BRANDING ALLIANCE

Bridging the Gap Between Design & Marketing in Small Business
Like building a cathedral, building a brand is a collaborative project.

— Marty Neumeier, The Brand Gap
As the Marketing Director of a small business, I was tasked to execute strategic campaigns and projects in which graphic design was a major component. With no formal design training, I needed to know more.

Despite the fact that I held a Bachelor’s degree in Marketing and Business Administration from a prestigious university, I often felt handicapped in my position with this lack of knowledge. My writing skills were above average, but I knew nothing about typography. I was clueless on how to create and manage the development of marketing material. Communicating with printing companies seemed like a foreign language to me. I did not know what to look for when needing to hire a graphic designer, in the unlikely event that I could convince management that we needed one. And my search for reliable resources to help me with my continuous questions was frustrating and often unsuccessful.
In contrast to my situation, large businesses have an intricate network of professionals who are able to fill a variety of different marketing and design positions, from interactive design, to web development, to SEO strategy and content management. Because they have progressed further along in their business cycle, and often have larger budgets, these businesses are fully equipped to execute branding strategies with collaborative teams.

For small businesses such as the one I worked for, and even some medium-sized organizations, management, marketing and creative teams are much smaller or even nonexistent. In these cases, design-related tasks are often delegated to professionals with no formal training due to budgetary reasons or lack of design knowledge. With limited resources available, successful branding strategies are much more difficult to develop for these smaller organizations.
This has been the worst economic period since the great depression. Now designers need proof of the value of their work so they can demonstrate it to their clients.

—Paula Scher, Unjustified

PROVING THE VALUE OF DESIGN

In addition to small budgets and resources, it is often the lack of knowledge in the value of design that hinders small businesses in their ability to execute well-designed branding strategies. This continues a cycle of doubt, under funding and dismissal of graphic design’s true power.

1. Many small businesses pass off hiring in-house designers as a way to cut costs.
2. Businesses often task unqualified staff to design their materials. This is not the case, however, if they need legal work done.
3. The lack of response to poorly designed marketing materials only strengthens the belief that marketing is a shot in the dark, and the first things to cut in a slow economy.

It is the realization of a designer’s value that will continue to bring new levels of corporate reach and achievement. In order to this, we as designers need to educate marketing teams about the real value of graphic design as a resource to help them reach their business goals, if we are to survive as a viable industry.
It is clear that while compelling graphic design surrounds our daily lives, design standards are often lower in small business environments. This occurs because of a general lack of knowledge in the overall value of graphic design, and the idea that good design can only be afforded with large marketing budgets. But this doesn’t have to be the case.

Drawing upon my own experience in marketing management, I see a unique opportunity to make quality design more accessible and to increase communication between marketing teams and creative teams in small business environments.

THE OPPORTUNITY: BRING GOOD DESIGN TO SMALL BUSINESS

The number of quality graphic design resources targeted specifically to help the needs of marketing teams in small business environments.
By unveiling the theory of design practices, by demystifying our choices with reliable resources, and by educating marketing teams on design principles, I want to create a resource that helps small businesses make better design decisions.

Demystify graphic design in the small business world
Provide a resource that better familiarizes marketing professionals with the principles of design and how to make good design decisions for their organization.

Break communication barriers between designers and marketers
Break the barriers of communication creative teams and marketing teams by helping marketers understand the theory of graphic design and how to more effectively communicate with designers.

Elevate the brand of graphic design
Improve the brand of the graphic design by elevating standards for businesses whose employees have minimal knowledge of design or for those with lower marketing budgets, which will ultimately increase the value of our practice.
There are currently countless resources that provide design principles and tools for a wider audience, however, none are all encompassing in educating small businesses with sound design principles.

1. When conducting an Internet search for graphic design and branding resources, many of the results reveal poorly designed blogs, lists of resources with no guidance on where to start, or graphic design firms marketing their own services or expertise.

2. With the plethora of online resources available, it is hard to determine what is viable and what is not, particularly for professionals without prior design experience.

3. Despite the amount of both online and print resources, viable or not, most are not specifically targeted towards small businesses, as well as marketing teams that have limited formal education in graphic design.

4. Most available resources do not specifically address the need to unify the marketing, branding and graphic design related functions within a business or provide a portal to help these parties communicate more effectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESOURCE</th>
<th>WHAT IT DOES DO WELL</th>
<th>WHAT IT DOESN'T DO WELL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIGA</td>
<td>Go-to resource for all things design</td>
<td>Targeted for designers, weak how-to's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Business Branding</td>
<td>Targeted towards marketers, small business</td>
<td>Poor design, weak resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Hische</td>
<td>Well-designed, easy to understand resources</td>
<td>Does not encompass all needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOW</td>
<td>Great resources, good usability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUST Creative</td>
<td>Plethora of advice and design-related links</td>
<td>Too many choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphics</td>
<td>Search capability for tutorials</td>
<td>Too technique focused, poor usability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Observer</td>
<td>Excellent design insight and inspiration</td>
<td>No targeted educational resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Mgmt Institute</td>
<td>Great networking and insight resource</td>
<td>Targets mostly management teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smashing Magazine</td>
<td>Rich with tutorials, insight and inspiration</td>
<td>Does not connect design to marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Design Forum</td>
<td>Good resource for asking questions</td>
<td>Poor design, weak guidance articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Graphic Design</td>
<td>Very well optimized on Google searches</td>
<td>Poor design, confusing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Fan</td>
<td>Diverse articles on design-related topics</td>
<td>Low quality tutorials and advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Shack</td>
<td>Good inspiration and tutorial resource</td>
<td>Caters more towards web design</td>
</tr>
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Approximate percentage of biased links that appear on page one of Google when searching for small business graphic design resources for marketing teams. 70%
DELIVERABLES & AUDIENCE

Equipped with my experience in marketing management, as well as my graduate education in graphic design, I aim to create an in-depth resource that educates professionals on design principles in order to make better decisions for their business. I envision this to be delivered in two components:

1. **Online Resource:** An integrated set of information on how to communicate with designers and how to approach problems where design is involved.

2. **Toolkit:** This toolkit, which would be available online and in print, would address design management practices, how graphic design comes into play in effective branding and demystifying techniques in design.

My target market for this integrated resource has been divided into three potential tiers of business size, professional and reach, as noted in the infographic (right). As the project progresses, I would narrow this audience as I determine needs based on my research.
TIMELINE

FALL 2012
GR 604 / Nature of Identity
GR 801 / Thesis Refinement

SPRING 2013
GR 800 / Directed Study
WNM 249 / Web Design (Directed Study)

SUMMER 2013
GR 800 / Directed Study

FALL 2013
GR 800 / Directed Study
GR 650 / Portfolio Design Seminar
GLA 676 / Professional Practices

SPRING 2013
Develop framework for materials and web design and development skills.

SUMMER 2013
Continue to consult with marketing teams and design professionals as project implementation begins and visual style is being established.

FALL 2013
Finalize deliverables and implementation of both print and online materials.

FALL 2012
Create a detailed timeline and reach out to marketing and branding teams for feedback on their needs.
GR600  Visual Communications Lab

GR601  Type Systems
The melodic music of Four Tet is an abstract approach to sound and melodies, incorporating elements of electronic dance, jazz and techno combined with live instrumentation. His ambient symphony, Ribbons, originally exudes a mysterious, minimalist tone by juxtaposing a high pitched note with slightly heavy bass undertones. High notes are punched into the seething percussion at various speeds and durations, sometimes slow, and others quick and ringing; then distinctly separated, followed up overlapping. The song then gives way to a feeling of melodic self-discovery and revelation over and over with beats that are equally soothing and energizing. Ribbons is a portal for remembering and reveling in the past, but gives a hopeful sense for what the future holds. It takes you on a journey in a mysterious world, with unfamiliar surroundings, allowing you to become more comfortable, giving way to a sense of belonging. Whether it makes you want to sit back and reflect or get up and dance, the song will make you feel like you are swimming in a wave of genuine emotion.