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Rivalry - February 27, 2018, 1:45 am

[\[img\]http://upload.vstanced.com/images/2018/02/16/xLE.png\[/img\]](http://upload.vstanced.com/images/2018/02/16/xLE.png)

Welcome to Tutorial Tuesday, works's weekly series teaching you how to become a better designer. Our tutorials are often non-specific; our aim is to improve the soft skills that underlie all aspects of design, especially your thinking skills. This week, we're looking at creative direction.

Creative direction is about purpose. The clue is in the name: as a creative director your aim must be to give a creative project purpose, drive, process. A creative director is a real-life job title, but regardless of your precise field or standard of design ability, you should seek to practise such skills in every project you undertake. This tutorial will aim to demonstrate ways to do that in the two broad stages of the design process.

AT A GLANCE

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Before you design, know what you want your brand to look and feel like. When creating concepts, always bear this 'direction' you want the brand to take in mind. Discard ideas if they don't adhere to this direction, even if these ideas are good. Only present one concept to the client: if you end up with multiple concepts, your creative direction has not been tight enough. Test yourself on finished work: can you justify all your design decisions, even small ones?

THINKING

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Creative direction begins before pen is set to paper. As we emphasise in many of our tutorials, thinking is as important a stage of the design process as any other - arguably, it is the most important stage. This is because poor creative direction at this stage cannot be rescued by excellent design work later.

To illustrate this, let's examine this brand: [American Indican Cannabis](#). The thinking behind this brand is extremely poor. The brand name will offend many people, and even if we aren't offended, we recognise that the brand trivialises the historic oppression and slaughter of an ethnic group by using that history to sell cannabis over the internet. The actual design work, however, is excellent. Unfortunately, it can't atone for the crass creative decisions made earlier in the design process; we might describe this branding as akin to gold-plating an old, rusty car without an engine. The gold-plating looks great, but the car underneath still doesn't work.

This company should have spent more time on creative direction during their strategy phase. Care should have been taken to avoid selecting a name that could offend, especially in a market like cannabis sales. Such a market desperately needs credibility, because it is a relatively new market, and because it was previously illegal: customers must be persuaded that what these companies are

selling is legitimate and safe, and - most importantly - that these companies take this potentially dangerous product seriously. These are some of the issues that this company should have considered during the strategy phase of their branding. Doing so would have allowed them to create a more tasteful - and potentially more successful - brand, which doesn't alienate customers by appearing offensive, immature, or overly casual.

When approaching a project these are questions you must ask, too. Consider the market your product is launching into: who buys the product? What are their expectations likely to be? Is it a serious market, or a casual one? Consider also your product itself: is it expensive? What niche does it seek to fill? What kind of customer do you want to attract? How will you differentiate this product from its competitors? These questions will help you gain a better appreciation of your product and its market, and thus they will help you to devise a successful concept for the brand.

A successful concept for your brand should satisfy your research. It should answer those questions listed above. It is of crucial importance to maintain objectivity at this stage in the design process; it's very easy to think of a pun, joke, or cool name for your brand and simply roll with that (as in the American Indican example). However, you must assess any concepts you come up with: regardless of how witty or smart they sound, do they fulfil your research into your product and its market? If not (if they just sound cool for the sake of sounding cool), never be afraid to bin those ideas. It's often painful to give up on a cool-sounding idea, but it's important to do so in the search for an idea that actually works for your project.

DESIGNING

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Once you have your idea, it's time for creative direction to take over in earnest. You should have a clear, lucid, rigorous plan of what you want your brand to look and feel like at this stage, thanks to your creative direction in the strategy phase. It's now important that you don't lose sight of that plan. Keep notes on what you want your finished brand to look like around your design workspace, so you can easily refresh your memory while you work on what the objective is. Sketch as many concepts as you need to, but if you feel your mind drifting away from the direction you established for your brand earlier, take a break and re-read your notes.

As a designer, it's often easy to go overboard and create dozens of concepts for logos and visual identities. This is a sign of poor creative direction. Tight creative direction should result in only one concept, because all others were eliminated by you during the design process for not fitting the objectives of the brand as effectively.

This doesn't only apply to designers. If you're hosting a contest between multiple designers for a visual identity, creative direction is absolutely vital here too. You, as the competition organiser, must be able to determine which entry best satisfies the requirements of your brand. This may not be the entry that is visually most appealing, or the wittiest, or the cleverest; as explained above and illustrated by the American Indican example, good design, witty puns, and fun ideas don't necessarily lead to good branding. Knowing the direction you want your brand to take will allow you to write a more specific brief (so submissions to your contest will be more aligned with what you're looking for), and will allow you to select a winning design more easily. Note that this is not advocating allowing designers no freedom of creativity: you should always be flexible in your briefs and expectations, because often others will approach a brand in a different way to you.

As a designer and brand-owner, it follows from the above that you should also be able to justify every single design decision taken in the finished concept. If you're asked to explain why a certain colour was used, a font was chosen, or even the brand name was selected, you should be able to

provide an answer because you've already done the rigorous thinking needed to clarify your decisions. This benefits you for two reasons. Firstly, it further entrenches the importance of thoughtful design within your workflow: this leads to higher-quality work which is always on-brand and on-brief. Secondly, it lets you sell your work. Clients will be impressed by designers who have clearly put real thought into their work, because it shows care. In turn, you'll begin attracting clients who care about you. This makes for a better working environment, and a potentially more lucrative working environment too.

Hopefully this has been of some use in impressing the importance of creative direction upon you. If you'd like to read more tutorials please visit the works megathread, where you can find all of our work.

[img]http://upload.vstanced.com/images/2018/02/16/xLL.gif[/img]

Novica - February 27, 2018, 2:49 am

Looks great, a lot of useful info. Good job Riv. n_n

Novica - March 3, 2018, 10:03 am

Bumping this awesome thread. n_n

Lotta useful info, don't be lazy and read it. :3

Mister Slyther - March 4, 2018, 2:14 pm

Very well written thread, kuddos to you sir!

Goku - March 17, 2018, 11:57 am

A lot of useful content in this thread. Also this is exactly what I needed for my school project. Keep it up guys!