GOOD DESIGN IS GOOD BUSINESS.

Business Resource Guide **AIGA** Nebraska

Table of Contents

About AIGA

AIGA, the professional association for design, is committed to furthering excellence in design as a broadly-defined discipline, strategic tool for business and cultural force. AIGA is the place design professionals turn to first to exchange ideas and information, participate in critical analysis and research and advance education and ethical practice.

nebraska.aiga.org

Welcome to the Power of Design

In order to have a successful business, you need to harness the power of sales, financial management, human resources and marketing.

But design? Isn't that just about making stuff look pretty?

Nope.

Great design combines artistry and economics in a way that profoundly impacts what we buy, how we act and even what we think.

Consider this: If you don't design a strong identity for your business, no one will know who you are. If you don't have well-designed promotional pieces, no one will know what products and services you are providing. If you don't design a strong product to sell and wrap it in equally strong packaging, no one will buy it. In short, good design is at the heart of every successful business from McDonald's arches to Apple's iPod packaging to Target's Sunday circulars. New companies are beginning to figure out what historically successful companies have known for ages: the money they invest in quality design comes back to them exponentially.

This Business Resource Guide is the first step to putting that power of design to work for your company. Use it to understand the value of design, the graphic design process, how to work with a creative partner and where to find them. Whether you develop two creative pieces a year or two thousand; whether your company is well established or brand new; whether you're launching a new product, breathing life into old ones, or don't even know yet what the next product will be; this is the place to get started. Welcome.

Drew Davies
President, AIGA Nebraska

AIGA invites you to open your doors and minds to the possibility of engaging designers as strategic partners in every aspect of your business, from the ground floor up.

The Design of Business

If your business is searching for that elusive competitive edge, you have come to the right place. AIGA Nebraska members and professional designers around the country have become valued partners as businesses and organizations seek new paths to innovation. In fact, "design thinking" has become a current mantra for corporations on the forefront of economic growth.

In his new book *A Whole New Mind*, Daniel Pink, acclaimed author of *Free Agent Nation*, outlines how the era of left-brain dominance and the Information Age that it engendered is giving way to a new world in which artistic and holistic right-brain abilities will drive economic growth. After all, we have all learned that growth is no longer automatic. We now live in a world dominated and driven by brand. On a daily basis, consumers are bombarded with thousands of brand impressions, from the coffee they drink in the morning to the sleep medication they take at night.

While branding has been the corporate battle cry in recent years, many brands now find themselves all dressed up with nowhere to grow. The most successful companies in today's marketplace have embedded design thinking deep into their organization. While designers are most often asked to assist in the "dressing up" process, the most visionary business leaders have cultivated the creative brilliance of individuals while instilling an effective process for innovation in corporate cultures. As stated in AIGA's publication *What Every Business Needs. And How.*, "Despite commonly held beliefs, real innovation is rarely the terminus of a carefully developed brief. It begins before the assignment is written, and is inevitably the difference between efforts that lead to meaningful new ideas and those that produce derivative results." In other words, opportunity begins with design, and professional designers are the most qualified partner in problem solving and implementation.

When combined with analytical approaches, design thinking can generate impressive results. As designers, we are well equipped to explore new frontiers. While we have often been dismissed in the past as simply "creative types," designers now have a seat at the table when it comes to business strategy. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that design thinking can play a critical role in innovation from the very beginning. In the business world, design decisions are made on a daily basis — quite often without the involvement of a professional designer. As the largest and most respected professional association for design in the world, AIGA invites you to open your doors and minds to the possibility of engaging designers as strategic partners in every aspect of your business, from the ground floor up. Working together, we can assist you in creating a process by which your business can create value and market demand through innovation by partnering with professional designers.

Bill Grant
President, AIGA

Good design reinforces something we all feared was true as adolescents:

How you look does *make a difference.*

Design Makes Good Business Sense

The look of your business – your name, logo, letterhead, ads, invoices, annual reports, store layouts, employee uniforms, sales collateral, Web sites, packaging, brochures, retail signage, merchandise bags, and more – all say something about your company.

And in a visual society and cluttered marketplace, constantly wrestling for our attention, they need to say it clearly, convincingly and persuasively — all in just one glance.

Successful businesses understand the power of these first impressions. They know that conscientious attention to detail means opportunities for expanded growth, promotion and profitability. They trust their lawyers with their contracts, their accountants with their taxes, and a trained professional designer with their visual communications.

The profession of graphic design is as rooted in strategy and skill as anything else we're likely to encounter in the business world. It involves the carefully considered combination of text and images, of data and strategy, of message and medium.

Working with these combinations, a good graphic design professional makes the complex clear. They literally can transform intangible assets — spirit, attitude, trustworthiness, innovation, dependability — into tangible, visual elements that people immediately understand. And they take their job seriously, respectfully collaborating with their clients to create the best solution for businesses.

Whether your business needs to sell services, promote new products, or just create good will, a skilled designer can marry your company's objectives with an artistic sensibility that translates into measurable results that impact your bottom line.

When to Get Started?

The earlier a graphic design professional gets involved with your company, the more she or he can contribute to your success. However, a designer will produce the best results when they are working with a prepared client. Before you begin, review your marketing or business plan and identify the pieces of the puzzle that need work. What hurdles is your company looking to overcome? A designer can help you determine specific solutions, but they will need you to first clearly articulate the problems and an approximate budget.

Once you have an established objective, such as an introduction of a new product, consider bringing in a designer before you pin down the parameters of the project. Your designer may contribute fresh perspectives and their input can offer valuable insight toward the form, cost-effectiveness and overall impact of your project.

Beyond just producing a single logo, brochure or poster, a designer can act as a "creative consultant" for your business helping you to: Identify a problem you're trying to solve and work with you on creative solutions to solve it; Extend the value of your marketing budget by evaluating and consolidating your visual message and its mediums; Establish a brand and identity that is powerful and distinct; Clarify and develop new initiatives or prototype new products; Make services and products palatable and appealing to consumers; Translate ideas into visual messages that are understandable to a global and interactive marketplace.

We are committed
to the power of strong design
to engage our employees,
to inform our stakeholders
and to enhance the power
of our brand.

Great Design Adds Great Value

Great design is an advantage available to all, but often overlooked. It improves the effectiveness of a communication, it speeds up the understanding of an idea, and it makes the important seem obvious. Why someone attempting to communicate with their customers, employees or their neighbors would ignore design is hard to imagine. That some choose to ignore design is evidenced in discarded mailings, ignored requests, and missed opportunities. In a world where the shelf life of an idea is the time it takes to go from your mailbox to your wastebasket, great design is the best way achieve the attention we all want in the marketplace.

At Union Pacific, we are committed to the power of strong design to engage our employees, to inform our stakeholders and to enhance the power of our brand. It enables us to connect with people at the emotional as well as the practical level and to build relationships that endure. When people remember our ads, our marketing materials, and our company, that's great design.

We work hard to get the message right, because we want people to remember. When people remember our message, it's great design that helps them remember.

At the end of the equation, the cost of great design is always worth it. The real cost comes when nobody notices what you are saying.

Robert W. Turner
Senior Vice President — Corporate Relations, Union Pacific

Looking back,
I laugh at how foolish I was
to second guess the tangible
value that professional
design would bring to my
small business.

Design Grows Small Business

I am the owner of a women's handbag and accessories business that has grown 500% in the past 2 years, thanks greatly to working with a professional designer. Diva Girl Purse Party began in my home in February of 2003. The company started as a fun way for me to supplement my family's income through home shows while I stayed home with my two-year old during the day. As with most small home businesses, we had a very limited budget that did not allow for much overhead.

My business cards and invitations, and all advertisements were designed by me and generated off my home computer. Although these items accomplished their general purpose, they were often done in different fonts, different sizes and with very different looks depending on the amount of time I had to work on them. Consequently, the company look was not very cohesive or distinct.

As interest in the company grew, so did my desire to get a company logo — something that people would recognize immediately as belonging to the Diva Girl. We knew it was time to seek the advice and talent of a professional graphic designer. I first met with our selected designer in January of 2003 to discuss the "look" I felt the company needed. She understood right from the beginning the needs of our small company as well as benefits of a memorable logo. She collaborated with us to develop a thoughtful and perfectly appropriate identity for Diva Girl. Not long after, I received my first price quote to print all the stationery products — business cards, letterhead, tags, invitations, mailing labels: I loved the cohesive company branding, but wasn't sure we could afford to spend that much money just for stationery. We took a gamble on the premise that if this company was truly going to grow and be recognized as a major contender in the industry, we needed to take this step!

That was almost 2 years ago, since then Diva Girl has grown 500%. We have sales reps in several states between Omaha and California; we have 9 sales reps servicing the Greater Omaha area, a 3,000 foot warehouse, a corporate web site and constant demand to attend large venues and women's conferences throughout the Midwest region. I attribute most of this fast growth to our company identity — we present ourselves as a very professional and sleek organization through the coordination of all our materials from business papers to signage. Curiously enough, we get frequent calls from people inquiring as to where Diva Girl's company headquarters are; there is an assumption that we must be part of a *huge* organization because our identity is so cohesive and professional.

As I look back now over the past two years, I laugh at how foolish I was to second guess the tangible value that professional design would bring to my small business. Our logo is on everything from yard signs to t-shirts to letterhead — it has given us a fun company look and has propelled us into a whole new level within the industry! I am thankful each day for having met such a great designer that really made me a believer in the power of the company branding.

Lesa Modde
Owner, Diva Girl Enterprises, LLC

A Client's Guide to Design:

If you represent a corporation, institution, advertising agency, investor or public relations firm, or individual in need of graphic design, you've landed exactly where you need to be.

Unlike so much in today's business world, graphic design is not a commodity. It is the highly individualized result of people coming together to do something they couldn't do alone. When the collaboration is creative, the results usually are too. This article is about how to get creative results. Developed by AIGA, the discussion that follows will give you realistic, useful information about the design process, from selecting a design firm to providing a clear understanding of objectives, evaluating cost and guiding a project to a desired end. It is a kind of "best practices" guide based upon the best thinking of many different designers with very different specializations and points of view, as well as clients for design who have a long history of using it successfully for their companies. The fundamental premise here is that "anything worth doing is worth doing well, but if it's to be done well, it must first be valued."

The Value Proposition

Design – good design – is not cheap. You would be better served to spend your money on something else if you don't place a high value on what it can achieve.

There's a view in Buddhism that there's no "good" karma and no "bad" karma, there's just karma. The same can't be said for design. Karma is a universal condition. Design is a human act (which often affects conditions) and, therefore, subject to many variables. When the word design is used here, it is always in the context of good design.

A lot of famous people have written many famous books on the importance of design and creativity. The subject matter ranges

from using design and creativity to gain a strategic advantage or make the world a more livable place — and more. Much more. The focus here is on how to make the process of design work in the business environment so that the end product lives up to its potential.

We live in a time of sensory assault. Competing for "eyeballs" — which is to say, customers — is more than just an Internet phenomenon. The challenge for companies everywhere is to attract consumers to their products and services and keep them in the face of fickle markets.

The answer to this challenge starts with each company's people, products and services, but it doesn't end there. How companies communicate to their markets and constituencies is becoming the primary means of differentiation today. Never, in fact, has effective communication been more important in business. And it has increased the pressure within companies to establish environments and attitudes that support the success of creative endeavors, internally and externally. More often than not, companies that value design lead the pack.

What Design Is, and What Design Isn't

Design often has the properties of good looks, which perhaps is why it's often confused with style. But design is about the underlying structure of communicating – the idea, not merely the surface qualities. The late, great designer Saul Bass called this "idea nudity" – messages that stand on their unadorned own.

Certainly, it's possible for a good idea to be poorly executed. But bad ideas can't be rescued. When, for example, a global fashion house put verses from the Koran on the back pockets of its designer jeans for all the world to sit on, that was a bad idea before it was ever designed and produced. And the outcry of indignant Muslims worldwide loudly attested to this. Using a different color or type style wouldn't have changed the outcome.

Ideas give design its weight, its ability to influence audiences positively, negatively or not at all.

The Object Of Design

Design is about the whole, not the parts. If you wear your $2,500 Armani suit with the wrong pair of shoes, you are apt to be remembered for the shoes and not the suit. Inconsistency raises doubt and doubt makes people wary. This might not matter much if customers didn't have alternatives, but customers do. And they know it. So?

So, it isn't enough for a company to have a great logo if the communications effort isn't carried out across the full spectrum of the company's interaction with its marketplaces—from how the telephone is answered to corporate identity; branding; packaging; print materials; advertising; Internet, intranet, interactive multimedia and Web-related communications; and environmental graphics. The "swoosh" didn't make Nike a successful company. Nike made the "swoosh" an iconic reflection of a carefully orchestrated approach to the marketplace. (For better or worse, the marketplace is now deluged with "swoosh"-like shapes identifying companies ranging from sportswear to software. It's the frame of reference for what many think of when visualizing the word "mark.") It's unlikely the "swoosh" would be so memorable had it stayed confined to, say, hangtags on shoes.

A Client's Guide to Design:

People with a great deal of experience — both as designers and as clients — will tell you that if you really do your homework in the selection process, the chances are excellent that what follows will bring the hoped-for results.

Where to look

There are more than 18,000 members of AIGA, and there are hundreds, if not thousands of other businesses providing graphic design who aren't members. There are also other graphic design associations with their own memberships. And this is just the U.S. It's a big community and, as with all businesses, design is increasingly global. Where do you start?

The membership lists of AIGA and other design organizations are available to the public. They are a good place to begin, especially if you're starting from ground zero. In the following pages of this guide, you will find a list of the members of AIGA Nebraska, as well as pages advertising the services of many area designers and firms. You can also find a directory of national members of AIGA online at www.aiga.org.

Design industry publications are another source. They are both numerous and accessible. Not only do they publish the work of designers on a regular basis, many also publish design annuals that display what the publications judge to be the best design in a variety of categories. These publications will not only show you what designers are capable of producing, but also how companies of all sizes and from every sector of industry are using design to communicate effectively. Reviewing them is a fairly easy way to see a lot of work quickly. Doing so may also tell you something about where your own design comfort zone lies. And while your personal comfort zone isn't necessarily the right yardstick for making a selection, knowing it will help you in the "briefing" process (more on this, shortly).

Still another way to find designers is to look around at what other companies are doing; call the companies whose efforts

Finding the Right Designer

you admire, and ask for their recommendations. Companies that are doing a good job of communicating are companies who care about it, and they're typically willing to discuss the subject. Furthermore, if they're doing good work, it usually means they are good clients. Find out from them what makes a design client a good client.

Designers themselves are also good sources. Ask them whom they respect within their field. There's nothing wrong with getting them to name their competition. While it might make choosing tougher, when you make the final selection from among designers who are peers, you usually come out better than when you don't. (And if the relationship doesn't work, well, you have some future contenders you already know something about.)

What to Look For

Locating designers to interview is a fairly uncomplicated proposition. What to look for among the potential candidates – what makes one or the other the right firm for you – is more complex. It's not a beauty contest. Seeing work that you like is important and altogether appropriate as a point of departure. But it's not enough to warrant a marriage proposal.

The nature and technology of what is designed today is changing and expanding, and so is the discipline of design. As with many businesses and professions today, there's more to know and the knowledge itself has a shrinking shelf life. Some design firms have organized themselves to do everything, adding new capabilities as the demand warrants. Others do related things, such as corporate identity and annual reports. And still others do one thing — interactive multimedia, for example.

If you have a retail packaging project, a firm that designs only environmental graphics might not be your best choice. Why? Well, the reasons have less to do with design than with technical requirements, vendor knowledge, pricing and scheduling. The designer who knows how paint and materials hold up in weather or how signage is viewed from a moving vehicle may not know a thing about seam wraps and how products are treated on retail shelves.

Still, there is no litmus test to say one firm can do the job and the other can't, or that a firm without a certain kind of experience can't learn. In fact, some companies see a real benefit in hiring a design firm that brings neither prior experience nor preconceptions to their project. If you've identified a firm you'd like to work with and are comfortable making a leap of faith, you probably should.

Questions to Help You Evaluate a Design Firm

1. How does the firm like to work?
2. Who are its clients?
3. How knowledgeable is it about them?
4. How is it viewed by them? By its peers?
5. What is its design process?
6. What kind of design experience does it have?
7. What kind of results has it achieved?
8. Who will work on your project?
9. Does the firm understand business?
10. Do you like the people you've met?

A Client's Guide to Design:

A design brief is a written explanation given by the client to the designer at the outset of a project. As the client, you are spelling out your objectives and expectations and defining a scope of work when you issue one. You're also committing to a concrete expression that can be revisited as a project moves forward. It's an honest way to keep everyone honest. If the brief raises questions, all the better. Questions early are better than questions late.

The Design Brief

Why Provide a Design Brief?

The purpose of the brief is to get everyone started with a common understanding of what's to be accomplished. It gives direction and serves as a benchmark against which to test concepts and execution as you move through a project. Some designers provide clients with their own set of questions. Even so, the ultimate responsibility for defining goals and objectives and identifying audience and context lies with the client.

Another benefit of the design brief is the clarity it provides you as the client about why you're embarking on a project. If you don't know why, you can't possibly hope to achieve anything worthwhile. Nor are you likely to get your company behind your project. A brief can be as valuable internally as it is externally. If you present it to the people within the company most directly affected by whatever is being produced, you not only elicit valuable input, but also pave the way for their buy-in.

When you think about it, the last thing you want is for your project to be a test of the designer's skills. Your responsibility is to help the design firm do the best work it can. That's why you hired the firm. And why you give it a brief.

How to Write a Design Brief

A brief is not a blueprint. It shouldn't tell the designer how to do the work. It's a statement of purpose, a concise declaration of a client's expectations of what the design should accomplish. And while briefs will differ depending upon the project, there are some general guidelines to direct the process. Among them:

- Provide a clear statement of objectives, with priorities

- Relate the objectives to overall company positioning

- Indicate if and how you'll measure achievement of your goals

- Define, characterize and prioritize your audiences

- Define budgets and timeframes

- Explain the internal approval process

- Be clear about procedural requirements (for example, if more than one bid is needed from fabricators, or if there's a minimum acceptable level of detail for design presentations)

In the final analysis, design briefs are about paving the way for a successful design effort that reflects well on everyone involved.

A Client's Guide to Design:

If the briefing effort is thorough, budgeting and managing a project is easier. It takes two to budget and manage a design project: the client and the designer. The most successful collaborations are always the ones where all the information is on the table and expectations are in the open from the outset.

Design Costs Money

As one very seasoned and gifted designer says, "There is always a budget," whether it is revealed to the design team or not. Clients often are hesitant to announce how much they have to spend for fear that if they do, the designer will design to that number when a different solution for less money might otherwise have been reached. This is a reasonable concern and yet, it's as risky to design in a budgetary vacuum as it is to design without a goal. If your utility vehicle budget stops at four cylinders, four gears and a radio, there's no point in looking at Range Rovers.

If you have $100,000 to spend and you'd really like to dedicate $15,000 of it to something else, giving the design team that knowledge helps everyone. Then you won't get something that costs $110,000 that you want but cannot pay for. The trust factor is the 800-pound gorilla in the budgeting phase. Without trust, there isn't a basis for working together.

The ideal approach is to bring in your designer as early as you can. The design team can then help you arrive at realistic cost parameters that relate to your objectives in lieu of an arbitrary budget figure. At this stage it is quite feasible to put together a budget range based upon a broad scope of a project or program. Individual estimates can be provided, for example, for design concepts, design development and production, photography, illustration, copy writing and printing for a print piece (or, in the case of a Web site, estimates for programming, proprietary software and equipment).

The more informed you are as a client about what things cost, the more effective you can be in guiding a project. You should know, for instance, that if your design firm hires outside talent

such as writers, photographers and illustrators and pays them, it is standard policy to markup (generally, 20%) the fees charged by these professionals. You can choose to pay these contributors directly to avoid the markup, but this should be addressed at the time they're hired. Printing, historically, has been treated the same way.

You should also be aware that photographers, illustrators and writers are generally paid a "kill fee" if a project is cancelled after work has started. That's because talent is in constant demand and accepting one project often means turning other work away. In the case of photography, expect to pay when a photo shoot is cancelled. And remember that unless you stipulate otherwise, you are buying one-time usage of the photographs—not the work itself—and that copyright laws are in force the moment the shutter trips. If you want unlimited use, you will have to negotiate and pay for it.

Who Leads? Who Follows?

There are countless volumes on the subject of leadership, so we won't presume to give leadership lessons here. The same general principles apply. In a design project, leadership requires that you give clear direction at the outset. You must be available when needed by the design team and ready to make decisions in a timely manner. You should understand how the design supports your objectives (so you can sell it). And you'll need to monitor major delivery points and be prepared to get the necessary approvals. On this last point, some designers are excellent presenters, and, in fact, like to present their work to the final authority. But while they can be persuasive, they are not the ones to get the final sign-off. As the leader of the team, you are the deal-maker, the closer.

If you identify and articulate your objectives, establish your process early, see that the design team has access to what it needs from you, have a detailed budget and schedule to measure progress with, and lead the process from beginning to end, there is no reason that you won't be able to enjoy the design process as much as the end product.

At least, that's how many of our members and their clients see it.

Bottom Line

There is no off-the-shelf budget to tell you what something will cost to produce. There are simply too many variables. Design details, designer fees, photographer/illustrator fees, regional cost differences, travel expenses, and so on will be different project-to-project, designer-to-designer, client-to-client. Time, materials and talent vary in the world of design, just as they do in the world of architecture, fashion-any other business in which specialized consultants provide custom-tailored solutions.

To say that a given project, an annual report for example, can range from $50,000 to $1.3 million is a perfectly valid statement, but not terribly helpful. For a clearer picture, ask a design firm(s) to show you projects they've produced that are similar to yours, and tell you what those projects cost. This is a quick way to learn what factors are likely to make one design approach more expensive than another, and will also help you see how things like experience and quality affect project costs from one firm to the next. It may also give you an idea of what kind of product you can expect for the dollars to plan to spend. Finally, it gives the designer an opportunity to talk about the design process-as it relates to cost-in terms that will be specific and useful to you.

A Client's Guide to Design:

What about design competitions and spec work? There are differing views on these two closely related subjects. Some designers are absolutely opposed to design competitions and speculative work. Period. Others are open to them, provided they are compensated fairly for their work (i.e., according to the market value of the work).

The design competitions being discussed here are those that require design firms to do original work for a company in an effort to get that company's business (sometimes called "spec work") — not the kind held by nonprofit, professional organizations, such as AIGA, for the purpose of recognizing design excellence.

Consider this real-world scenario: A multibillion dollar, publicly held global corporation with huge brand awareness surveys the work of several dozen graphic design firms for the purpose of selecting one to design its annual report. After narrowing the field to a half-dozen candidates, the company offers each design firm $25,000 to provide it with a mock design of the report, issuing well-defined design parameters. Assuming the compensation reflects the effort required (it did), this isn't an unreasonable way to approach the selection process. And many designers would opt to participate. Yes, speculation is involved, but so is reciprocal value — up front.

Real though it is, however, this scenario isn't the norm. There aren't that many multibillion dollar companies, for one thing. For another, few companies cast such a wide net in search of design. The more common speculative scenario includes non-compensated competitions and work that's commissioned but paid for only upon approval. In either case, the situation is the same: little or no value is placed upon the designer as a professional, as someone whose purpose is to give trusted advice on matters significant to the company.

Egalitarian or Just Too Eager?
A typical design competition can be drawn from experience with the International Olympic Committee,

Design Competitions and Speculative Work

the U.S. government or even business enterprise, and it usually goes something like this: A competition is announced for a new logo and identity. No creative brief outlines the communication challenges or objectives from the perspective of the client. A jury will select the winner and a prize may be given (recent examples include a color TV and stipends of $15 and $2,000). Often the client indicates one of the "rewards" will be the use of the design by the client – i.e. exposure. The rules of competition include granting the client ownership of the selected entries. (In one recent competition, the client asked for ownership even of designs that were not selected.) Once a design is chosen, development of it may or may not involve the designer.

A competition like this prevents the client from having the benefit of professional consultation in framing and solving a communication problem. The client receives artwork at a cost below market value, owns the intellectual or creative property and can exploit the work without involvement from its creator. Who loses? The designer, the client and the profession. The designer gives up creative property without a fair level of control or compensation. The client fails to get the full benefit of the designer's talent and guidance. The profession is misrepresented, indeed compromised, by speculative commercial art.

Unpaid design presentations are fraught with economic risk — risk that is absorbed entirely by the designer. Why, then, do some design firms agree to participate?

Sometimes a new firm or a firm without strong design abilities will offer the excuse that this is the only way for it to get work

or exposure. A slump in business might make a designer more willing to gamble. Whatever the reason given, this short-term approach to hiring a design firm is not in the best interests of either party.

But the issues go beyond economics. The Financial burden borne by the design team translates into risk for the client. To protect their "investment" in a design competition, competing firms often play it safe, providing solutions that don't offer fresh, new ideas — in which case, the client gets what it paid for. You wouldn't ask a law firm or management consultant to provide you with recommendations prior to hiring them. A design firm, no less than a law firm or management consultant, has to know its client thoroughly if it's to give valid advice. This takes time and commitment from both sides. Design competitions — even paid ones — just don't allow for this level of participation.

Comparisons sometimes are made with design competitions held for the purpose of selecting architects or advertising agencies. Where these analogies fall short is in the initial effort required versus future potential. Architects and advertising agencies typically present design alternatives in order to win assignments that represent substantial future billings and ongoing consulting services to the client. The "product" comes at the end of a long engagement (in the case of architecture) or is the cumulative effect of a long engagement (as in advertising campaigns). Either way, initial design represents only a small part of the project's total value to both client and architect or agency. Not so with graphic design. The design approach represents the real value offered by the design firm, and the bulk of the work may well be completed at the front end of a project.

"Recognizing the importance of design is a corporation's first step to creating great design. The second step is talking to good designers immediately."

— Joe Mansueto,
President, Morningstar

The Gap, Herman Miller, Morningstar, and others that use graphic design as a strategic business tool, take advantage of an obvious, but nonetheless often ignored fact. Things that people see affect them.

Every physical representation of a company's image that people notice, whether it's a letter written on the corporate stationery, a product and its packaging, a brochure or annual report, a logo in an ad, a sign, graphics on a vehicle, or a name badge worn by a counter clerk, offers an opportunity to win respect and admiration. And business can successfully shape favorable consumer opinion by intelligently controlling these many forms of their communication program.

In today's message-saturated environment, communication programs that produce positive results must stand out in order to get noticed. Thanks to the successful use of graphic design by professional sports teams, manufacturers from Harley Davidson to Kodak, and Hollywood from Disney to Warner Brothers, people have become graphic design sophisticates. The age 20-somethings especially, have been brought up on TV, computer games, and brand name everything, respond only to high quality design. That's why successful companies hire graphic designers to plan and produce business communications. They realize that they need professionals to help them figure out which message to send out and how to deliver it with effective impact.

Strategically guided graphic design positions an organization to set off a very desirable chain reaction: Positive impressions create higher perceived value which boosts sales. The final

links in the chain tug nicely on the bottom line because the first links are forged into place with a results-oriented plan — a communication strategy.

The Communication Strategy

The Communication Strategy elevates results by establishing a target and spelling out the steps needed to hit it. Although strategic planning can be done by one person or a large task force, the steps are the same:

A] Review the company's mission and marketing strategies.

B] Interview people inside the company — employees and management, and people outside the company — vendors, customers, investors, etc. to learn their opinions about the company.

C] Review company communications to assess strengths and weaknesses.

D Review competitors' communications to prevent infringement and identify opportunities to explore.

E] Analyze the data gathered in steps a) through d) to prepare a list of goals and objectives that comprise the strategy.

Next comes the final and most critical step. Submit the communication strategy to top level management to win their approval and on-going support. Without management endorsement of the communication strategy a company will soon find that it has not one, but several communication programs producing a variety of inconsistent messages. On the other hand, a management-backed communication strategy prevents separate agendas, reduces duplication, and aligns

all messages with strategic objectives. In the most successful design projects, the CEO believes strongly in the importance of design and takes an active advisory role throughout the process.

A successful communication strategy makes sure that people who ultimately control a company's success — the workers who make and deliver its products and services and the customers who buy them — receive the most consistent, most persuasive messages possible. In other words, it provides a plan that supports a business's most important mission — making profits.

"I believe that in a crowded
marketplace, DESIGN may be the
most potent tool for differentiating
one's products or services."

— Tom Peters,
Management Consultant

Working With a Graphic Designer

Not all graphic designers follow the same procedures in completing a project. But this cursory overview will help you become familiar with the ins-and-outs of the creative and production stages of the graphic design process.

Before any work begins, we suggest the following: a communication strategy; assigning one company staff person as the decision maker and key contact for graphic design; a written contract covering project parameters and responsibilities; money matters such as estimates and billing; and a project timetable. Since the communication strategy is the single-most important element guiding a project from its initial stages through final refinements, make sure that you and the graphic designer understand what it says.

Initial research should include an audit of your competitors' and your company's current communications. In trying to establish a distinct position for your company or one of its products or services, you don't want to mimic a competitor's work or contradict a message your company just sent out.

The first stage of creative work includes concept development. This is an exciting process, exploring various options and weighing their merits against the communication strategy. Once the concept has been established, the refinement stage begins. Along the way, you see the project evolve, each time becoming more refined. Other creative work such as writing, illustration, or photography usually occurs simultaneously with refinement process.

At the end of the concept refinement stage, the graphic designer will usually present a final comprehensive layout or mock-up to the person at your company who has final approval authority.

He or she should be satisfied with everything that will go into the final product, including typography, photography, copywriting, paper and colors. Copywriting takes on particular importance because proofreading responsibility rests with the client unless other arrangements have been made. In today's electronic world, desktop publishing allows copy to go directly from word processing to set type. Correcting copy during the word processing stage, rather than later, saves time, money and headaches.

Since the approval process may involve more than one client representative, expect changes at each decision-making point. It is important, however, that the client's key contact person keeps track of and agrees to all changes before the designer makes them. Then, the production stage begins.

During production, you will be asked to review and approve preliminary proofs at each stage of the project. This proofing process ensures accuracy at every step in the process and keeps things on budget and on schedule. During the production stage, the designer ensures the technical accuracy and overall quality of the final product.

A design project can span weeks or months. What you end up with will be the result of a joint effort. Talented designers and savvy clients produce effective graphic design by making the most of their common interests and their individual preferences. If you decide to work together on future projects, take the time to assess your experiences and look for ways to improve. A union forged by success can generate profits and growth for both of your companies.

The purpose of the statement of policy on professional practice is to provide all AIGA members with a clear standard of professional conduct. AIGA encourages the highest level of professional conduct in design. The policy is not binding. Rather, it reflects the view AIGA on the kind of conduct that is in the best interest of the profession, clients, and the public.

For the purposes of this document the word ̈designer ̈ means an individual, practicing design as a freelance or salaried graphic designer, or group of designers acting in partnership or other form of association.

The Designer's Professional Responsibility

1.1   A designer shall at all times act in a way that supports the aims of the AIGA and its members, and encourages the highest standards of design and professionalism.

1.2   A designer shall not undertake, within the context of his or her professional practice, any activity that will compromise his or her status as a professional consultant.

The Designer's Responsibility to Clients

2.1   A designer shall acquaint himself or herself with a client's business and design standards and shall act in the client's best interest within the limits of professional responsibility.

2.2   A designer shall not work simultaneously on assignments that create a conflict of interest without agreement of the clients or employers concerned, except in specific cases where it is the convention of a particular trade for a designer to work at the same time for various competitors.

2.3   A designer shall treat all work in progress prior to the completion of a project and all knowledge of a client's intentions, production methods, and business organization as confidential and shall not divulge such information in any manner whatsoever without the consent of the client. It is the designer's responsibility to ensure that all staff members act accordingly.

The Designer's Responsibility to Other Designers

3.1   Designers in pursuit of business opportunities should support fair and open competition based upon professional merit.

AIGA Standards of Professional Practice

3.2   A designer shall not knowingly accept any professional assignment on which another designer has been or is working without notifying the other designer or until he or she is satisfied that any previous appointments have been properly terminated and that all materials relevant to the continuation of the project are the clear property of the client.

3.3   A designer must not attempt, directly or indirectly, to supplant another designer through unfair means; nor must he or she compete with another designer by means of unethical inducements.

3.4   A designer must be fair in criticism and shall not denigrate the work or reputation of a fellow designer.

3.5   A designer shall not accept instructions from a client that involve infringement of another person's property rights without permission, or consciously act in any manner involving any such infringement.

3.6   A designer working in a country other than his or her own shall observe the relevant Code of Conduct of the national society concerned.

Fees

4.1   A designer shall work only for a fee, a royalty, salary, or other agreed-upon form of compensation. A designer shall not retain any kickbacks, hidden discounts, commission, allowances, or payment in kind from contractors or suppliers.

4.2   A reasonable handling and administration charge may be added, with the knowledge and understanding of the client, as a percentage to all reimbursable items, billable to a client, that pass through the designer's account.

4.3   A designer who is financially concerned with any suppliers who may benefit from any recommendations made by the designer in the course of a project shall secure the approval of the client or employer of this fact in advance.

4.4   A designer who is asked to advise on the selection of designers or the consultants shall not base such advice in the receipt of payment from the designer or consultants recommended.

Publicity

5.1   Any self-promotion, advertising, or publicity must not contain deliberate misstatements of competence, experience, or professional capabilities. It must be fair both to clients and other designers.

5.2   A designer may allow a client to use his or her name for the promotion of work designed or services provided but only in a manner that is appropriate to the status of the profession.

Authorship

6.1   A designer shall not claim sole credit for a design on which other designers have collaborated.

6.2   When not the sole author of a design, it is incumbent upon a designer to clearly identify his or her specific responsibilities or involvement with the design. Examples of such work may not be used for publicity, display, or portfolio samples without clear identification of precise areas of authorship.

AIGA

Nebraska Chapter
PO Box 8114
Omaha, NE 68108-0114
nebraska.aiga.org

The professional association
for design.