

CREATIVITY

BACK-TO-BASICS DESIGN

Von Glitschka shows how taking a break from digital tools and software can infuse your work with a whole new level of creativity in a 6-step process he calls “illustrative design.”

These days, anyone with a Wacom tablet and a copy of Photoshop is calling herself a designer. At the risk of sounding like an old-timer, I concur with the cry of many other creatives who say that the heart and soul of design is getting lost amid fancy software, miraculous plug-ins and souped-up hardware.

But it isn't the novice designer who is threatening our craft. The enemy just might be ourselves. As the process of designing becomes more and more about working onscreen, designers are losing their connection with the tactile process of sketching that is at the core of our practice.

“Ten years ago, a level of craft and skill was needed to even get into the design industry,” says Von Glitschka. “You had to possess some artistic ability to even make it as a production artist. The computer has removed virtually all of these factors. Tool-driven design is rampant. Art schools teach it, companies demand it, and many so-called design professionals feed the poor public perception of design by not utilizing a solid creative process themselves. They thus rely on pull-down menu effects rather than solid, concept-oriented design.”

Glitschka has more than 20 years' experience working in the communication arts industry. And in 2002, he started his own firm, Glitschka Studios, where he creates logos, illustrations, lettering and icons for an impressive client base, including GM, Virgin Atlantic and Microsoft. He also teaches design at Chemetka College in Salem, OR, and founded

Illustrationclass.com, a popular site where he breaks down the back-to-basics creative process he uses in creating many of his projects.

ILLUSTRATIVE DESIGN

Although many creatives identify themselves as designers, marketers or illustrators, Glitschka finds these terms confining. He coined the term “illustrative designer” to describe his role and practice.

“An ‘illustrative designer’ is a creative person who uses his brain as his primary tool,” Glitschka says. “This person adheres to a systematic creative process that focuses on idea-building and conceptual drawing to work out their design solutions. Birthing ideas, refining those ideas, and locking in unique and original directions before they ever touch the computer to create their art.”

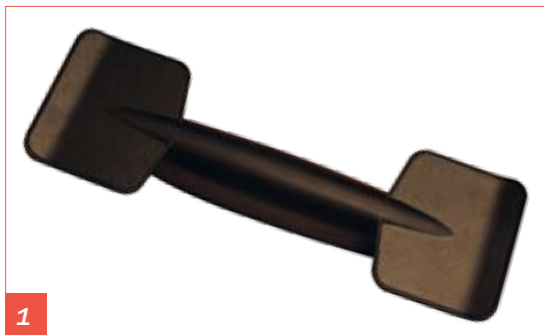
Many designers may feel estranged from their sketchpad and dubious of their drawing ability. But Glitschka advises to dive right in. “Just do it,” he says. “It doesn't matter how good or bad you are, you just need to start. If you start now, in a year, your drawings will be that much better. And in five years, you'll be even better. It's a self-fulfilling creative prophecy.”

In the following six steps, Glitschka walks you through his illustrative design process. It isn't until step number five that you'll use your computer (so you might as well power-down now). Think of it as an exercise in liberation from your keyboard—and an opportunity to fortify your creative muscle.

ILLUSTRATIVE DESIGN IN ACTION

CONDUCTING RESEARCH

Von Glitschka recalls a project involving a start-up toy company's new product, "MeeWok," that needed a brand logo and identity developed. "I requested a prototype that I (along with my two daughters) could take for a test drive and provided them with a creative brief to fill out after they approved my design quote," Glitschka says.



SKETCHING IDEAS

"After proper research and information gathering, I start to create thumbnail sketches and brainstorm solutions," Glitschka says. "I isolate my best ideas and refine them."



1 COMMUNICATION

One of the most crucial steps—developing the creative brief—is often glossed over or bypassed by designers in an effort to get started designing. Big mistake—this step is not only an opportunity to gather all the resources you need to do the job correctly, but also a chance for everyone involved to understand the expectations and scope for the project. This is when you'll educate your client about your creative process and the steps along the way. In turn, ask your client to detail their expectations and relevant internal processes.

"You can never have too much information regarding a project, but you can have too little," Glitschka says. "This is admittedly one of the least creative aspects of the creative process, but it's one of the most important. The designer knows what directions are appropriate, and the client knows the project's scope."

2 RESEARCH

The next step involves collecting relevant collateral and inspiring work, plus gathering specs from vendors.

The wider you cast your net, the more resources you have to inform your work. "Let's say a design firm has hired you to create a mark for a new wireless company called 'Wing,'" Glitschka says. "They want a bird logo they can use in their branding and identity. We can all draw a 'bird' from memory. But that drawing will be improved when we research how birds look or act and use these subtle characteristics and traits in our approach."

An advertisement for FunctionFox Systems Inc. The background is a solid green color. In the foreground, a man in a black suit and white shirt is sitting at a desk, looking at a computer monitor. The text "Billings. The very word makes my skin crawl." is written in a large, bold, black font at the top left. At the bottom right, there is a logo for FunctionFox Systems Inc. and the text "End the pain. TimeFox is the simple time and project tracking system for small creative companies. Try it free! www.functionfox.com".

Billings. The very word makes my skin crawl.

End the pain. TimeFox is the simple time and project tracking system for small creative companies.
Try it free! www.functionfox.com

functionfox
FunctionFox Systems Inc.

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A CASE FOR DOODLING

It doesn't matter what your high school teachers told you. Doodling actually does have great value. Here's why, according to our resident illustrative designer, Von Glitschka.

1 IT IMPROVES YOUR DRAWING ABILITY.

Anyone can doodle. It doesn't have to make sense, it doesn't have to look like anything. It just needs to be what you want it to be. Your whim is your client.

2 IT IMPROVES ABSTRACT THINKING.

The laws of physics don't apply to your doodling environment. Go nuts. Draw flying eyeballs or a two-headed cat playing a violin. Everything is acceptable.

3 IT ENCOURAGES YOU TO EXPLORE CREATIVE THOUGHTS AS THEY HAPPEN.

Doodling captures those fleeting moments of brilliance. Let's face it—you can't always turn them on when needed. So if you get into the habit of capturing

them all the time, you're training your mind to think uniquely while slowly building a very cool resource.

4 IT BUILDS AN ARCHIVE OF YOUR CONCEPTS AND VISUALS.

Your notebook is a great source for future inspiration and brainstorming. Save your doodles. Paste them up in a sketchbook or onto sheets of paper and insert them into a binder for easy access and future inspiration.

5 IT'S FUN.

Doodling is a great outlet to express yourself. When was the last time you heard anyone say, "Man, today sucked. I had to do all kinds of doodles." Look for opportunities to doodle during the day.

From Aztec to Zulu...



HERE THE IMAGE OF "TRAVEL" COMES FROM THE AZTEC MANUSCRIPTS. THE AZTEC MANUSCRIPTS, IN WHICH, IT IS NOT UNUSUAL TO FIND, THE
IMAGE OF A PERSON "TRAVELING" IS COMMON. THE AZTEC MANUSCRIPTS, IN WHICH, IT IS NOT UNUSUAL TO FIND, THE

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3

FINESSING THE CONCEPT

Having worked the art out prior to doing anything on the computer, all Glitschka needs to do is scan in the refined sketch and build on top of it with precision. “I rarely leave any line absolutely straight when building this type of art, opting to incorporate subtle curves,” he says. “This makes the end product look less computer-driven and more customized. Depending on the style, I may also subtly round off sharp corners too, but on this project that wasn’t necessary.”

THE FINISHING TOUCHES



4

MOCK UP EXAMPLES

“This is how I presented the logo concept to the client,” Glitschka says of putting the design into context. “The product will be molded in several colors, so I mocked up a simple example of how it would look embossed into the toy’s plastic.”



5

BRAND IDENTITY

“The client selected this option, and I then developed their identity pieces,” Glitschka says. “This is the business card design I created with a die-cut that mimics the toy’s shape. Each of the business partners had a different color card since the toy will be marketed in several colors.”

3 CONCEPTS

This is the most unpredictable phase in the creative process. It could take hours or it could take days. This is when you sit down with your pen and paper and start working out sketches for how the project will take shape, using the previous two steps to inform your work. Glitschka urges designers to think of this process as a “slow boil.”

How many sketches should you do in this step? More than you need. “You’re looking for a total ‘brain dump,’” Glitschka says. “There’s no bad idea at this stage of the game. Anything goes. You’ll weed out the weak ones in the next step. Just let the floodgates open and allow your creativity to ooze onto the paper.”

4 REFINEMENT

Here’s where you prune your work down to the strongest creative ideas. Glitschka advises using what he calls the “Rule of Five.”

“In this step, I go through and select what I feel are the five strongest concepts and designs,” he says. “These are the ones I will refine and develop further.”

Keep working with your sketches on paper, refining them until you have the concept and art exactly as you want it. The goal here is to get your work to a place where it will be easy to translate digitally.

How do you know when you’re ready to stop refining? “If you’re not sure, you’re not done,” he says. “Once you think you have your design refined, step away from it for a few hours or a day. Then revisit it with fresh eyes. When you’re doing this, you’re art-directing your own work and will see what can be improved upon.”

When you’re going through your sketches, don’t discard the ones that don’t make the cut. “Put these sketches in a folder and save them for another project,” Glitschka says. “I have a file called ‘Lost Ideas’ where I archive old thumbnail sketches.”

5 EXECUTION

It’s only now—in Step Five—that Glitschka will sanction using your computer. So go ahead and pick up your mouse (we know you’ve been dying to) and start converting your chosen sketch into the digital realm.

“If you’ve spent enough time refining your work, then all you need to do is scan it and build it,” Glitschka says. “The heavy lifting, creatively speaking, has already taken place outside of the box.”

6 WRAP IT UP

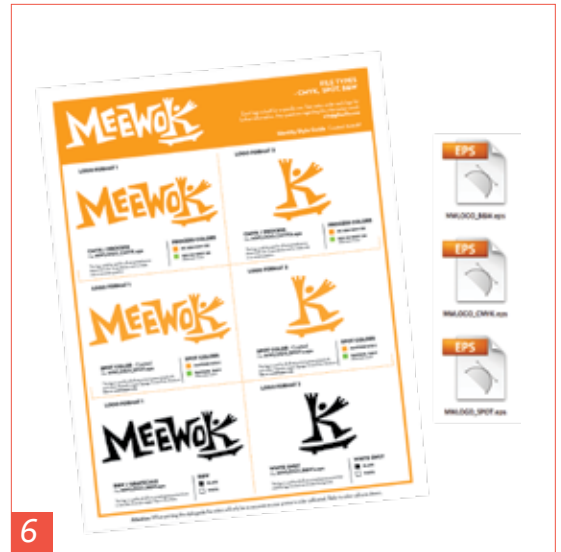
Once your work is digitized and ready for client review, don’t assume you’re done. Be sure to take the time to adequately present, deliver and archive your work.

For instance, don’t just hand off your comps and expect your client to make sense out of them. “Take the time to properly write a description for each direction that’s clear and specific, relaying your thoughts and reasoning behind each design approach,” Glitschka says. “Explain everything so the client thoroughly understands your vision. This will help them capture the same vision and build trust.”

And make sure that everything you’ve created meets



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STYLE GUIDE

For small business owners like this, I put together a simple PDF style guide that explains how to use their logo in various forms for different vendor types. I do this to help small business owners keep their identity consistent as they produce new materials and allow the process to be self-managed by my client instead of me. They simply provide the PDF to the vendor and then the vendor tells them which logo to send.

your client's specs. For instance, ensure that your file is in CMYK for print, spot for limited printing or RGB for screen/web graphics. Label your layers, clean up your files and archive. Glitschka says, "I save an .eps of everything I do because in five years, I have no idea if the software company will allow for five-year-old native files to work in the new application. But a universal format like .eps will."

A MORE CREATIVE YOU

Due to time constraints, habit or sheer laziness, you may be tempted to skip some of Glitschka's steps. You may want to sketch on your computer or not at all. You may want to deliver the files and trust your client to respond accordingly. Or you may think that you'll get around to archiving those files later.

But give this method—in its entirety—a shot at least once. You may be surprised by the new directions that illustrative design takes your work. Getting into the habit of following this process will make you overall more productive, creative and organized. And give your computer a much-needed break. **HOW**

Lisa Hazen is a Chicago-based web designer and writer who is a happy convert to the illustrative design process. www.lisahazen.com

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Download handy worksheets for more tips to streamlining your design process (including a copy of the creative brief Glitschka uses) at HOWdesign.com/article/illustratedesign.