, ask questions about frequency of late nights, travel, weekend work, flexible schedules, working from home, etc. Try to match your lifestyle values to an employer's workstyle.

No matter how interesting the work is, only accept fair pay in a profit-making organization. Teaching is a job where the pay usually doesn't match what a designer can earn otherwise, but if you have a passion for it, do it.

Some reasons my previously-mentioned husband finally left the \$125 / week job were that his boss would not allow him to receive or make personal calls and insisted that the large sketch pad provided be covered with many design concepts rather than, as was my husband's habit, a single one.

Other Factors

Big company? Opportunity to work with star designers? Small company? Opportunity to make a difference? Like the products a company makes? Have an interest in a particular industry or service? Often, the first job defines one's career path, but as every experienced designer will tell you, serendipity has a lot to do with what you may go on to do later. Participation in a one-off exhibit designing environmental graphics in a company where you were hired to design consumer electronics, can lead to a specialization if you really get into environmental graphics. Or, doing interaction design because it needed to be done and you were there!

After the Interview

Evaluating an Offer

Don't accept a job offer on the spot if you need time to think about it. Thank the potential employer for the offer and ask for the offer in writing, including details about benefits and bonus. Show enthusiasm for the job and company and say you need a few days to think about the offer. Companies often specify a date when they want a response. If you want to negotiate the offer, do it before that day. Respond by the deadline, or the offer is likely to be withdrawn. If you need more time, ask for it before the deadline and provide an alternate date. If it seems appropriate, you may say you are expecting or weighing other offers. They may ask what your decision will be based on, and this could open the door to further negotiation. Some potential employers want an immediate response, and if this happens, you can negotiate, accept or walk away.

Compare all factors in addition to salary: relocation policy; medical, dental, vision, disability and life insurance; employer contribution to 401K plan or similar long-term savings plan; tuition reimbursement; stock plans; bonus potential; vacation; even the commute, if relevant. If there are no or very limited benefits, raise your asking salary. Most importantly, ask who you will report to and what you will be doing if it was not made completely clear during the interviews.

Conclusion

Performance expectations for recent design school grads through senior design directors have increased significantly.

There are many marketing, business planning, engineering, technology, IT, human factors and manufacturing people who have worked with good designers. They bring that experience with them to their new jobs. The vastly increased media profile of design also contributes to the bar being raised and to the increase in the number and type of job opportunities for value creation through design.

Lots of good jobs remain unfilled because there are fewer young people coming into the workplace in the US than there were previously. Many employers have complained about how few qualified design candidates there are for each position. Rather than hire people who are less than qualified, most employers will redesign their work process rather than compromise their standards.

There are good jobs out there for every designer, generalist or specialist. And every type of job demands its own set of skills. There are common denominators, and most of them have to do with personal characteristics, including being smart. **In turn, you will learn more than you can imagine on the job, so be receptive.**

Conclusion

Getting a good job requires active participation in the process of finding where the good jobs are and interviewing for them. This includes proactively contacting and convincing an organization to make a place for you because of the case you make for design as a strategic element of business/organizational architecture and the role you can play. Try checking your ego (not your confidence) at the door. Your work is not about you. It's about the people who will use or be affected by what you do.

The information and processes described in this book were put together to make your life better.

All you have to do is add:

- Common sense
- A clear assessment of what you are capable of now
- Enough confidence in your abilities to present yourself in an inspiring manner
- A willingness to take a risk
- Commitment to design to improve life

Plan your strategy,
give it a go, and good luck!

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Notes



Industrial Designers Society of America

703.707.6000

www.idsa.org