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Do You Want Fries With That Logo?

- By **Stephanie Orma**
- May 24th, 2009
- **Design**
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From low-budgets to rush jobs to piss-poor project management, every designer has one time or another faced the inevitable, “I need a logo (brochure, website, etc.) done ASAP” scenario. Depending on the designers’ work situation, some can simply choose to decline these projects.

But for many full-time designers, this “**rushing creative**” is a very real and necessary part of their job requirement. So when asked to “just slap a design together” or “crank it out,” **how do we as designers maintain our standards and integrity** when a logo must be created in three hours? Or a website in a day? And for that matter, *can* we?



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In this article, Stephanie Orma, a graphic design herself, hangs her head out the drive-through window and shares her personal experience, tips, and advice on how to handle the “**hurry-up and be creative**” demands of the graphic design industry.

[Offtopic: by the way, do you know the Smashing Network has its own **Smashing Network RSS Feed**? Only excerpts are displayed in the feed.]

“Fast Food” Design Jobs

I recently worked for a short period of time at a marketing firm in which it was my job to produce good design in an unforgivingly short period of time. One week, I was “challenged” to design a logo for a dry cleaner’s company in just one hour. In another, I had to create an annual report in less than three hours.

The timeline to execute these projects (*and do good design*) seriously puts into question what is feasible,

even for the most seasoned and talented of designers. Sketching time is simply out of the question and you better be damn sure your first idea is a good one because that's all you'll have time to execute. Needless to say, it was a constant struggle to produce quality work under such conditions.

As a seasoned designer, I had a pretty good idea of what I was getting myself into when I accepted the position (although I don't know if you can ever fully prepare yourself for the internal struggle of **“getting a design done vs. getting it done well.”**) But for newbie designers, I highly recommend thinking twice before readily accepting a “fast food” design position fresh out of school.

First and foremost, I would say: don't do it. Not only are these types of jobs not portfolio builders, but it's like flying trapeze without a safety net. Without a skilled mentor to provide guidance, standards below the norm, and lack of experimentation time, **these positions can seriously stunt a designer's growth.** For tips on finding design jobs where obscene time-crunch is NOT the norm, check out this interview, **“How to Get Hired by the Best Graphic Design Firms...”**

Time Matters

I think it's important to note that deadlines and stress on their own are not necessarily negatives. In many situations, they can help heighten and stimulate the creative juices. In her article **“Can stress actually be good for you?”** health editor Jane Weaver of MSNBC makes some excellent points on the upsides of stress. But there's a point at which extreme deadlines can have reverse and detrimental effects. Thus, certain non-negotiable factors *must* be present in order to generate good design, namely – time:

- Time to research and gather information
- Time to brainstorm, sketch, experiment, and form ideas
- Time to execute and bring ideas to fruition
- Time to edit, refine and assess the quality of the creative

That being said, crazy deadlines, whether you're a newbie designer or seasoned professional are often times the workplace norm. So the next time you go into battle with good old Father Time, be sure to arm yourself with:

Creative Ammunition

1. Keep sources of design inspiration by your side at ALL times (note: inspiration is not stealing). For me, looking at great design (**Communication Arts Magazine, HOW Magazine, AIGA design annuals**) is so utterly inspiring. It helps stimulate my creative juices, gets me excited about graphic design, and reminds me that I too am a good designer.

Plus, keeping a positive frame of mind is especially important, as it can sometimes feel a bit disheartening when you're asked to slap some design together in a jiffy.

2. Stick with the classic typefaces (Garamond, Caslon, Gill Sans, Frutiger, etc.) This is *so* not the time to be experimenting with new fonts. For a quick reference, Smashing Magazine has a great post on **“80 Beautiful Typefaces for Professional Design.”**
3. If possible, get briefed as early as possible on a project. Allowing your brain a little “idea incubation time” is better than jumping into a project cold turkey.
4. Pop on the headphones and turn on some good tunes. Not only does music help put you in a good mood, it helps drown out the chatter around you (not to mention the chatter in your head, “I have how

many hours to design this?!”) For further reading on this topic, check out Adelle Charles’ blog’s post, **“Music to Feed Your Soul During Crucial Design Moments.”**

5. Worse comes to worse, take the work home and do it your own time...on your own dollar. I constantly grapple with this, but sometimes that’s just what you’ve got to do in the name of good design. Of course, I highly recommend informing your boss of the situation, so they are at the very least, fully aware of the unrealistic timelines.
6. It pains me to say this one...let it go. Just let the design go. Put the mouse down, step away from the keyboard, and just walk away.

Bottom Line

Staying in a “fast food” design job for too long can result in early onset designer burnout. To avoid this creative killer, it is highly recommended to pursue other creative endeavors on the side, be it: freelancing in your spare time where you have more control over types of clients, projects, and timelines; taking design classes to sharpen your skills and enhance your portfolio; drawing, painting, and anything else that helps keep those creative juices fresh and the passion in your belly burning bright.

And remember, the next time you’re asked to hurry up and be creative take a moment for yourself, pause, breathe and then in your most nasal, drive-through window voice inquire, *“Honey, do you want fries with that logo?”*

Resources

- **“Can stress actually be good for you?”**
Jane Weaver health editor of MSNBC makes some excellent points on the upsides (and downsides) of stress.
- **“Music to Feed Your Soul During Crucial Design Moments”**
Adelle Charles discusses how music can help *fuel* your creativity.
- **“80 Beautiful Typefaces for Professional Design”**
Smashing Magazine provides a rich and thorough list of classic typefaces.
- **“How to get hired by the best graphic design firms...”**
Had enough “french fry” design jobs? In this insightful interview from SF Examiner, top creative directors share what it takes to get hired by the best graphic design firms (note: the agencies mentioned are SF based but the advice is relevant to all).
- **“How to Boost Your Creativity”**
This is an excellent article on keeping the creative juices flowing by Jacob Cass of Just Creative Design.



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Stephanie Orma is a San Francisco freelance writer, graphic designer, and illustrator. She’s principal/creative director of Orma Design, as well as the clever greeting card company She’s SO Creative. Stephanie is a contributing writer for HOW Magazine and writes on graphic design, branding, and creativity for the SF Examiner.