

Writing Center Tip Sheet

Job-hunting Advice for Designers, Artists, Illustrators

from www.artistresource.org

The following suggestions have been gathered from a number of recruiters and career specialists, including Susan Lee, Rita Sue Siegel, The U. of Wisconsin Art Department, the California EDD, and excerpted from my *Portfolio Development Workshops for Illustrators & Digital Designers*

Careers and Salaries

Digital Design and Multimedia

The EDD defines Desktop Publishing, Prepress, Graphic Design, Web Design, Animation and Computer-aided Illustration as Multimedia jobs. (I generally prefer the term 'Digital Design').

Digital design / Multimedia has been around for a number of years, but it is only within the past few years that it has been recognized as a rapidly emerging new industry. This emerging industry is creating many new career and job opportunities for people with knowledge and skills in these areas.

An important and interesting difference between careers in multimedia and many other career areas is the large proportion of freelance workers in the industry. Many people with careers in multimedia are not steadily employed by a single company or employer, but rather move from project to project working on a contractual basis. Each new project may bring together a different collaboration of professionals into what might be considered a "virtual company" with a life limited to the duration of the project. These professionals create a virtual workforce who are often paid by the hour and expect their current employment to terminate with the end of the project. Therefore, these freelance workers must have a number of entrepreneurial skills in addition to their technical skills. They must also be able to work effectively as a member of a team whose membership changes with each project.

Another difference between careers in multimedia and many other careers is the extent to which those wanting to enter this field gain initial experience through interning or volunteering. It is quite common for someone with basic computer or graphic skills to locate a company doing the type of work in which he or she is interested and approach the company directly with the offer to work without pay in exchange for on-the-job training. After a period of six months to one year the company may offer a paid position to incumbents who shows promise.

There are many career opportunities for creative and talented people in the multimedia industry. The industry is currently at a point in its evolution where entry and advancement are not tied as closely to academic achievement or credentials as to the quality of a person's contribution to the project. Enthusiasm combined with experience and talent often generate employment offers.

For ALL DIGITAL DESIGN JOBS

Job Skills Needed:

- Ability to work as a member of a team.
- Ability to clearly communicate ideas.
- Ability to quickly and accurately understand the goals and objectives of the project.
- Ability to be organized.
- Ability to use the computer tools required to complete the project.

Other Helpful Skills or Characteristics:

1. -- Willingness and ability to frequently seek employment on new projects.
2. -- Willingness and ability to join projects without much advanced notice.
3. -- Willingness and ability to continually update skills by learning new tools and techniques.—Passion for the work.
4. -- A good sense of humor.
5. -- Patience.
6. -- Be an expert in one or a few areas, but have a general understanding of as many areas as possible.

How to Find a Job:

1. -- Create a portfolio of your work that demonstrates your versatility, creativity and technical abilities as well as your capacity to work within time and budget constraints.
2. -- Customize your portfolio to highlight work you have done that is similar to that of the new project.
3. -- Become an active member of professional organizations in order to keep current and to make contacts that may lead to employment opportunities.
4. -- Attend multimedia and professional conferences and meetings to generate job leads and to acquire current information about trends, tools and techniques.
5. -- Update and acquire new skills through enrollment in continuing education classes and through reading magazines in the field. Network with other students and faculty.
6. -- Those without experience or training should consider interning or volunteering on a project to gain experience and build marketable skills.
7. -- Those with experience and/or training can use contacts from previous projects or professional organizations.

Compensation:

Many multimedia specialists do not work as salaried employees for a single company over a long period of time. It is more typical to work freelance as an independent contractor, moving from one project to the next, and being paid hourly, daily, or per project.

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS

Print Design (Desktop Publishing)

What They Do:

Graphic Designers are responsible for creating original artwork with a visual style, design and layout that is appropriate to the project's concept and goals. They may create screen layouts, menus, icons and symbols, logos, charts and diagrams. The visual design must be consistent with and support the overall goal of the project and be visually interesting to the product's users. It helps create the "mood" of the product and therefore the experience that the user has while using the product. Good Graphic Designers are first and foremost talented artists who are also technically competent using a variety of electronic tools and techniques.

Job Skills Needed:

- Understanding of the fundamentals of visual communication and design, including color theory, composition and iconography (the use of symbols).
- Knowledge of image acquisition and processing tools, including those used for image scanning and manipulation.
- Knowledge of computer painting and drawing tools.
- Understanding of storyboarding techniques.
- Knowledge of typography, designing with type and managing fonts
- Understanding of information design, including text formatting, styles, information hierarchy and navigation.
- Understanding of the limitations and capabilities of digital media.
- Understanding traditional and digital printing processes, including digital output
- Ability to create artwork that conforms to the style and content specifications provided by the project's art director or producer.

Other Helpful Skills or Characteristics:

1. -- Willingness to stay closely tuned to trends in the design field by reading a variety of design magazines (such as Communications Arts, How, and I.D.).
2. -- Ability to create various styles of visual images.
3. -- Ability to meet short deadlines.
4. -- Ability to understand various audiences and select the design style most appropriate for that audience.

Conceptual Skills

- Story Development and Communication
- Project Management
- Information Design
- Digital Imaging and Resolution
- Color Theory (Perception and effect)
- Printing Processes
- Digital Color Management (Palettes, Modes, etc.)
- Reflective Color (Inks)

Creative Skills

- Project layout and design on paper
- Typography, Designing with Type
- Composition, Use of Positive and Negative Space
- Use of Color to Communicate
- Symbolism/ Use of Icons
- Image Editing and Compositing

Technical Skills

- Scanning
- Photoshop
- Illustrator (or Freehand)
- QuarkXPress (or InDesign by end of 2000)
- Image, text and document formats and conversion
- Font Management (Suitcase or ATM Deluxe)

Portfolio

Portfolio should demonstrate the above skills and include some samples of the following:

- catalog, magazine or book layout and design;
- logo development and design;
- creative use of images and photographs;
- creative use of color;
- advertising;
- packaging (ie CD-Rom cover or point of purchase display);
- collateral material;
- posters and other publicity.

Finished, professional examples of layout and design can be printed to high quality, full-color (CMYK) digital output devices, but some projects must be actually printed in black and white, spot color, and CMYK.

Preliminary sketches can be included if followed by the finished design

'Before-and-After's' can be included on facing pages, to demonstrate problem-solving skills

Alternate proposals can be included—i.e. more than one version of a logo—to demonstrate creative versatility

How to Find a Job:

Use contacts from previous projects or professional organizations to get an interview with the project's art director or producer since they are the ones most likely to make the hiring decision.

Compensation:

A formal salary survey is not available; however references to annual salaries range from \$25,000 for beginners to \$75,000 for those with experience. All salaries depend on the nature of the project and the skill of the specialists.

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Resumes

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Traditional

A resume should include your name, address, phone number, email address (if you have one), and all your previous experience that is relevant to the current job hunt. Your experience should be broken down into the following parts:

- (1) work history: including employer, period of employment, job performed, additional duties and special accomplishments or awards in that job;
- (2) other skills: including knowledge of software or special equipment, languages, or other special knowledge that might help make you look more attractive to prospective employers;
- (3) other experience, including special projects, free-lance work, volunteer positions or internships; and
- (4) education, including number of years, college attended, degrees, continuing or vocational education. To round out a picture of your personality, you can also include
- (5) Awards and Achievements
- (6) (only if it helps your image) hobbies or personal interests such as mountain climbing, fine art, travel, etc., but consider first whether any of these may come under the heading of special skills or experience.

Email

An email resume must be easy to read. You should use all the basic punctuation tools, including caps, underlines, asterisks and extra spaces, to make your information appear organized. An email resume, in particular, must also list 'key words.' These are words that can be searched for in a database. The reason many companies ask for an email resume is so they can enter it in a database easily. Then they will search the database for whatever skill they need at the moment, like 'Production,' or 'Illustrator.'

Samples

When sending a resume in the hope of getting an interview, it is often a good idea to send non-returnable samples of your work. This will give an even clearer idea of your skill level, and make your resume stand out from the crowd. But don't send medium-grade samples or discards. Send only something that looks really good. If you want the samples returned to you, you must enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Don't expect the recipient to put out the time or money to return your samples.

Brochure

One way to ensure that your samples and your resume both look really good, is to combine them in your own promotional piece. You can create a brochure for yourself that will act as a resume while also showing your skills. This way you can include illustration, small photos of completed projects and demonstrate your graphic design skills. If you do this, put your heart into it. Treat yourself as well as you would any other client. The effort will make an obvious difference in quality.