

EIGHT THINGS I WISH I'D KNOWN WHEN I STARTED

- 1 DETAILS A GREAT DESIGNER MAKETH.**

If there's one thing I've repeated over the course of my career more than anything else, it's this simple philosophy: If you have time and talent to care for the smaller details, it almost always means you've already cared for the bigger details. Meaning, if you have time and talent to readjust the logo positioning 1px or 1pt to the left or right, it likely means you've already solidified usability, cross-browser compatibility, primary headline, and so on. I'm amazed by works that continue to impress as you dig deeper into the details.
- 2 THERE'S A POINT AT WHICH QUALITY BECOMES TOO COSTLY. FIND THAT POINT WITH EVERY PROJECT.**

Having expounded on importance of details, allow me to counterbalance with a brief discussion about the cost of quality. You'll inevitably hit a point on every project when we all say, "If I just do this or that improvement, it'll be much more impressive as a portfolio piece." At that point, you're essentially designing off the clock. If you (and your employer) can afford the time, more power to you. If not, however, the cost of the additional quality is both too expensive and unnoticeable by the client and its audience — time to stop and move on. (Economics majors: Think law of decreasing margins.)
- 3 THOSE WHO CODE AS WELL AS THEY DESIGN WILL ALWAYS HAVE AN EDGE OVER THOSE WHO ONLY DESIGN.**

For those of you who already code XHTML/CSS well, this is a no-brainer. You're able to foresee potential layout and coding issues while the comp is still in Photoshop or Fireworks or even Illustrator. The benefits of such are rarely overrated, as time, er, money is saved and frustration is minimized.
- 4 COMMUNICATE, DON'T DECORATE.**

How often are you caught up in adding imagery and typography — even details — that have little or no relevance to the project at hand? No worries, I still struggle too. But the sooner you and I learn to communicate with our designs using only what's necessary and relevant, rather than decorate for the mere purpose of decorating, the sooner we'll find our designs touch the consumer's heart, rather than just satisfy the designer's eye. Think of it this way: Every element added to a design, whether print or web, decreases the importance of every other element already on the page. You better be sure, then, that the additional element enhances rather than detracts.
- 5 WHEN YOU HIT A SNAG IN CSS, STRIP DOWN TO THE BASE ID AND WORK UP.**

Imagine this: The div containing your masthead image wraps improperly in IE, but displays perfectly in other browsers. While not all that difficult to imagine, it's quite frustrating. Apart from coding from the start in Firefox, I've found it useful to comment out everything except the container div, for example. Once I'm positive the container div is working, I uncomment in the next div. Once that div is working properly in tandem with the container div, I uncomment the next div. And so on. A simple technique, no doubt, but often a useful one.
- 6 ROCK. PAPER. TRIMMER.**

Forget scissors. Get yourself a quality paper trimmer. I can't even begin to tell you how valuable a good paper trimmer is when prototyping print work. So much so, in fact, that I've wasted an entire point just on paper trimmers. What to look for? A rotary blade trimmer that can handle up to 11" x 17" prints.
- 7 GIVE ME ONE CANVAS, TWO FONTS, AND I'LL MAKE SOMETHING THAT SINGS.**

Type. Typography. Fonts. Typefaces. Whatever floats your boat. The important thing is this: Typography can make or break a piece. Typeface selection is crucial. Try testing your type savvy by creating a print ad using only two typefaces. No color, no photography, no logo. Just you and the type. Then submit it for peer review. You'll quickly discover how well — or how poorly — you choose typefaces.
- 8 CHUNKING.**

Summarized in one sentence, "chunking" a brand increases consumer recollection. It's the reason you can identify a BMW based solely on the front kidney grill, or the reason you can identify an iPod based solely on the white case.

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