

How To Design Better & Faster Than Trial & Error

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Tuesday, 18 December 2007
Last Updated Thursday, 14 February 2008

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How do you get design work done? When I have a new assignment, I'm usually eager to start sketching right away. Do you sit down immediately and draw something together? Or do you prefer to let your thoughts wander off and play around for a couple of days before you get started with the actual implementation? I like to make the most out of my creativity. With experience growing, I identified some helpful guidelines I follow to improve the designing process - and the quality of my work. When I accept a new design job, it's most appealing to start off with Illustrator immediately. As I mentioned earlier though, I've noticed over time that that wasn't the best approach because of the limitations the computer sets to intellectual creativity. What I'd like to talk about now is actually the part before sitting down and starting to sketch ideas, whether it is on the sheet or on the screen. Resist the temptation! I made it a habit not to start off immediately. And I can say, it's pretty tough! With every new brief, I encounter hundreds of thoughts and ideas about the design and the implementation. And I want to try them out right away. Starting on a sheet of paper is hard enough, because I have to pull myself together not to skip that step and start designing on the computer right away. Not starting to sketch is even more difficult. But it's a good thing to take your time. The harder it seems to be in the beginning, the easier you make progress in the end. By holding on to this guideline, I got really fast! Let things settle "Let things settle" is a very important statement. Don't move too fast in the beginning, as you are going to stumble sooner or later. And then all you have accomplished is the knowledge about an approach that doesn't work, and you will have to start over with a new idea. That takes time! By separating your creativity into intellectual and visual creativity, and taking one step after another, you will become faster with every new project - and, most importantly, a lot better each time. How to start Start with giving your mind a few days' time to get familiar with the topic. Think about your goal and imagine yourself in different positions for each idea you have: your client, their clients and customers, their competitors, etc. Develop a more and more sophisticated design every time you think about it. Sometimes, you'll think about something, see something inspiring or listen to a song - and suddenly come up with a ground-breaking idea for the project. (CreativeBits' Ivan wrote an interesting article about inspiration.) After having brainstormed a couple of sketchy ideas, go ahead and put it to the table. Use sheets of paper to handdraw your ideas. I described this process in The Sheet vs. The Screen. Step back and take a look After that, put it away and take a few days off again. Not off the subject, but off the need of production. Let your ideas ripen. Think them through - thoroughly. Pre-design them step by step in your head, as if you were using your favorite design application. Finish you ideas in your mind! Imagine the whole thing in color, and play with variations. All in your head. The plus is, if you have a lot to do, like I do, you don't have to be unproductive during the ripening phase. You can get other things done easily. You are encouraged to work on other projects, because it can enlighten your view of this one. Now, after you've almost finished one composition or more in your head, here comes the best part. Now, sit down and actually start designing! Believe me, you will be done in no time. You don't believe me now? You won't believe yourself later. Do believe From the results-count-only point of view, you've just started to design. And finished already with a terrific and perfect comp. How is this possible? Because you anticipated all steps of the designing process in your mind before actually getting started with the composition, you were able to look ahead and avoid problems that you would have experienced during the process. (Of course, you need to know your design applications and how to do things. You must have passed the early "I don't know if it works, but maybe the function is hidden somewhere"-phase.) If you are capable of using your mind rather than trial-and-error, and achieve design goals better, faster and more convenient, why not? Besides, you gain an interesting side effect if you proceed this way: You are able to accomplish more at a time, and you will impress people around you with your "geniality". Don't tell them where you got this from ;)

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