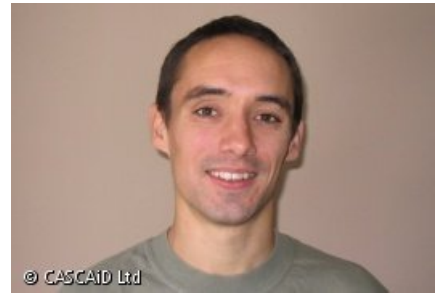


Case Study: Graphic Designer - Paul

What do you do?

I work on graphic design 'across the board', so this involves coming up with creative ideas and developing designs for everything from leaflets, posters, press adverts, logos, corporate brochures and magazine work to exhibition stands. I come up with creative graphics that could be used in all sorts of design, across different types of printed material and I also do designs for interactive websites and screen-based media, as well.



If you can imagine all the things that you see in the world that have been printed - everything that comes through your letterbox, every advert on a billboard or on the side of a bus, every magazine in the newsagents - they've all been designed by somebody and laid up on a computer. So there's an awful lot of different areas of graphic design you can be involved with.

I'm often asked by a client to come up with initial concepts for a design, which is normally the first stage. So I'll sketch out ideas that I might use for the final printed material and then slowly develop those through, discussing the ideas with the client and then finding out what they like, and what they don't like, and developing the design through until it becomes something that is suitable for using in print.

Depending on the subject matter of the material that you're designing, you always try to inject as much interest into that as you visually can, so if it's quite a dry subject matter (like a brochure for an accountancy company) then you really have to think creatively and think of ways to illustrate that, even if nothing might immediately spring to mind.

You need to use visual metaphors to illustrate different concepts. I spend a lot of time at a layout pad just coming up with ideas on paper and then once those have been discussed with the client, we'll take the best of those ideas and develop them through into a design that is suitable for what the client needs.

What is your background?

I was always interested in art and design at school - it was my favourite lesson - and so, that made me think, 'what sort of jobs could I do which used creative skills?'

It's a while ago now since I was at school, and graphic design was quite a young industry then, but it was an up-and-coming job, and I liked the idea of being able to apply my creative skills and my art and drawing skills to something that I could earn a living from. So it initially started at school, in my careers lessons, with me looking at different jobs that I might do.

I then did an A level in Art and Design at college, and then a year-long foundation course in Art and Design at the University of Derby. I then applied to do a degree in Graphic Design and Typography at the University of Plymouth. And after my degree, I went into the design industry, and got my first job as an in-house designer - designing teapots!

What characteristics do you need to be successful in your job?

You need to be quite personable and able to talk to people. You need quite good communication skills for dealing with clients and customers.

Obviously, you need creativity, some level of artistic ability and knowledge of graphic design and typefaces, that sort of thing.

You also need to be able to stay fairly calm in a crisis, because you can be working to fairly tight deadlines and find that you are up against the clock sometimes. It's important to keep calm under those circumstances.

Also, in a way, you need to be able to not take things too personally because art and design is a very subjective thing. What you think is really good, the client might not like at all, or a client might really like something, but it's not your favourite idea. So you need to not take clients' comments about your work too personally, and not be too precious about your work. You need to be ready to adapt it to meet the needs of the person or company that you're developing the design for, rather than your own needs.

I think that actually it's quite a key point that you need to try and put yourself in the position of whoever it is who is commissioning the work, and understand what they want, rather than just taking on your own ideas.

What other jobs could you do using the skills from this job?

One of the main aspects of being a graphic designer is creative thinking and coming up with creative ideas. You could use the artistic side of that to work as an artist, perhaps, or a web designer.

You could move across into other areas of design, although you might need to do a course. For instance, if you wanted to move into textiles and become a textiles designer, you might need to do a course in textiles - but largely the creative side of the design would be transferable.

You could also move across into advertising, where you're using your creative skills, and then apply those to other medium, maybe like film or TV advertising.

You could use the skills that you've gathered from the process of graphic design to move across to become an account handler at a design agency. So instead of working on the hands-on design, you could be doing more of the liaising with clients and managing the client accounts.

I'm sure that there's all sorts of other jobs that you could do as well!

What changes will there be in the future?

Well, the design industry, in terms of the technology that is used and the mediums to which design is applied, is changing all the time. But the fundamental aspects of creative thinking and drawing up ideas and visuals on a layout pad, won't change that much, I think.

Of course, the software will develop, so we've got better ways of creating and generating graphics and visuals to show to clients, but technology is constantly bringing change to the design industry.

What are the biggest challenges in your job?

One of the biggest challenges of this job is coming up with fresh ideas.

When you're faced with a blank piece of paper it can be a challenge to fill it with creative ideas. Some days you're feeling more creative than others, and it's a case of really trying to dig deep to get the creative juices flowing; other days your creative juices are flowing perfectly and you can just get on and do the design.

Another challenge can be working against the clock to meet a deadline. For example, I sometimes do design for exhibitions and because the exhibition is planned in for a certain date, you need to get all the designs done well before that date so they can be checked and printed.

It can also be challenging getting clients to give you the feedback you need and the 'assets' for a job, which include logos, text, images, the sorts of things you might need to integrate with the job.

Keeping clients happy can be challenging - graphic design is a subjective thing, so what a client likes might not be what you like, and vice versa.

Sometimes just communicating your ideas to the client can be challenging. Although you've got to listen to their thoughts, you want to try and make them aware of your thinking as well, and explain to them key points about the concepts that you've come up with.

It can also be a challenge keeping up to date with the latest software. It's a big challenge in the first instance learning the software, although that's probably something you'd do on your design course. But normally you're thrown in a bit at the deep end when you get your first job in graphic design, because nobody leaving university knows anywhere near as much about the computer as they'll need to know actually in the working environment. So it's a challenge when you first start out in the design industry to get to grips with all of the design software.

Are there many opportunities to enter this career?

It's a case of getting the education in place - making sure you make the right choice of course, and doing a good job on your university course or whatever course you do. Try and build up a portfolio of good work that mimics real life projects that you might be given, so that if you go to an employer they can see that you have been thinking about the

right type of projects and commercial-based design projects.

I guess, like trying to get a job in many areas, if you believe in your ability and you work hard then you will get the job eventually. It's a competitive industry, graphic design, but if you're a good designer with good skills, a creative thinker, if you're good working on a layout pad and you keep up to date with the industry developments, then you won't have a problem getting a job.

Of course it's competitive, but my personal belief is that, going into the future, graphic design is a solid career to choose because the creative industries are set to thrive. They're thriving already in this country, and I think they're set to thrive in the future especially with the move over to digital media such as the internet, CD-ROMS, interactives, that kind of thing. There is a whole area there of requirement for graphic design.

Also things like trade shows, exhibitions, they're still going to happen and someone's going to need to do the graphic design for them. So I think there is a big requirement and I think it will be possible to get jobs in the future.

What do you like about your job?

I like the fact that I get to think of new, creative ideas on a daily basis.

I also get to meet lots of different people - clients, other designers, etc. The design industry is quite sociable, so it's nice to meet people - they can be quite sociable out of the office too and you often get invited to design agency functions and that kind of thing.

There is certainly a good deal of job satisfaction to be had from being a graphic designer, because you get to see your ideas in print. Whether it's a brochure that you've designed, a leaflet or an advert that gets printed in a magazine or newspaper, a logo that gets displayed on a building or on a company's website, or whether it's the website itself that you've designed, there is job satisfaction because the work that you've done is then there for all to see. In the case of design for print it's something you can hold and actually read through and show to people and say 'yeah, this is what I do'.

What do you dislike about your job?

Well, I dislike the fact that sometimes it can mean working to tight deadlines and working slightly long hours to get jobs out of the door, so that's one of the downsides - occasionally you can be called upon to work evenings or weekends, but then again I suppose that's all part and parcel of the territory, really.

There's not really that much I dislike about the job aside from that, it's generally just the pressure of deadlines and occasionally clients that can possibly be a bit demanding in terms of what they like and don't like.

A lot of clients don't always know what it is that they want from the design, but they know what they don't want, so if you show them a design that you've worked on, they might not like it, and it can be a little bit difficult to really get to the root of what it is that they want.

But generally speaking there isn't that many things I dislike about it.

What are your ambitions?

Well, I'm a freelance designer and so, in a way, it was one of my big ambitions to go freelance, and to be able to work for myself.

But having achieved that, looking to the future, what I really want to do is to work on the most creative work that I can. I particularly do a lot for screen-based media, and it's my ambition to try and involve myself as much as I can in creative projects, rather than doing too much lower-level design work.

I'd like to work more on the concept stage of design, so that's really my ambition for the future, is to work on that, and get a good client base together (which is slowly coming together already), to build a reputation for myself, and then see where it goes from there.

I've never really thought about expanding to employ anybody else, but again it's not impossible that that might be an option in the future. I'll just take it as it comes, and go from there.

What advice would you give to someone interested in your career?

Well, obviously I would advise people interested in this career to take the right educational courses and get the right qualifications under their belt.

I would advise them to concentrate as much as they can on drawing and art and different visual approaches to subjects. Basically, working by hand instead of at a computer all the time. I think there is a big tendency for people these days to work at the computer by default and not actually go to a layout pad.

I would advise people to get their sketch pad out, go out drawing, come up with some creative ideas and then once they've got that, to develop it along that side, rather than being too preoccupied with trying to learn all the latest computer software.

I would advise people to contact design agencies when they're at the stage of getting a portfolio together. Even if the design agencies are not offering a particular job at that point, it's still worth asking them if it would be okay to go in and show them your portfolio work, and talk about what you do. Because, generally, design agencies are very receptive to new talent and new ability - the talent of the designers that work there is really the basic currency of a design agency.

A lot of design agencies use freelancers as well and so they're always interested and used to talking to people who don't work for their company anyway. So it would be worth just going and getting someone to look through your portfolio and talk to you about what your strengths and weaknesses are, and where you might be useful to them or how you might improve your offering in order to get a job elsewhere.

A day in the life

9:00 am - 9:30 am

Check emails and plan work for the day. Look through my diary.

9:30 am - 12:30 pm

Work on designs for whatever job is at the top of my list. This could involve sketching ideas on a layout pad, working on visuals on the computer or working on the final stages of a design project, where I'm putting out design stages for the pages of a brochure or leaflet, for example, to build up the design from the job that's been agreed by the client.

12:30 pm - 1:30 pm

Lunch.

1:30 pm - 2:30 pm

Talk to clients on the phone about a job in progress. Or, I might go to a client meeting to take a briefing for a new job and discuss the requirements for that.

2:30 pm - 6:00 pm

Carry on working on design. I also refer to source books to get inspiration from design journals and magazines. I could be looking on the internet for typefaces for a job or imagery to be used in a design, but basically design-related, hands-on work.