Graphic Design for Beginners

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Introduction

A graphic designer, or graphic artist as they are also known, is a person who places together images or motion graphics (or both) with typography in order to produce their work. They will primarily create such work for printed, published or electronic forms of media (newspapers, magazines, TV, film, internet) for use in advertising.

However, there are some graphics designers whose work makes them responsible for illustration, typesetting and web design. But as these are speciality subjects within the field of graphic design, only someone who has taken training in this particular field will work on such projects as these.

The main responsibility of a graphic designer is to present information in such a way that, not only can it be easily accessed, but also it looks pleasing to the eye.

Most of the work you will see done by graphics designers is that which they produce for their clients in order to promote, publicise or advertise a certain product, service or topic.

Although there are a lot of graphic designers today who have obtained their degrees through going to college, or one of the many credited trade schools, there are others who have not. In fact, in some cases, there are businesses where a degree is not considered to be essential, and these positions are filled by those people who have been in the business for a number of years, and so have vast amounts of experience.

But what is essential if you wish to get on as graphics designer, is to produce a good portfolio. It is this portfolio which will show off your talents to their fullest,

and will normally require that you update and change things within it throughout the rest of your career.

Today, most portfolios compared to 20 years ago have now been digitized, and so will often be available to prospective clients either through the internet, on a CD or a DVD. Whereas 20 years ago, a graphics designer would have had to carry all their work around in either a big black book or binder. So as you can see, with the invention of the computer and the way technology is progressing, so does everything else, including the role of the graphics designer.

Through this book, we will show you what you will need to do if you wish to take up a career in graphics designing.

Chapter 1

The Role of the Graphics Designer

The main roles of a graphics designer (graphics artist) are to plan, analyze and then design a visual answer to a communication problem.

It is up to them how they get the message across, and it can either be through the use of print, film or some form of electronic media using various different methods. The methods that they will use in order to convey this message will be through the use of type, photography, animation, illustration, color and certain print and layout methods.

It is the graphics designer who develops the overall layout and design of magazines, journals, newspapers, corporate brochures or reports and many other kinds of publications you see today. There are even some whose main role is to design promotional displays, marketing brochures, packaging or the logos for products and businesses.

But today, there are an increasing number of graphics designers whose sole role in their field is to design web pages for the internet, interactive media and multimedia schemes.

While there are some graphics designers whose role is to produce the credits you see at the beginning and end of all those movies and television programs that you watch.

So certainly, when it comes to being a graphics designer, there are plenty of options and different ways in which their talents can be used.

However, the first step a graphics designer will need to take in order to develop the design for their client is to determine what they actually need. They will need to know what it is that the message he is trying to convey will portray, and how to make it more appealing to the customer or user of the product or service.

When developing a design for their clients, a graphics designer will look at several different factors in order to plan and execute their design at their target audience. The factors that they will take into consideration in order to achieve this include the following:-

1. Cognitive
2. Cultural
3. Physical
4. Social

In order to get the relevant information they need to produce a piece of work which will do everything that the client requires, is to meet with the client, as well as their own creative or art directors (if the company has them). Plus, they will carry out their own research on the subject matter as well.

It is essential that, if you really want to excel in the world of graphics designing, you need to identify the needs of your clients consumers. As you will soon discover, a lot of your work will focus on helping to create a communication strategy for your client, as well as actually doing the designing and layout work as well.

Many graphics designers, in order to produce a design for their client, will either produce sketches or layouts through either the use of a computer or by hand. When putting together a design for their client, they will look at various different elements in order to produce something that not only the client will like, but will cause a reaction from their target audience. The elements that will need to be included within any design they produce includes:-

1. **Colors**

2. **Sound** (if required)

3. **Artwork**

4. **Photography**

5. **Animation** (if required)

6. The **style of type** (font) they will use

7. They will select the size, as well as how the different elements when all brought together, will look either on the page, or on the screen.

8. They may also design **graphs or charts** produced from data provided by their client.

In many cases, a graphics designer will also take time to consult with copywriters as to exactly what type of text they should be using to accompany the visual part of their design. Once all these elements have been brought together and they

are satisfied with what they have produced, they will then present it to their client for them to approve.

However, for those graphics designers who work for either printing or publishing company, they may actually assist the printers in choosing the kind of paper and ink which will be used for each publication. Plus, they will be required to review the design to check for any errors prior to it actually being published.

Many graphics designers today will now use a wide range of graphics and layout software in order to help them produce their designs. Certainly, when it comes to producing designs for web pages or other forms of interactive media, then this graphics designer will use computer animation and programming packages in order to develop and produce a design for their clients.

The great thing about using such software programs is that they are easy to use, but they provide the graphics designer with a lot more flexibility. By having this flexibility, they are able to explore a larger number of alternatives for their designs. But also it helps to cut the amount of time down that it actually takes to produce and present the completed design to their clients and then to the target audience.

Finally, not only does it save them time, but it also helps to reduce the costs associated with producing designs using the more traditional methods.

So now we have taken a look at what it is a graphics designer does, we will need to take a look at the type of qualifications they need and where these can be attained.

Chapter 2
Qualifications in Order to Become a Graphics Designer

If you wish to attain a position as a graphics designer, most companies now require them to have a Bachelor's degree, but there are some positions which will only require you to have an Associate degree instead.

But as well as having trained in graphics designs, a person also needs to be creative, and able to communicate and solve problems as well. These skills are extremely crucial in order for them to produce work which will help with their clients needs.

Today, a graphics designer will also need to be familiar with many computer graphic and design software packages. But probably one of the main things which will help to decide whether you get the position you are after or not is to have a good portfolio of work that you have already designed and produced.

Now let us take a look at the types of degrees you will require for certain positions within the industry of graphics design.

Bachelor's of Fine Arts Degree Programs in Graphic Design

These programs are offered by many universities and colleges, as well as private design schools around the country.

The program of lessons that you will take in order to attain your degree include studio art, the principles relating to design, how to design using a computer, learn

about various different printing techniques, the production of commercial graphics and also about designing for a website.

Plus, you will also need to take other additional design courses, along with learning about liberal arts, art history, psychology (you need to know what the target audience wants), writing, sociology, cultural studies, foreign languages and marketing. All of which will be helpful to the designer to produce work for their clients, which will make it more effective.

Associate Degrees and Certificates in Graphic Design

These are courses which a person will take for 2 or 3 years at one of the many professional design schools that have now been set up across the country.

Normally, these courses will focus on the more technical parts of graphic design. Plus, they will include very few additional sections to the course relating to liberal arts.

Many graduates who attain their qualification after 2 years will generally work as an assistant to a graphic designer, or in those positions where their technical abilities are required.

However, for those individuals who are looking to pursue a career in graphics design and have already attained a Bachelor's degree in another subject, they can then complete this program in order that they may learn about the technical aspects of the position.

Certainly, because of computer technology, more and more employers will expect their graphics designers to be completely familiar with computer graphics and the design software packages that are now available. Therefore, they will need to keep up to date with all the latest developments and any updates to the

software packages they already use. This they can do either through learning about them on their own, or taking various software training courses instead.

Often after a graphics designer has attained the necessary qualifications, and have obtained their first position with a company, they will often receive on the job training as well. Certainly a graphics designer, when first starting out, may find that they need a further 1 to 3 years of on the job training before they begin to advance to those positions higher up within the company. For those with the experience, they may well advance upwards into the position of Chief Designer or an Art or Creative Director within a company.

But there are some designers who, after working for several years within a position, will then leave it to become a teacher, training others at colleges, universities or design schools. A lot of these will also still have worked on other things, which they consult privately or may actually have their own design studio.

Chapter 3
Is a Graphics Design Degree Essential?

For those high school students who are interested in a career in graphics design, many have wondered if it really is that essential for them to attend a college, university or design school to get their degree or certification in Graphic Design.

Although you may be good at sketching or painting and other forms of artwork, or can use software such as Photoshop, Illustrator or Flash and think you can design well and are able to find a position within a company, you are lucky…that may not always be the case.

However, what a person needs to remember is that being a graphics designer is not just about being creative and being able to use certain software packages. In fact, it is about being able to visually solve a problem, as well as meet all the needs and requirements of a client. You are not there to make something look cool, but rather to sell the product or an idea in a way that is visually captivating for the client's target audience.

By attending a good graphic design school, university or college, it will help to mold and shape the person into being able to do just that.

Although you could, if you wish, learn on your own, you will need to be well disciplined. The reason being: there are a lot of elements to the role of a graphic designer which you will need to learn about.

You will need to learn about design theory, typography (art and style of printing) as well as about the history of art. By learning about the history of art you will be able to see for yourself what a good or bad design was, historically.

Although you may find it difficult to know which of these you should make your priority, a good graphics design program will have everything that you require set out within the syllabus of the course.

You may decide that you do not want to attend either a graphics design school, university or college in order to obtain your degree or certificate, but there are certain things that you would be missing out on if you did.

You could actually be missing out on getting those all important connections you will need when you start looking for your first position of employment. In some cases, there are employers who will have some form of partnership in place with some of the schools, colleges or universities for employing their qualified students into positions within their company.

You will not be able to spend time with like minded people, and miss out on the teamwork side of the training. This can be extremely important if you were to end up in a graphic design studio. It is essential that you are able to work alongside others.

Also, if at any time you have a question that requires answering, then either your tutor or your class mates may actually be able to answer it for you. Plus, you will be able to get feedback, as well as have your work critiqued by someone, which will help you to learn and grow a lot faster than if you were doing the studying completely on your own.

Certainly by doing everything on your own, you will not really be able to make an informed decision as to whether what you are producing is good or bad. Plus,

you can not be sure that you are on track, or that you have actually hit the mark when it actually comes to producing a design.

Many of the schools, colleges or universities will include some hands on work experience, where you spend time within the working confines of a graphic design business. This could actually help you in the future, and you may find yourself being offered a position within the company where you have done your work experience training.

But all these programs are actually geared towards helping you to produce a good quality portfolio, which you can present to prospective employers in the future. It is within this portfolio that you will be able to showcase your best work in order to sell your talents to any potential employer.

However, although you can create your own portfolio when studying alone, and you may fill it with the best design work possible, for many employers, they will not even consider anyone who does not have a degree in graphics design as well.

Even if you are good enough at what you do, any potential employer of a graphics designer likes to know that this person understands the processes of graphic design completely. They also want to be able to know that you will not have difficulty working with others. Plus they want to know that you understand all the various aspects relating to design including:-

1.   **Design Principles**

2.   **Art and style of printing** (typography)

3.   **Color**

4.   The **art of selling** something to a target audience

As well as attaining a degree, many teachers at these schools, colleges or universities provide their students with a reference also. This will help any future employers to know that the person they have employed has, in fact, a solid foundation on which they can build and then succeed in their chosen career.

Certainly for many employers, hiring someone who has done all this training on their own, and not through any recognized source, would be taking a big risk. It is the word of the interviewee that they will need to take only, and there are many employers who just do not have enough faith in order to believe what is being laid before them is true.

Although, there are some people who have attained positions as graphics designers because they were lucky, even though they did not have any necessary qualifications.

But if you want to be assured of getting not just a job, but a good one, then you will need to attend a good design school, university or college in order to obtain your degree.

Chapter 4
The Types of Graphics Design Programs Available

In the previous chapter, we provided reasons as to why it was essential for a person wishing to have a career in graphics design to have a degree. Now, in this chapter, we will take a look at the various programs that are available for students to use in order to attain their qualifications.

Short Term Certificate Programs

Although these are a good start for anyone wishing to get their first foot on the ladder in their chosen career of graphic design, it should be known that this will not get them some of the high end jobs straight away.

Normally, these particular programs last between 1 and 2 years.

Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree

This actual program offers the student a more in depth look at the world of graphics design. Such courses will last between 3 and 4 years, so you will need to be extremely dedicated if you wish to obtain your degree.

However, once the training has been completed and you have obtained your degree, the chances of getting a much better and higher paying job is more likely to occur than if you had done just the short term certificate program instead.

But with either of these courses, you may not get what you actually want at the end of them, so be prepared to be disappointed.

However both of these programs will often provide the student with a position within a business or studio, both while studying, and after they have completed the program. This is a great way for students to actually gain experience, and which helps them when it actually comes to getting their first job.

In some cases, students have been extremely lucky, as they have been employed by the business or studio where they actually went and did their work experience training. In some cases, they have been employed by them before they have completed their training.

Now that we have looked at the kinds of programs available in order for a person to attain their qualifications, in the next chapter, we will take a look at what a person should be looking for when choosing a college, university or design school to carry out their studies at.

Chapter 5
How to Choose the Right Graphics Design Educational Facility

When it comes time for a person to start deciding where they would like to do their graphics designer course at, there are literally hundreds, even thousands, of options available to them.

They could, if they wish, attend a technical or trade school, a community college or a state university. They may even decide to attend a private art college or school for graphic design. However, actually narrowing down their choices may look extremely difficult to some people. But by choosing the right one, it will have an impact on your career in the future.

In this chapter, we take a look at a number of things a person will need to consider in order to find the right educational facility, where they can obtain the necessary qualifications to have a career in graphics design.

The first thing is that a person should have a rough idea as to what the position of a graphics designer entails, as this will help in them choosing the right school, college or university to complete their training at.

Most graphics design courses include various lessons relating to advertising, publication, website design and for even some, will have animation involved within the core program.

You may well need to look not just for colleges and universities which offer graphics design programs, but those that also offer art or communications courses. Often, a graphics designer course will be included within these two departments of a college or university.

Look at those educational facilities which offer either a graphics designer degree, or have it come under a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree program as well.

Much of the coursework carried out at either a graphics design school, college or university will be concentrating heavily on graphic design. However, you will also be offered a liberal arts experience as well, especially if you are doing the course which takes 4 years to complete.

But at the end of the course, you will either have obtained a certificate, or an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree (this is only achieved after completing the 4 year course). But this will always depend on the school, college or university that the person attends, and the type of student that the person is.

Also, when looking for the right educational facility, you will need to have made a decision in which area of graphic design you are most interested in qualifying for. Unfortunately, if you happen to be interested in more animation based courses, then you may not find that all facilities offer this type of program because of the high costs that are related to the subject.

When you have narrowed down your choices of school, college or university where you would like to do your course at, there are certain questions which you will need to ask of them first.

1.   What are the requirements for gaining entry to the course they are offering?

2.   What does the program actually cover?

3.   What kinds of software and equipment is it that they use during the course?   Plus, how old or new is the equipment that they have available?

4.   What is the average size of the class?

5.   Once students have graduated, how many have actually gained active employment?

6.   What will they tell you about in order to prepare you for when you have graduated from the program?

7.   Does the school have any ties to the industry?

8.   Do they provide guidance to those students after they have graduated when it comes to looking for employment?

By providing you with the answers to these questions, you will be able to make a much more informed decision as to which college, university or school meets your requirements.   Never rush into attending the first college, university or school that you see. Instead, take your time, and if at all possible, arrange an overnight visit so you can see everything as it is, and spend time with some of the students already attending it to find out their views and feelings about the course.

But as well as attending a college, design school or university in order to obtain your qualifications as a graphic designer, you can, if you wish, do your training online instead.

Unfortunately for some people, they do not have either the time, or the capabilities required in order to attend a college, university or school, but luckily, they can now do all their training online. But for any online program, there are a number of things that you would need to take into consideration first.

1. What requirements do they require from people who wish to enroll in the program?

2. What is the timescale in relation to when the program must be completed by?

3. What are differences and similarities between a person doing an online program, or taking part in a more traditional program instead?

By considering these three points, a person will be better able to make an informed decision as to which is the best training method for them. Largely, it will depend on the time they have available, the cost of the program, as well as how disciplined they are.

Certainly for those who are going to need constant motivation or assistance, then a more traditional classroom training program is suited to their requirements. However, for those who are able to motivate themselves and are well disciplined, then taking an online program may be the much better option for them.

But which ever way you choose, by obtaining a degree or certificate, in the end, will help to ensure that you get a good start in your chosen career as a graphics designer.

Conclusion

Many people before you have been seduced into purchasing something because of the advert they have seen for it. This should tell you just how powerful imagery can be when it comes to influencing a person's spending habits. You will also have realized that marketing and advertising are not just big business, but can be very lucrative as well. So if you really are keen to get involved in this industry, a great way of doing this is through getting a job as a graphics designer.

So for those people who are artistic and have an eye for what people want and desire, then going in to the field of graphic design seems like the logical decision. It allows them to use those talents in a career which can be extremely satisfying, and also this particular field of work is expected to continue to grow in the next few years.

In order to be a good graphics designer, a person will need the following skills.

1. Must possess the ability to create and design eye catching, as well as effective graphics.

2. They will need to come up with strategies with regards to the layout and artistic concepts for their designs. It is important that they now how to effectively use visual imagery in order to engage, attract and sell to their clients' target audience. They should, at all times, be responsive to their client's needs. Must be able to create ideas that are both new and original.

3. They should be meticulous and be able to meet deadlines and adjust to their client's requirements and priorities.

4.   Be capable of using the latest desktop publishing tools, and be aware of all the latest and updated versions of every software program that is around.

5.   They need to be able to communicate with their clients and others in order to convey their ideas across clearly and succinctly to them.

So if you feel that you have these attributes, then you may well consider that a career in graphics design is the right choice for you. If you do, there are various different jobs open to those who have attained a qualification, such as a degree or certificate in graphic design.

Today, in the US alone, over ½ million designers have jobs and around 40% of this total is made up of graphic designers. They work in all fields of various different industries, ranging from commercial and industrial design, through advertising and marketing.

Everywhere you go, you will see the impact that other graphics designers have had on the world we live in today. From the layout of a magazine, through the many different logos you see on brand name companies, such as Starbucks and McDonalds. Even the chair in which you are sitting now will have been influenced by a graphics designer at some stage. So the actual variety of positions available to you when you want to become a graphics designer is unlimited.

Certainly, the potential to earn a good salary is also another reason why more and more people are getting involved in this business. Although you shouldn't expect to earn the same sort of salaries as some other fields of design work may get, certainly what you will earn should not be sniffed at. However, as you gain

experience within your field of expertise, and are able to advance further within the company you are working for, the chances of earning a better salary are steadily increased. You could, however, work as a freelance graphics designer instead, as this pays quite well, and plus you would be your own boss. But it is important that you remember how much it is going to cost you to run your own business, and also the financial risks involved with doing so.

There are plenty of opportunities available to those who do decide on a career in graphics design.

1. Because of the continuing growth of the internet, there are more opportunities becoming available every day. This is because there is a high demand for graphics designers who can design, and then develop web pages for companies.

2. All businesses will continue to need to use visual imagery in order to reach their target audience. Whether it's through package design, advertisements, marketing strategies and through the use of TV and video, these will need to be implemented and designed using a person's skills as a graphic designer.

3. Even though there is high demand for both freelance and salaried graphics designers, the competition for even the best jobs is going to be stiff. Many employers today are willing to make an attractive offer to the most creative and talented people who apply for positions within their business.

So if you are really keen to get yourself involved in this demanding industry, and have loads of creativity, then you should definitely consider getting yourself into a graphics designer course as soon as possible.