

# THE RATIONALE FOR PROFESSIONAL DESIGN

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raphic design is a business that often involves activities and results whose effectiveness can't easily be quantified and measured.

Yet, in today's economy, every client must look for ways to economize. Our firm is sometimes asked to examine our quality approach and the traditional ways we address our clients' problems and opportunities.

So let us share with you a few thoughts about what graphic design can accomplish and what its true value is.

## COMMUNICATION

Asked to define jazz, Louis Armstrong said, "You'll know it when you hear it." We feel the same way about good design.

What we can say, authoritatively, is this: good graphic design is not about style or fashion. First and foremost, it is about communication. And it should always have a direct, bottom-line effect on any organization's business.

How much more value does a quickly- and easily-communicated visual message have over one that's neither? Frankly, we don't know the answer. But we do know that there is a commercial imperative today for graphic design quality and distinction.

Like it or not, we live in a world that is over-communicated, and we must use media that are excessively cluttered. The only way to combat this condition is through design that not only distinguishes an organization, but that quickly communicates its many messages well.

## IMAGE

We also know that good graphic design is about image building. Over time, all products and organizations develop personalities, just as individuals do. Positive personalities (images and brands) are often among the most important properties any organization possesses.

In today's world, not to try to reinforce positive ones, or to strengthen weak ones, is to leave a positioning vacuum soon filled by competitors. Being constantly attentive to image and brand building is one of the ways smaller organizations get bigger, and bigger organizations stay on top.

Creating strong, visual identities is what we do. Our experience tells us that it is a function far too important today to trust to chance, or a low bidder.

## VALUE

Because we are talented and trained professionals, our work does not come cheap. But please don't confuse cost with value. Perhaps it is a cliché to say that you get what you pay for, but that doesn't make it any less true.

When you contract for graphic design, most of what you end up paying for is time. And most design time is executional in nature—i.e., "working things out." This process does not vary greatly from individual to individual, or from firm to firm. In a service business, there are few economies of scale or shortcuts.

The result is that the difference between inexpensive and expensive design is in the *value* of time expended. This is a direct function of how much talent, training, and experience it encompasses.

Also consider this: except for the very smallest of jobs, design

fees are usually a fraction of total job costs (printing, media, etc., are the big ones). Thus, the *incremental* difference of opting for outstanding design versus a mediocre equivalent typically only increases costs 5% to 7% on a small brochure, ad, or Web site; less than 1% on an annual report, ad campaign, or major Web site.

Viewed from the bottom-line perspective, a small additional investment in design quality produces an ROI that is sure to warm the heart of even the toughest comptroller.

## FLEXIBILITY

Our business is constantly changing, mostly because of more powerful computers and software. Unfortunately, they don't lower costs. Any new efficiencies or time savings are more than exceeded by the costs of keeping up with new technology.

Better computers and software also don't make good design any easier. Design is, as it always has been, a business of problem-solving. And machines don't solve problems. (We're reminded of a saying ascribed to another jazzman, Duke Ellington: "It is not the piano that makes great music; it is the person sitting at the piano.")

The primary benefit of new technology to our clients is increased flexibility. It allows us to provide more solutions, options, and ideas. Occasionally, even more quickly.

For all these reasons, we are excited about what graphic design can accomplish for any organization. And we are particularly excited about how we can make it happen for *you*.