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Visual Communication – A Designer's Guide to Reaching Target Audiences

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Visual Communication – A Designer's Guide to Reaching Target Audiences

by

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"We don't accomplish anything in this world alone and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that create something." – Sandra Day O'Connor

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Abstract

Visual communication is the cornerstone of graphic design. All graphic design projects communicate a visual message. As with all forms of communication, visual communication is a two-way street. For a message to be effective, a designer must understand how to reach their audience. Scholarly design programs focus primarily on visual cues, while marketing programs focus on in-depth audience analysis and consumer behavior. This creates a problem for designers as they complete their degree program and enter the job market, particularly if they intend to seek freelance work. This guide is innovative because it presents components of visual communication from perspectives of both marketing and design. Presenting both perspectives alongside one another demonstrates that all elements are equally important to visual communication. If a designer wishes to be successful, it is imperative to understand and embrace lessons from the marketing community. If a design fails to reach the intended audience, it is useless. Along with explaining the importance of each topic, this guide contains resources which designers can use to enhance their workflow and seek additional information.

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Introduction

Where would the human species be without communication? The ability to communicate through a variety of methods is one of the most unique elements of the human experience. No other animal possesses the ability to leverage their senses for communication quite like people do. Instinctively, humans communicate from the moment they are born. One of the first major accomplishments in a person's life is learning to communicate needs and wants--first through gestures, then through verbal communication. Children learn visual communication at a very young age. For most children, it only takes one trip to McDonald's before they associate the golden arches with the toy included in a happy meal. Visual communication is powerful. The human brain can commit a symbol to memory far more quickly and easily than spoken or written words.

The majority of people will go through life processing visual cues as a means to get what they need or desire. The child associating the golden arches with a new toy is a prime example. However, designers are required to understand visual communication on a much more intimate level. It is not enough for designers to learn to respond to the visual cues in the world around them. Designers are responsible for developing the visual cues. They must understand how and why people respond the way they do to visual communication. In fact, a successful designer must be able to predict how people will respond to visual mediums. If a designer inaccurately predicts how a design will be perceived, the design will be ineffective, or worse–completely useless.

To create an effective design, it is imperative for a designer to take many elements into consideration. Designers who work for large corporations have the benefit of working with an entire team comprised of professionals from both the design and marketing industries. But what

about freelance designers? Without a team behind them, it is imperative that they consider the marketing aspect, in addition to the design elements. As of this writing, freelance designers dominate the industry. According to a 2021 study by Statista, 75% of the design industry was dominated by freelance professionals in 2019 (Statista, 2021). This guide will demonstrate that these professions cannot thrive without one another. Design needs marketing, and marketing needs design. However, the cross-pollination between subject matter in U.S. universities remains minimal. The demand from companies for visual communication material has grown stronger over the past couple of decades, with the rise of the internet and the subsequent rise of social media. It is logical to assume that this demand will continue to grow for the foreseeable future. Elements of design and marketing are included in this guide. Some topics will be familiar to designers, such as composition and color theory. Other topics will be familiar to marketing professionals, such as segmentation, targeting, and positioning. Ultimately, all of the topics in this guide share a common goal–effective visual communication with target audiences.

Composition

One of the first design elements a designer must think about is composition. Understanding effective compositions can separate the contenders from the pretenders. There is a reason why professional design work can be distinguished from that of an amateur, and that starts with composition. The designer who uses proven compositional techniques will enjoy far more success than a designer whose layouts are organized haphazardly. By understanding and applying the techniques of symmetry, rule of thirds, golden ratio and grids, the separation between design and art for art's sake starts to look a little less blurry. Additionally, a successful designer must communicate a visual message by controlling the viewer's perception, along with guiding their eyes through a composition.

Composition refers to the way elements are arranged on a visual medium, including graphics, images, works of art, or architecture. Placement of these elements allows the creator to control how a viewer experiences the composition (Adams, 2019). One of the most important jobs a designer has when building a composition is establishing a clear visual hierarchy. Visual hierarchy refers to the order of information in a layout. It is helpful to think about hierarchical layers as levels within a composition. The first level must stand out the most, to ensure the viewer's eyes land on that level first (Samara, 2014). Elements that can be adjusted to command the viewer's eyes include size, color and contrast. Additionally, the order of information is an important consideration. Typography is one example where the order of information can command visual hierarchy. Considering that people in the western world read left to right, top to bottom, if all typographic elements on a page are the same, it is natural and accurate to assume that the viewer's eyes will follow that pattern.

Symmetry

A symmetrical composition implies "any manner in which part of a pattern can be mapped to another pattern" (Tyler, 2002 p. 3). Many lessons in design are taken from nature and symmetry is no exception. This simple and basic principle has been used across the arts for centuries to create aesthetics that please the human eye. It is not by chance that humans find symmetrical objects aesthetically pleasing. Rather, this phenomenon is supported by biological evidence. Most living organisms are symmetrical, including humans. Conversely, many inanimate objects are organic in nature, such as geological formations and rocks (Tyler, 2002). Through the fundamental belief that life is valued over organic objects, psychology demonstrates how elements associated with life are valuable to the mind's eye. Additionally, as it relates to biology, it is believed that humans perceive symmetry to be a sign of health and good genes. To

offer further evidence of the importance of symmetry as it relates to beauty, consider that plastic surgeons regard symmetry as one of the most important considerations for facial reconstructive surgery (Groves, 2017).

While many accept the notion that the human inclination toward symmetrical compositions relates to biology, others argue that the preference for symmetry is a result of visual processing (Garfus, 2017). However, the gravitation of humans toward symmetrical compositions cannot be denied. This phenomenon been studied and documented extensively throughout time. Empirical studies, often involving stimuli tests, demonstrate that people prefer symmetrical compositions, and they find them easier to navigate (Huang et al., 2020). One such study was conducted in 2017, using a series of four simple graphic designs. Out of the four designs, one was composed using mirror symmetry, while the other three compositions contained asymmetrical variations. During the study, fifty-two users were asked to rank the designs, using the Likert scale. In other words, they were required to rank them in order from their favorite to their least favorite. The data was analyzed, using a mathematical formula. The study concluded that the symmetrical design resulted in the highest quality aesthetic composition (Budimir et al., 2017).

At this point, symmetry likely sounds like the perfect solution for composition. Unfortunately, it is not so simple. There will be times when a composition contains too many elements for a symmetrical composition. Additionally, while humans have a general preference toward symmetry, oftentimes, a symmetrical composition can be perceived as predictable or boring. For example, if all portraits of people were symmetrical, the subject would be placed in the center of the composition every single time. There are certainly times when centering the subject is appropriate, especially if the subject is so important, nothing else in the composition is

relevant. However, a designer should always be thinking of ways to balance the composition, while adding interest.

Rule of Thirds

The rule of thirds introduces a great way for those new to the arts to begin thinking about composition like a professional. With the rule of thirds, the subject or subjects are not centered. A simple grid is used to divide the composition evenly into thirds (Hagen et al., 2017). Subjects or points of interest are placed where the lines intersect. This offers a way to create an interesting layout without one single subject dominating the entire composition. This technique lends itself particularly well to photography. In fact, it is so widely used that most modern cameras have an option to display a grid system in the viewfinder. Perhaps a reason the rule of thirds is so widely used in photography is because the technique is versatile enough to be used when the artist (photographer) has limited control over the position of the subjects.

Golden Ratio

While a photographer is required to alter their perspective to capture compositions, many of which are organic, a designer has much more control. The designer is responsible for building the entire composition, which lends itself well to more complex grid systems, such as the golden ratio. Widely accepted as the quintessential aesthetic composition, this ratio has been prominent in the arts since at least 440 B.C. (Katyal et al., 2019). Based on a mathematical formula referred to as the Fibonacci sequence, the golden ratio is applied across a wide variety of disciplines to include philosophy, art, architecture, design, photography, science, and of course, mathematics. An example of the mathematical formula for the Fibonacci sequence is as follows: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55…(Katyal et al., 2019). As evidenced by the example, the sum of any number in the sequence can be calculated by adding the two numbers that proceed it. Further, aside from

the first handful of numbers in the sequence, when any number is divided by the number that proceeds it, the result will be 1.618, or very close to it. As a number, the golden ratio is represented as 1.618.

Golden Rectangle

To understand how the golden ratio can be applied to aesthetics or compositions, it is necessary to consider geometry. One of the most common applications comes in the form of a golden rectangle. A golden rectangle is formed when the ratio of the sides is 1:(phi) (Meisner, 2018, p. 46). In other words, the long side of the rectangle is 1.618 the length of the short side. Additionally, successive golden rectangles can be created by a square to the long side of the original rectangle. Additional squares can be added to create an indefinite number of golden rectangles.

Golden Spiral

A second common composition that can be derived from the golden ratio is a golden spiral. The golden spiral begins with a sequence of golden rectangles. Once the sequence of golden rectangles is established, "a quarter circle arc is drawn in each square to create the golden spiral" (Meisner, 2018). The golden spiral is often thought to be prominent in nature, in the form of a nautilus shell. The nautilus shell is one of the most classic examples of the golden ratio. One would be hard-pressed to do any amount of research on the golden ratio and not come across a nautilus shell. It can be found on the cover of many books. The results of an online image query for "golden ratio" will yield countless images of the golden spiral. It is regarded as such a classic example, most industry professionals accept its prominence, appreciate its beauty and move on. However, this wasn't the case for one professor from Towson University in Towson, Maryland. Professor Christopher Bartlett challenged the idea of the golden spiral's application to the

nautilus shell through his own experiment. Bartlett sampled eighty shells from the Smithsonian collection and what he found was most shells do not fit the parameters of the golden ratio. Bartlett suggests that nautilus shells are closer to a ratio of 4:3, or 1.356, which he refers to as "meta golden ratio Chi" (Bartlett, 2018).

Golden Ratio Controversy

Bartlett's work highlights an argument surrounding the golden ratio. Opponents of the golden ratio's dominance argue that its perceived application is a result of attempts to forcefully imply its application across the arts throughout time. Consequently, some believe that historical artwork thought to contain the golden ratio simply contains a resemblance of the ratio by chance. It is well documented that the golden ratio has been used with intent throughout history; that is not up for debate. The opponents argue against historical instances in artwork where it is not possible to know the artist's intent with 100% certainty. Additionally, there is no argument that the golden ratio's application results in an aesthetically pleasing composition. However, the fact that the golden ratio provides a way to break up a composition into a perceivable pattern is arguably its most important element. It is important for designers to realize that people are drawn to patterns.

Grids

All of the compositional elements discussed thus far have related to patterns. Patterns provide designers with a structure to organize information, while simultaneously proving a rhythmic way to guide a viewer's eyes through the composition. In addition to providing rhythm, patterns help a designer achieve visual balance. Grid systems are a prime example of pattern use. Grids are used throughout the field, from desktop publishers to web designers. Patterns work because the human brain is wired to recognize them. Reading is a perfect example of the brain

recognizing a pattern. Consider that letters and words on a page form a pattern that the brain recognizes as writing. Reading, in and of itself, is a form of pattern recognition (Young, 2016).

Conversely, typography is one of the most important and fundamental concepts that designers must master. Without going too deep into typography, consider how important all of the spaces between letters and words are on this page. This spacing is so important, the English language has different words to describe the various spaces. Leading refers to the spacing between baselines–for example, the bottom of this line of text in relation to the bottom of the line of text above it. Kerning is the spacing between individual letters, and tracking refers to spacing between letters across a selected range of characters. The point is that patterns are such an important part of design, designers must focus on it right down to the smallest details, such as spacing in typography.

Designers must make conscious decisions to choose appropriate patterns, based on the content for each individual design. Every scenario is different. Therefore, there is no cookie cutter solution. Some designs may call for a simple symmetrical design, while others call for a more complicated grid system. A Swedish designer by the name of Josef Muller-Brockmann captures the essence of how designer must think about composition in his reference to grid systems: "The grid system is an aid, not a guarantee. It permits a number of possible uses and each designer can look for a solution that is appropriate to his or her personal style. But, one must learn how to use the grid; it is an art that requires practice" (Samara, 2017 p. 8).

Gestalt – Visual Perception

As evidenced by the previous section discussing composition, a great deal of visual communication involves understanding the human psyche. Designers must leverage the psychology of visual processing. In addition to the elements of composition, designers must also

think about the psychology surrounding individual elements in a design. Fortunately, this is a topic that has been studied and documented by philosophy and psychology professionals since the early 1900s.

Gestalt Origins

The story of gestalt theory began in the year 1912, when a German Philosophy Doctor named Max Wertheimer was working towards habilitation. Habilitation refers to an exclusive fellowship for candidates who choose to examine a new thesis after receiving a doctorate degree. If a habilitation candidate's thesis is approved, they are accepted into the fellowship. Additionally, upon fulfilling the requirements for habilitation, the member is qualified to teach others in their field autonomously (Gundlach, 2014).

According to third-party recollection of Wertheimer's story, he came up with his initial hypothesis for gestalt theory while traveling on a train to Frankfurt. During the train ride, Wertheimer considered that the apparent movements of objects outside of the train reminded him of a toy where the participant moved a slide behind a screen. This experience inspired Wertheimer to examine the perceptual difference between actual and perceived motion (Gundlach, 2014).

Perceived motion has been thought to be a sensory illusion. As Wertheimer experienced on the train, objects in the world around him appeared to be moving, even though they were not. Yet, Wertheimer's experiments demonstrated that real and perceived motion are indistinguishable perceptually (Wertheimer et al., 2012). Anyone who has ever felt the unexpected notion of movement, due to the world around them moving, will understand what Wertheimer set out to prove. Consider sitting in a car in a parking lot and glancing over at the next vehicle over…suddenly and unexpectedly, it begins to move. Even if for a brief second, the

observer panics out of a belief that it is their vehicle moving unexpectedly. Upon realizing the remainder of the world around them is stationary, the observer finds comfort in the fact it was not them moving, but the vehicle next to them. This phenomenon sheds light on exactly what Wertheimer set out to prove–perceptually, there is no difference between actual and perceived motion.

Wertheimer's experimentation set gestalt theory in motion. Gestalt theory, or gestalt psychology, refers to the way people experience the world around them perceptually. This explains why gestalt is so important to designers. The word gestalt is derived from German language and loosely translates to "configuration." Gestalt psychology centers around the fundamental idea that surrounding elements give context to the perception of visual objects. Images are optically processed as a whole or pattern, rather than being perceived as individual parts (Gestalt, 2018). Designers can leverage this information to understand how gestalt psychology influences perception of design elements. Over the years, gestalt psychology has provided a foundation for many interdisciplinary studies, ranging from therapy to design. There are a few key principles that relate specifically to how a viewer perceives arranged elements in a design or work of art. These principles are pragnanz, figure-ground, similarity, proximity, closure, continuity and balance (Berghammer et al., 2013).

Pragnanz

Pragnanz, often referred to as the gestalt principle of simplicity, implies that the brain is drawn to the simplest possible organization considering all present stimuli (Wagemans et al., 2012). In short, people do not like to think more than what is absolutely necessary to receive a message, visual or otherwise. Designers must embrace this and exploit ways to deliver visual cues throughout their designs to make them as simple and easy as possible for their audience. In

this respect, designers can borrow a technique from photography, which uses leading lines and vantage points to guide the eye through a composition. The human eye instinctively follows lines to see where they are leading. On the subject of eyes, if a composition involves a living organism, having them gaze at an important element in the composition is a surefire way to ensure the audience will look there. When someone is looking at something, other people also want to look at it. It provides a subtle hint that something important is happening. Visual hierarchy can also be leveraged to aid the principle of pragnanz. There are many techniques a designer can use to ensure a clear order of visual hierarchy in a composition. For a simple example, consider that headline text always stands out from body text. Headline text is almost always larger or bolder than body text. Color can be used to provide a sharper contrast with the background. The reason for this can be explained by the law of pragnanz–the eyes will naturally land on the element that is perceived as most important, thus making the composition simple or easy to navigate.

Figure-ground Relationship

The figure-ground relationship principle of gestalt focuses on the relationship between the positive and negative space of a design element. When scanning a layout, determining the figure-ground relationship is subconsciously the first thing a viewer does (Berghammer et al., 2013). To offer an example, the simple act of reading the words on this page involves distinguishing the figure (text) from the ground (digital paper). In some instances, both the figure and ground have meaning, and it might be difficult for the viewer to differentiate one from another. Designers often do this with intent to add interest. One of the most iconic examples of this technique exists in the FedEx logo. While seemingly simple, the FedEx logo required nine months of research and over 300 iterations (Airey, 2015). The letters between the "E" and "x"

form an arrow. By establishing a meaningful relationship between the foreground and background, the designer was able to create a memorable logo, while keeping it simple. It is worth noting that simplicity is a key component to a successful logo. The purpose of a logo is to create an easily identifiable visual expression of a brand. While an intricate logo might be tempting, it misses the mark on functionality. A viewer should be able to easily commit a logo to memory at a glance. This is why iconic brands often have very simple logos. Designers should be aware that simple does not equal easy. Contrarily, it can be quite challenging to add interest, while simultaneously creating a unique design, while conforming to the constraints of simplicity. The designers of the FedEx logo leveraged the gestalt principle of foreground-background relationship to create a logo containing all of the elements for success–unique, interesting and simple, rolled up into one iconic design.

Similarity

The principle of similarity refers to the theory that similar objects will be grouped together by the viewer. For example, if a layout contains three red circles, all of the same size, those circles will be perceived as a group. For a more practical example, consider headline text in a layout. While the size of headline text helps establish visual hierarchy, consistency within headline text, particularly sub-headings, assists the viewer in page navigation through elements that are perceived as a group. Remember that the human brain loves patterns. Text elements on a page form a pattern that is quickly and easily identified by the viewer (Berghammer et al., 2013). The eyes land on the headline text first. In order of visual hierarchy, the first sub-heading is next. Immediately, a pattern is recognized, and a viewer is able to quickly scan sub-headings on a page to locate the information they are seeking. Designers can leverage the gestalt principle of similarity to establish patterns and aid in the formation of a clear visual hierarchy.

Proximity

Proximity of elements in a design also helps the viewer establish groups. As the name implies, elements that are close together are perceived to belong in a group. As Berghammer points out in an article, titled "Pleasing the reader by pleasing the eye*"*, proximity is one of the most often misused gestalt principles (Berghammer et al., 2013). Naturally, designers leverage the principle of proximity to establish groups in a layout. The problem arises when designers inadvertently group objects within proximity to one another. Proximity of all elements in a layout must be considered to avoid sending a mixed signal to the viewer. Accidentally placing an object closer to one group, versus another, could send a message to the viewer that the element belongs to a group.

Closure

By leveraging the gestalt principle of closure, a design can be identified, in spite of the appearance of missing elements, such as connecting lines. Closure implies that a viewer will, "perceive a set of elements as a single, recognizable pattern, rather than multiple, individual elements" (Lidwell et al., 2010 p. 44). People are able to complete or "close" a design, even if it is incomplete. The fact that people can see a whole, even if it is missing parts, reiterates the brains' desire to identify patterns. Closure is useful for logo designs for the same reasons as the gestalt principle of foreground-background relationship. It adds simplicity and interest, while also aiding the designer in creating a design that is unique and memorable. By reducing the number of lines, the principle of closure facilitates simplicity by reducing complexity. Additionally, it engages the viewer as they participate in completing the design. By engaging the reader with a simple visual puzzle, the design is likely to be more memorable–a key element of a successful logo.

Continuity

The gestalt principle of continuity refers to the layout of elements along a line. When elements are placed along a line, they are perceived to be more related than elements which are not along a line. Additionally, elements that have good continuity, or flow along a line, are easier for the eye to follow than elements which are not (Lidwell et al., 2010). A simple bar graph provides an excellent example of this phenomenon. If variables along the x axis of a bar graph are situated in a way which allows a perceivable line to form across the x and y coordinates, the graphic will be easier for the eye to follow. Another example of continuity is a clock. All of the numbers are easily perceived as a group, due to the continuity formed by the circle. It is important for designers to use continuity only with intent and ensure that elements are not mistaken as a group through the inadvertent use of continuity in a design.

Balance

The gestalt principle of balance refers to the practice of balancing elements in a layout around a center point. As it relates to visual perception, the people tend to seek balance around a center point. A balanced layout will look good whether it is right side up or upside down. Designers have two options to achieve balance: symmetrical or asymmetrical. Symmetrical designs are often perceived as predictable and boring. Contrarily, asymmetrical designs, while more difficult to achieve, are perceived as unexpected and exciting. To achieve balance in asymmetrical layouts, designers often use established grid systems to aid placement of content (Berghammer et al., 2013).

Color Theory

On the surface, color may seem like a simple topic. Yet, color theory is incredibly complex. Color selection can quickly make or break a design. The designer must be aware of

their own personal biases toward color. It is not enough to choose a color because one feels it looks good. Colors in a design must be selected with both intent and awareness. The designer is responsible for selecting color with intent of communicating a specific message. Simultaneously, the designer should be aware of common color associations or perceptions, to ensure they do not inadvertently send the wrong message. As if this task isn't complicated enough, the meaning of color is not fixed. What works today might not work tomorrow. Color can evoke emotions of happiness, anger, excitement. It can be used to grab a viewer's attention. Color can also be used to spark a sense of patriotism or affiliation, as noted by the colors on a national flag or a local sports team, respectively. The topic of color theory lends itself to a sequential approach, beginning with an explanation surrounding the existence of color in the physical world. Next, color will be examined from a biological viewpoint. Countless applications of color around the world were borrowed from mother nature. Designers must also understand color models, along with some basic technology for creating color. Finally, designers must be aware of various meanings of color and acknowledge that meaning may shift, depending on culture or nationality.

Physical Existence

The mere existence of color in a physical world is far more complicated than most people realize. It is based on a series of interdependent relationships. "In a physical sense, there is no such thing as color, just light waves of different wavelengths" (Adams, 2017, p. 8). The relationship between light and vision is obvious. The less light, the harder it is to see. What is less obvious is the fact that, without light, color would not exist. The existence of color is a result of light passing wavelengths through the human eye, which is processed and interpreted by the brain. Further, color does not belong to the object which is being viewed. Rather, the color is produced by the organism viewing the object (Matikas et al., 2010).

The human eye can see approximately 10 million colors, despite only being able to process the following seven wavelengths: red, orange yellow, green, blue, blue-violet and violet. The perception of white involves processing all seven wavelengths, while the perception of black involves processing zero wavelengths. In essence, black and white are polar opposites. The contrast between the two makes them a perfect pair. It is not by chance that nearly all text is black over a white medium. One of the most legendary designers of all time, Paul Rand, eloquently summarizes the importance of this contrast in his book, *A Designer's Art*: "It is impossible to define cold without contrasting it with heat. It is impossible to comprehend life if death is ignored. Black is the color of death, but by virtue of this same psychological fact it is also the color of life – it defines, contrasts, and enhances life, light and color. It is through the artist's awareness of black as a polar element and consequently of its paradoxical nature that the color black can be appreciated and effectively used. And the artist must not forget that its neutrality makes black the common denominator in a multicolored world" (Rand, 2016).

When a person sees any color in between black and white, it means the object has absorbed a fraction of the wavelengths, and the perceived color is a result of the remaining wavelengths being reflected (Dresp-Langley et al., 2010). Designers should be cognizant of the relationship between objects, wavelengths of light and people, especially when designing for particular circumstances where light is controlled and predictable. For example, if a designer is creating a poster that will reside inside a building, it might be worthwhile to print a color palette, to see how the selected colors will be perceived under the lights inside the building. With light being a major contributor to the perception of color, the color palette may look different, depending on how cool or warm the lights are in the area where the design will live.

Color in Nature

Many colors in the human made world carry the same meaning as they do in nature. Red is often a sign of danger in nature, as can be seen across the back of a black widow. It signals predators to stop or approach with caution, the same way that stop signs and traffic lights signal people to stop. Additionally, color is used as a communication tool in nature. Through the use of bright colors and high contrast, flowers attract pollinators, similar to a restaurant attracting diners with visually appealing meals through the use of color. Further, people were not the first to use camouflage to blend in with nature and hide from their enemies. Some animals, such as lizards and fish, change color to blend in with their environment. Others blend in naturally with their environment, such as leopards (Dresp-Langley et al., 2010). Nature is a great place to look for color inspiration. If a designer is stuck on palette selection, it might be helpful to walk outside, observe, and draw inspiration from the colors around them.

Color Properties

The properties of color are hue, saturation and value or brightness. Hue refers to the nomenclature for a particular color. In other words, hue can be used interchangeably with the word "color." Saturation describes the purity of a color without the addition of black or white. Finally, the value or brightness refers to how light or dark a color is, which is an indication of how much white or black is added to the hue. Although less commonly associated as a color property, it is worth noting that temperature is sometimes used to describe color. Temperature color is measured in degrees Kelvin and refers to how warm or cool a color is. Lower numerical values tend to indicate warmer hues, while higher values are indicative of cooler hues (Sherin, 2011).

Additive and Subtractive Color

Colors can be created one of two ways, depending on the medium: additive or subtractive. As the name implies, additive refers to adding colors to achieve the desired color. This model starts with three colors: red, green, and blue. Commonly referred to as RGB, the additive method is used in the digital world, such as computer screens and smart phones. The subtractive model is common in printing, using the colors cyan, magenta, yellow, and black, or CMYK. This method can be explained through consideration of why color exists. Remember that color is the result of a relationship between an object, wavelengths of light and a viewer. The viewer will see only the colors which are not absorbed by the object. As a result, the viewer only sees the colors which were not absorbed or subtracted by the paper or medium (Adams, 2017b). It is important for designers to understand the difference between these color models. Often times, colors will not look exactly the same on a digital medium as they do when printed. Most design software helps with this by allowing the designer to choose between CMYK and RGB color models. It is worth noting that gradients can be especially problematic when printed. For this reason, it is wise for designers to refrain from using gradients on projects that will be printed frequently, such as logos.

Designers have a seemingly endless number of resources available to assist with choosing color combinations. However, it is important to be selective when choosing sources to assist with building palettes. Many online sources are similar to Wikipedia: anyone can contribute to them, which increases the likelihood that the material is misleading. However, there are some resources available that are fundamentally based on what is known as a color wheel. The first known existence of a color wheel was developed by Sir Isaac Newton (Adams, 2017a).

Color Models

Many variations of color wheels exist. However, if one discusses a color wheel without referring to a particular variant, they are likely referring to a "red, yellow, blue" version. This is seemingly the most basic and, consequently, the most common color wheel. Red, yellow, and blue are considered primary colors. These colors are referred to as primary because any color can be achieved by blending various ratios of these colors. The colors of violet, orange and green are referred to as secondary colors. They can be made by mixing equal amounts of two primary colors. The final category on the color wheel is tertiary colors. These can be made by mixing inequal parts of primary colors (Sherin, 2011). Tertiary colors include yellow-orange, red-orange, red-violet, blue-violet, blue-green and yellow-green. The color wheel is composed of these twelve colors in a graduating fashion around a circle. The color wheel is a useful tool for building harmonious color palettes through a variety of methods, to include complimentary, split complimentary, double complimentary, analogous, triads, and monochromatic.

Complementary colors are located directly across from one another on the color wheel. The arrangement of the color wheel places warm and cool colors across from one another, which provides high contrast. This can add visual excitement, while also ensuring separation of visual elements. A double complimentary color scheme involves two pairs of complimentary colors, for a total of four colors in the palette. The double complimentary screen should be used with caution because some color combinations work better that others with this model. A split complimentary color scheme pairs a color with the neighbors of its complimentary partner. For example, red is paired with both yellow-green and blue-green, instead of green. The analogous color palette is built using two or more colors in sequence on the color wheel. The variation of wavelengths between analogous colors is minimal, which makes a palette built through the

combination of them easier on the eyes. A triadic color palette refers to pairing colors that are evenly spaced along the wheel. This is another model that should be used with caution, as some combinations do not work as well as others. Finally, a monochromatic palette is built from pairing variations of a single hue. Similar to analogous, this method is easy on the eye, due to limited variations between wavelengths (Adams, 2017b). Understanding these models will help designers build successful color palettes. It is helpful to use online resources which function similar to "color calculators". One can input a hex or rgb color code and build a palette based on their chosen color model.

Building a Palette

Color selection can make or break a design. The choices are seemingly endless, leaving a novice designer scratching their head or simply picking a color they feel looks attractive. While this approach might work sometimes, a more methodical approach will likely achieve superior results. First, a designer should think about the message they are attempting to communicate. Is there a color commonly associated with that message? Are there any colors which communicate the opposite of the designer's intent? By thinking through these questions, one can begin to narrow down choices for selection of a primary color. Upon choosing a primary color, the designer can begin to select a palette. This process introduces additional questions: Which colors pair well together? Are there any combinations that bear strong association to something other than the intent of the design? In design, perception is everything, and color selection is critical to how the design will be perceived. The designer should not limit their success to their own personal perception regarding color. Everyone has an opinion about color, and some people may have strong associations with particular colors that the designer does not. Learning about the

perception of color is a life-long journey, one without a destination. As with all areas of design, it is crucial for the designer to consistently fight for feedback and learn from those around them.

<center>**Color Meanings/Associations**</center>

Some colors have a strong association with human emotion or sentiment. When used properly, leveraging this notion will greatly enhance visual communication. On the other hand, inadvertent use of a color with a strong association to something other than the designer's intent will destroy a design. Some common colors that carry strong meaning or association are red, yellow, blue, green and orange.

Red is one of the most polarizing colors. It can be used to communicate excitement, passion, danger, or anger. With proper contrast, use of red is a surefire way to command the eye's attention. One must be particularly careful when combining red with other colors. Many combinations yield national associations, such as red, white and blue in the United States. The combination of red and black is associated with fascism (Adams, 2017b). When combined with green, most people in the Western world have a difficult time thinking about anything besides Christmas.

Yellow is associated with sunshine. It is used to communicate happiness, optimism and creativity. Like red, it can be used to command the eye's attention, particularly when paired with neutral or cool colors. Yellow bears cultural meaning in Japan and China, where it represents courage and royalty, respectively (Adams, 2017b).

The color blue communicates trust and loyalty. It is commonly chosen for logo design. In the western world, it is commonly associated with masculinity, in contrast to pink, which is often associated with femininity (Adams, 2017b). Altering the shade of blue can result in a dramatic change of the psychological effect, ranging from energizing to relaxing.

Green communicates nature and the environment. It is an obvious choice for anything environmentally friendly, such as recycling or renewable energy. When paired, green is useful to help cool warm colors, like orange. However, careful consideration should be given to the hue as to not cause an effect known as optical vibration (Adams, 2017b).

Like yellow, orange can be used to communicate creativity. Additionally, it can be used to communicate immediacy and spontaneity. It is found frequently in fast-food restaurants, where it is used to energize customers. Orange is one of the most subjective colors. Consequently, while some love it, others might view the color as loud or obnoxious (Adams, 2017b).

Design for a Purpose

It is often said that the difference between art and design is "design has a purpose". That is not to say art is purposeless. However, the purpose of art is almost always to achieve aesthetic value. All of the design elements discussed thus far are useful for creating art. Knowledge of composition, gestalt theory and color theory provide a designer with tools to create an aesthetically pleasing visual. With only these tools, a designer is not a designer, but an artist. To be a successful designer, one must understand how to create with a purpose. To achieve that, it is necessary to first consider "what is purpose?". What is it that sets design apart from art? Design is a form of visual communication used to communicate a specific message to a target audience. Designers must understand people. Often times, the intent of a design is to influence, motivate, or inspire an audience. How can a design be successful if the designer doesn't understand enough about the audience to know what motivates, inspires or influences them? Marketing professionals understand the importance of this and spend a great deal of their waking hours

thinking about it. Designers should follow suit. To be an effective communicator, one must know their target audience.

Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning

A common methodology used by marketing professionals to reach consumers is referred to as the STP method which is an acronym for "segmentation, targeting, positioning". The segmentation component involves identifying the target audience. Subsequently, targeting focuses on relating to the segmented audience. This involves research to determine what motivates or influences the audience. Finally, positioning refers to ensuring that the brand is best situated to achieve success with the target audience and the message they are trying to send. Marketers who work for established brands perform data analytics and statistical analysis to detect changes in consumer behavior which enables them to pivot their strategy as necessary.

Unfortunately, most freelance designers are unable to maintain this level of awareness about their target audience. A freelance designer's audience will vary every time they acquire a new client. Designers must work with each client to segment the audience as appropriate. Alternatively, designers may rely on data from trusted sources. Competitive research is a useful method for determining how to reach a target audience especially if it is possible to determine a measurable success rate.

Segmentation

The segmentation process is complex because it involves the complication of human variables. There is not a clear path from A-Z. Consequently, it is challenging to determine the best path to reach the most people. The more people the designer can reach, the better. However, a designer should never attempt to reach all of the people. Attempting to reach all of the people would be a futile endeavor; it is simply not possible. The segmentation process involves many

variables to determine who the target audience is. Some variables are descriptive such as

"demographic, socioeconomic, psychographic, and occasion of use". Other variables include

behavioral categories such as "benefits sought, desired usage, purchasing patterns and loyalty,

participation in the decision-making and dissemination process, brand attitude, sensitivity to

marketing mix elements" (Vukasovic, 2020 p32).

Designers have a few options to consider for market segmentation. One option is to

conduct a study from scratch. This is often considered the best method since it will be tailored to

the specific product or design. Unfortunately, an in-house study does have its drawbacks: It is

time consuming, and it requires coordination and collaboration on many levels. It will take a

while before the designer has tangible results to move forward with. The second option is to use

market research from reputable companies. While using established resources is a time saver, it

is a less tailored approach. Additionally, many of the better sources can be costly. Finally, some

projects require a level of expertise beyond the designer's ability. A designer should know when

to identify these situations and inform a client that they should consider outsourcing a marketing

professional or team.

If a designer wishes to conduct an in-house segmentation study, they should start by

determining as many variables as possible. While some static variables such as generalizations

about generational demographics are useful, other variables are dynamic and require engagement

with the intended audience. The goal is to find out what is important to the potential audience.

Variables that should be considered include demographic, geographic, psychographic, and

behavioral. Categories of demographic variables are age, gender, education and income.

Geographic variables include location along with information such as neighborhood type.

Behavioral variables include media habits, purchase patters, and brand loyalty. Examples of

psychographic variables include attitudes, values, and interests (Lynn, 2015). Surveys or

questionnaires are useful for this step. Ask the audience to consider all of the variables possible

about a product. In addition to asking direct questions, ask the audience to rank or rate the

variables that are most important to them. The more feedback the designer receives during this

stage the better. Based on the surveys, a designer can begin to understand the target audience.

Michael Lynn offers an example segmentation approach for the hospitality sector in his

report *Segmenting and Targeting Your Markets: Strategies and Limitations.* In Lynn's example,

a segmentation study was conducted by a marketing research firm named Swinyard and Struman.

Participants were asked to rate attributes that might influence their decision as a restaurant

consumer. Attributes included on the survey were "a good place for meeting new people,

consistent food quality from visit to visit, friendly service, large food portions, a lively upbeat

environment, convenient location, attractive waiters and waitresses". Additionally, the survey

requested participants to agree or disagree with specific lifestyle statements such as "I never

seem to have enough money, I love to cook, I like to meet lots of new people". Participants were

also asked to provide demographic information and describe recent restaurant experiences (Lynn,

2015). Results from surveys such as this can be analyzed to learn about the potential audience.

Common responses provide a clue about the participants shared values, lifestyles and consumer

choices.

For some projects, the use of existing data might be effective and appropriate.

Additionally, this approach will speed the project up tremendously because the data is readily

available. In some cases, this approach may be chosen due to time constraints. In such cases, the

client may wish to retain the designer on contract to adjust the design based on market response

and feedback.

Richard K. Miller and Associates (RKMA) publishes a biannual *Consumer Marketing* handbook to serve as a guide. RKMA is one of America's largest market research publishers. RKMA's research reports can be found in over 90% of major academic libraries across the nation (Miller et al., 2018). Within this publication, RKMA highlights geodemographic segmentation variables. The handbook also discusses effectiveness of marketing techniques to include digital, mobile, search engine optimization, social media, television, and radio. This information can be useful for a designer when discussing an advertising strategy with a client. The client may wish to discuss development of additional content with the designer based on the effectiveness of various strategies. Additionally, RKMA publishes bi-annual handbooks specific to various sectors. For example, their *Travel and Tourism Market Research Handbook 2019-2020,* includes segmentation information for the travel sector. This publication includes demographic information such as age, race and income. Further, RKMA divides the sector into dozens of sub-sectors such as beaches, camping, adventure, amusement parks, fishing, hiking, and hunting (Miller et al., 2019). This information provides a solid starting point for a designer to understand and segment their target audience. Using this information as a guide, a designer can begin the segmentation process by determining the variables the target audience has in common.

Targeting

After a designer has segmented an audience by determining all of the variables they have in common, they can begin the process of targeting. Targeting involves deciding which variables are important to the brand and which variables to discard. All businesses share a common goal of creating revenue. Therefore, there are a few target audience traits that tend to hold universally true: "have strong sales and growth potential, …inexpensive to reach with marketing efforts,

…served by few or weak competitors, have needs and desires that (the) company's resources are well suited to satisfy" (Lynn, 2015 p. 5). A company's goals and values should be considered during the targeting phase to align them with what could be defined as a perfect customer.

Positioning

Upon completion of segmentation and targeting, the process of positioning can begin. Positioning involves putting the company in position to stand out to the targeted customer. The targeting process forces a company or brand to define a clear vision of who they are here for. Positioning, on the other hand, forces a company to consider what makes them different. How will they stand out amongst the competition (Johnson, 2016). For a designer, this process involves studying competitive visuals while defining similarities and differences. It is necessary to determine what consumers are responding to and why. The designer should attempt to pick visual cues or styles that the target audience seems to be drawn to. In a sense, the designer is attempting to create something that is the same, but different. Is the target audience drawn to minimalist or ornamental styling? Sans or serif typefaces? Palettes that are easy on the eyes or bold, exciting colors? The designer must think about what the audience or consumer wants beyond a product, such as a lifestyle or emotion. The visuals should communicate to the customer that their desires will be fulfilled by the product.

Generational Variables

Descriptive variables are useful when paired with additional information. Demographic variables highlight common traits shared by generational groups. Members in each generational group developed through stages in life during the same time period. Consequently, their cultural and social experiences were comparable. Similarities in values, attitudes, and behavior are thought have a direct correlation to these shared socio-cultural experiences. In *Marketing 5.0*,

Philip Kotler points out the fact this is the first time in history when five generations with different sociocultural backgrounds all exist simultaneously. In the past, sociocultural situations did not evolve as rapidly as they have in recent years. Therefore, generational gaps were spaced further apart in the past than they are now. The five generations existing today are: baby boomers (born 1946-1964), generation X (born 1965-1980), generation Y aka Millennials (born 1981-1996), generation Z aka Centennials (born 1997-2009), and generation Alpha (born 2010-2025) (Kotler, 2021). It should be noted that these dates are not set in stone and may vary from one source to another. Additionally, these generations are sometimes segmented further into additional categories thus providing a narrower focus and refined segmented audience.

The following examples provide a snapshot of demographic traits which are current at the time of this writing. This information may change over time especially regarding generation alpha. Generation alpha is very new, and their behavior patterns are still being analyzed and observed. Additionally, generational variables are just one example of how behavioral patterns can be analyzed to predict consumer behavior. These examples are not meant to be all-inclusive. Designers should understand and embrace the value in generalizing about an audience based on variables. It is important to include information such as this when researching a target audience.

Baby Boomers

Baby boomers were born during a period following World War II. As a result, boomers experienced high sociopolitical tensions along with many forms of activism. Those who were born in the 1960's experienced financial hardship. As a result, many of them work past the traditional retirement age of 65. Some younger generations consider boomers stubborn; unwilling to adapt to change and technology. Still, they remain an important focus group for marketers due to size. As the name implies, they are a result of a "baby boom" following the

war. Consequently, boomers comprise a large generational group. Baby boomers tend to prefer established brands (Kotler, 2021).

Generation X

Generation X grew up during a time of economic stability. Many from this generation grew up in either double-income or divorced households. This often resulted in less time spent with family while spending more time with friends which is reflected on many sitcoms from this time period such as *Friends* and *Beverly Hills 90210*. Generation X experienced life before and during the technological advancements of the 2000's. Due to these life situations, this group is adaptable and independent. Many of them leave the workforce in seek of entrepreneurial opportunities. Like baby boomers, this group leans toward established brands. However, a portion of the group, particularly those born during the latter half of the generation, are more open to experiential brands (Kotler, 2021).

Generation Y

Generation Y tends to be more culturally diverse and educated. Similar to generation X, generation Y encompasses a time frame before, during and after the technological revolution of the 2000's. Generation Y has experienced wide exposure to digital content throughout their lives. They are also very active on social media. Due to their connectedness, this generation has a great influence on one another. They are likely to trust what their peers are saying versus big brands. Because of this, this generation gravitates toward experiential brands (Kotler, 2021).

Generation Z

Members of generation Z do not know life before the digital age. Thus, they are considered the first digital native generation. Digital media provides a constant source of simulation to this generation. Brands that provide interactive and engaging content appeal to

generation Z They prefer brands that portray support or concern for social and environmental issues. Experiential branding works with this generation. In addition, this group flocks to engaging brands which is a reflection of their insatiable desire for stimulation (Kotler, 2021).

Generation Alpha

Similar to generation Z, generation Alpha do not know life before the digital age. However, generation Alpha grew up in a more developed digital environment. They learn about products from influencers on social media channels. This generation views technology as an extension of oneself. While this generation does not have a great deal of spending power in 2021, they have influencing power over those who do: their parents or guardians. Therefore, content for this demographic should be marketed directly towards them. They respond almost exclusively to engaging brands (Kotler, 2021).

Branding

More often than not, when a designer is working with an established business, they will be working within defined boundaries of brand guidelines, rather than starting from scratch. If a designer is working with a start-up, it is likely that they will be participating in the branding process. According to the American Marketing Association, "a brand is a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or services as distinct from those of other sellers" (Branding, n.d.).

Visual representation of a brand is much more than a meaningless symbol. Rather, it is "a system of meanings that triggers emotional links with consumers" (McIntyre et al., 2016, p. 8). A successful brand forms an emotional bond with the consumer. At first glance, this task may seem monumental to a novice designer. It is logical to wonder how one can create a visual which establishes an emotional bond with an audience they have never met. To achieve this, a designer

must think about what the consumer desires through the product. The design fundamentals of color theory, gestalt psychology, and composition provide a good starting point. Additionally, descriptive variables such as demographics give insight into the audience. Furthermore, market research is helpful in this area. Marketing professionals publish studies about consumer subculture groups. Some subcultures are drawn to specific visual stimulation or styles.

Brand Identity

Before a business can be sure of who their target audience is, they must be sure of who they are as a company. If a designer is hired to aid a company in the early development stages, they will likely be tasked to assist with branding. Branding is much more than designing an aesthetically appealing logo. If a company wants that, they can turn to cheap online services and purchase a cheap design that will likely be cliché, unoriginal, and inaccurately reflect the company and its values. When a company hires a professional designer, the designer has a responsibility to deliver a quality, original, and memorable product that aligns with business values.

In a book titled *Branding in Five and a Half Steps*, Michael Johnson offers a method called mapping to help business owners identify who they are. Mapping involves compiling a grid of established brands and requesting the company to place those brands in certain categories. In Johnson's example, cars brands are placed in a four-part grid with the categories of economy, premium, "a brand I like", and "a brand I don't like" (Johnson, 2016). This simple exercise can aid a designer in building a brand that reflects the company's values. With this information, the designer can research the competitive brands and learn what those brands communicate and how they appeal to the target audience. By learning about brands in all four corners of the grid, the designer can be sure to avoid communicating the wrong message. The

business should discover who they are. A series of thought-provoking questions can help them arrive at an answer: "Why are we here? What do we do and how do we do it? What makes us didferent? Who are we here for? What do we value the most? What's our personality?" (Johnson, 2016, p. 88) The more a designer can understand about who a company is and what direction they are trying to go, the better positioned the designer will be to determine who the target audience is.

Styles

During the Victorian era, artistic fields to include design shared a common theme: ornamentation. Looking at the Victorian era, one can peel back the layers of the proverbial onion and realize the emotional connection between consumers and design. During this time period in the 1800's, a rise in wealth sparked an insatiable desire for excess. This desire trickled over to the arts and the Victorian style was born. Victorian style art and design style is very ornamental by today's standards. It is a reflection of the desire for excess during the Victorian times. During this time, consumers were drawn to products that demonstrated visible evidence of their social status (Heller, 2018). The desire for success and subsequent display of such success was almost universal. Whether designers during the Victorian era realized it or not, they were creating an emotional bond with consumers through design.

The market has changed a lot since Victorian times. There is no longer a universal "one-size fits all approach." Consumers respond to different visuals for different reasons. Designers must understand how to tailor visual cues appropriately for each audience. In marketing, this is referred to as consumer-centric design. Contrary to Victorian times, the designer can no longer constrain their work to a single specific style. The Victorian ornamental style would not be guaranteed to attract consumers to products or advertisements today. In fact, quite the opposite is

often true. Many consumers prefer a more minimalist design style as evidenced by the popularity in products such as Apple. It is a worthwhile endeavor for designers to continuously learn new styles and observe how various consumers are drawn to, or interact with different designs.

Subcultures

Countless styles in existence communicate with different subcultures. One such example is referred to as neo-retro. Neo-retro is a design style targeted at a subculture of consumers known as hipsters. As the name implies, neo-retro or "new retro" applies to designs that appear to be from the past although they are new. The use of design styles from the past to evoke feelings of nostalgia is not a new concept. The term and practice of retro design has been in practice since the 1970's. It is used to form a positive emotional bond with consumers (Celhay et al., 2020). At Montpellier Business School in France, elements associated with neo-retro design style were defined during a 2020 study. To define neo-retro elements, participants were asked to identify elements which they perceived as retro. Neutral stimuli were used as a control. The study conclude structural, graphical, typographical and holistic elements associated with the neo retro design style (Celhay et al., 2020). The case study revealed stylistic elements that appeal to a subculture target audience known as hipsters.

The neo-retro style is just one example of using specifically defined elements to effectively communicate with a targeted subculture. It is helpful for designers to be aware that subcultures and associated styles exist. A designer should determine if a target audience belongs to a specific subculture for each project. If a subculture can be determined, further research will reveal the stylistic elements the group is likely to respond to.

Semiotics

"Men are the dominant sign-using animals…Human civilization is dependent upon signs and systems of signs, and the human mind is inseparable from the functioning of signs" (Morris, 1938). These words were published by an American philosopher named Charles Morris in 1938, and they still hold true today. In the publication titled *Foundations of the Theory of Signs,* Morris discusses his view on semiotics. Semiotics relates to the existence and interpretation of signs or symbols. A sign is the most basic form of visual communication. Letters of the alphabet are considered signs. Emojis are considered signs. It is important to recognize these signs have meaning only because society collectively decided to give them meaning. The word "owl" is a sign only because at some point in history, it was arbitrarily decided that those three letters strung together would be used to describe a particular bird. Emojis grew in popularity with the advancement of social communication technology. Society collectively agreed that emojis would be an acceptable shortcut to describe a range of emotions. Semiotics provide designers with visual cues to aid in communicating messages. Using signs that bear an associated meaning for the intended audience is an effective way to deliver a message quickly and succinctly. To grasp the effectiveness of semiotics to design, consider the handicap symbol as it applies to parking spots. Without a sign that has an agreed upon meaning, it would be nearly impossible to communicate the message. It would require a wall of text explaining who the space is reserved for, while simultaneously explaining that non-handicapped people should not park there, along with the consequences for doing so. It would be impossible to read while driving through a parking lot. Consequently, without the sign, it is likely that the message would be ineffective or completely lost. The spot would not be reserved for its intended use. In contrast, inadvertent use of symbols could wreak havoc on a design. When a designer uses a symbol in a design,

particularly with branding, they should be certain the symbol does not carry an underlying meaning.

The work of Charles Morris provides a way of viewing semiotics from three different angles: semantics, syntax and pragmatics. Semantics deals with the relationship between a sign and what it is symbolic of. For example, the sign for a handicapped parking spot is a stick-figure representation of a person in a wheelchair. Syntax refers to the meaning of a sign in relationship to other signs. The handicapped sign in a parking spot relies on other signs to paint the entire picture. Yellow lines form boundaries for the handicapped parking space. Additionally, other parking spaces give context to the handicapped space–spaces reserved for expected mothers or open spaces without signs. Finally, pragmatics offers meaning through interpretation or as a sign relates to people. Although a handicapped symbol resembles a person in a wheelchair, everybody knows that not all handicapped people require a wheelchair. Society has accepted the sign for handicapped parking spaces regardless of this fact (Davis et al., 2017).

For designers, it is important to understand the role semiotics plays with branding. "Brands consist of meaning, not just the stuff that consumers use. As a result, brand value is not merely enhanced by the meanings consumers associate with brand name, the product, the logo, and other brand assets. It is a *function* of those meanings and contributes to the brands semiotic value" (Oswald, 2011). Consequently, designers should not limit themselves to considering known symbols and signs when establishing brand identity. For example, if a designer sought known symbols every time they created a logo, the logos would wind up being unoriginal, uninspiring and cliché. With marketing, semiotics is a product of everything associated with a particular brand; not just the symbol associated with the logo. Apple, the technology company, has nothing to do with apples. The logo is an apple with a bite missing. Due to very successful

branding, consumers do not even think about an apple when they see the apple logo. Instead, the symbol is associated with modern, minimalistic, quality technology products. Their products are intended to be streamlined and intuitive. From the products, to the websites, to the store décor, all things associated with Apple create a semiotic identity for what the brand represents.

Conclusion

Visual communication is more complicated than most people initially realize. It involves many moving parts accompanied by human variables. However, it is the most powerful form of communication. When a visual message is crafted with care, a designer can communicate an idea, trigger a range of emotions, appeal to a specific subculture, sell a product, sell an emotion, sell a lifestyle, sell a brand, or otherwise persuade an audience. However, to do so successfully, all aspects of visual communication must be taken into consideration. It is not enough to solely focus on the design components of composition and color theory. Likewise, it is not enough to only consider psychological components such as gestalt and consumer behavior. Designers must also embrace marketing research components to understand data analytics along with the principles of segmentation, positioning and targeting. The cross-pollination between design and marketing is lacking in many scholarly programs today. A student who wishes to pursue independent work such as freelance design, will be ill-prepared upon completion of a degree program, particularly if they do not choose marketing electives. While an individual may be able to create an aesthetically pleasing design, they will likely be ineffective in crafting a design that will reach a specific target audience and appeal to their emotions. Design is not art. Design *is* visual communication. However, without consideration of every aspect of visual communication, a design is not a design, but art for art's sake.

Resources

Adobe Classroom in a Book - https://www.adobepress.com/series/series.asp?st=44646 These books are published annually for each of the Adobe programs. As the title implies, one can learn an Adobe program through the appropriate book. The books are full of useful exercises, information and tips.

Adobe Color Wheel – https://color.adobe.com/create/color-wheel create a variety of color pallets based on schemes such as complementary or monochromatic.

Adobe Typekit – https://fonts.adobe.com/ A collection of fonts included with Adobe Creative Cloud subscription. This site includes font pairs that work great together.

AIGA – https://www.aiga.org/ Premier professional organization for designers. Follow them on social media channels and keep an eye out for events with the AIGA chapter local to the area.

American Marketing Association - https://www.ama.org/ Premier professional organization for marketing

ArcGIS - https://www.esri.com/en-us/arcgis/about-arcgis/overview Locale based data analytics for targeting markets

Clarion Research - https://www.clarionresearch.com/ Clarion Research is a marketing research firm that can help with projects such as survey design for marketing

Creatives on Call – https://creativesoncall.com/ Site to find freelance work. This site is lesser known than sites such as fiver.com or freelancer.com. It is geared towards professionals as they offer corporations wholistic solutions.

Envato – https://envato.com/ Subscription based service for assets and tutorials. Additionally, they host some great free tutorials on **Tutsplus: https://tutsplus.com/**

Illustrator Tutorials – https://www.creativebloq.com/digital-art/illustrator-tutorials-1232697/3 Set aside time to learn new techniques.

Morguefile – https://morguefile.com/ This site contains free stock photos for commercial use

Pexels – https://www.pexels.com/ Free stock images

RKMA Publications - https://www.rkma.com/reports.cfm Vast resource for data analytics and consumer behavior broken down by market segment

Schemecolor – https://www.schemecolor.com/ Schemecolor can be used to generate ideas for color palates. It is worth noting that this site should be used with caution since anybody can contribute to the site. However, it can help get the wheels spinning when a designer feels stuck on color palate for a project.

The Type Snob – https://thedesignteam.io/the-type-snob-f221969a884b This is a solid typography primer.

UX Magazine – https://uxmag.com/ Community resource for UX Designers.

White Space is Not Your Enemy –
https://issuu.com/barsgrave/docs/white_space_is_not_your_enemy Excellent e-book for design fundamentals.

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