Cdesignwork: A Nautical Self-Promotion

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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Abstract

The professional discipline of graphic design is a complex synthesis of opposites. In the process of producing design pieces creative expression meets a strict budget, while idealistic artistic license can often combat the harsh reality of the business world. The single universal goal of all design mediums is communication. In this equation of sorts there are really only three variables: who is beginning the communication, what is being communicated, and to whom the communication is intended. As design graduates enter the workforce, they must communicate which specific characteristics as people they possess to qualify them as the best candidate for career openings at given companies. I have produced a holistic piece to communicate what I bring to a design company in the areas of personality and professional competence. My history and passion for living and working are intangible concepts I attempt to convey through the piece.
Acknowledgements

-I want to thank Mr. Fred Bower for advising me through this project, maturing me as a designer, and being a friend of mine for three years. He has been extremely helpful in teaching me how to think, and not just spoon-feeding me advice to beef up my portfolio.

-I would like to thank my parents for supporting me in school financially and in life generally. And also a thanks goes to my sister in helping to shape me into who I am today.

-This thesis or my entire senior year's successes would not have been possible without the love and support of my wonderful fiancé. Shannon has stood behind me with a gentle nudge through both good days and no-so-good, and for that I will always be grateful.
The first step in the design process is to evaluate and narrow down the target audience for my self-promotional piece. I will be mailing these pieces to potential employers, both creative directors in design firms and presidents of smaller printing companies interested in hiring a production artist. Creative directors are most interested in just that—creativity—and will not even look twice at a cliché idea or conceptually boring piece. Presidents of printing companies or other types of companies needing an in-house designer are not amused by gimmicks and can be very turned off by "artsy" design. Therefore my self-promotional piece must satisfy both a creative thirst while staying in-bounds and not being a distraction.

Since a self-promotional piece is a tool of communicating a said idea to a target audience, I had to decide what it was specifically that I wanted to communicate. In a brainstorming session I wrote down some of my attributes on which I might want to focus on communicating: dependability, creativity, humility, having already been proven, passion for boating and the outdoors, working well as part of a team, and immediately being able to make an impact for my first employer. I decided to focus on communicating my dependability, having already been proven, and immediate ability to make an impact wherever I start working. I wanted to also include somehow both my faith in God and some specific information about myself, as I believe such uniqueness is required to allow me to stand out from the crowd of eager young professionals seeking the same jobs.

As far as concepts for the project, it took me quite awhile to decide which would be the most effective. I have included in this thesis a handwritten brainstorming session where I thought of five possible concepts. In the end I decided to abandon all of these ideas and run with a
nautical theme, as water has always been a special part of my life in helping to energize me. I immediately dug up old photographs of myself, as such pictures would give my project the personal touch for which I was going. I then wrote text to match each image, emphasizing what unique characteristic I embodied.

With the nautical theme in mind, I had to decide in what package I wanted to deliver such a concept. I had seen several other self-promotional pieces from other graduating graphic design seniors, as well as from a graphic designer my mother worked with in Indianapolis. I would say that these were my primary sources of inspiration and guidance for this project. It seemed to me that the most effective self-promotional pieces included some sort of actual tangible object, as opposed to a mere booklet or brochure. I found unfinished wooden boxes at Hobby Lobby that I could stain with a wood stain, and I began looking on the Internet for different nautical objects that I could afford and would fit into said boxes. My options included miniature anchors, miniature steering wheels, compasses, and dock cleats. I could not find any miniature anchors or steering wheels, and my advisor and I decided that compasses would be too cliché. That left dock cleats, a unique and relatively inexpensive object that is substantial and elegant. In deciding between the finishes of black, silver and brass, I chose the latter because of its association with the traditional and its contrast to the dark-stained wooden box.

At this point it was time to get on the computer. I scanned in my photographs and typed in the text I had written to match, and then began designing an appropriate look. My personality is simple and honest, and I went for a look that matched. Working with my advisor for this thesis, I worked with the typography to ensure that aesthetically pleasing textual pages would accompany my already strong family photographs. I produced several drafts of the booklet, stained the boxes, installed the cleats into said boxes, and printed and assembled the booklet. Since I cannot accurately print on both sides of the paper of the booklets I was
forced to cut out each page, put spray adhesive on one of the sides, and glue together the front with the back of each page. To bind the booklet I simply stapled and covered the left side with a strip of blue hockey tape.

The practical aspects of this senior graphic design project involved me producing ten of these projects, packing them safely in boxes and shipping them to actual potential employers. Additionally, I had the benefit of being able to show this project to a working graphic designer from Indianapolis during the annual Senior Graphic Design Portfolio Review Night. The gentleman who reviewed my portfolio and this project was extremely impressed with the quality of concept and production of the piece. He said that he quickly made the connection between the gracefulness and reliability of the dock cleat and me being a graduating graphic designer.
Self-Promo Ideas

- Have small samples, so Co. can see my work before I go out there again
- "break the world" imagery
  - Cool wooden box w/ broken mold of a mouse
  - Maybe include
- "hire me, it's only natural" concept
  - Natural paper stocks
  - Outdoorsy, camping/panoramic feel
  - Shots of Colorado, shots of me, shots of me there
- Emphasize dependability + hard work
  - Put smaller cards in a cut-out back pocket of old jeans... "I'm the type of designer you'd want to keep roots in your back pocket"
- "it's a boy" idea... cigar/polaroids of work
  - Conception of an idea
  - Baby designer, emphasizing potential
- BIG concept
  - Big feet, big hands... show somehow (maybe how my hands are the same size as M.Jordan's)
  - Big ideas
  - Big picture thinker
Just when I thought I couldn't keep going, I ran the other 13.1 miles.

Lots of people know how to ski, but few know how to get up on their first try.

A hundred miles away from the nearest road, it was upon my shoulders that my family placed their trust.

When you face a challenge, always come prepared. I'll never forget that little Boy Scout lesson.
Just when I thought I couldn't keep going, I ran the other 13.1 miles.

Lots of people know how to fish, but few know how to fish at 25 miles an hour.

"God-bless-us-amen-lets-eat." My prayer at age six shows communicating clearly what is important has always been my top priority.

When you face a challenge, always come prepared. I'll never forget that little Boy Scout lesson.

A hundred miles away from the nearest road, it was upon my shoulders that my family placed their trust.
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A hundred miles away from the nearest road, it was upon my shoulders that my family placed its trust.
Sources of Inspiration

- Kate E. Brockman, professional graphic designer. kbdesign@indy.rr.com.

- Graphic designers in the **Fontism** era, namely Pete McCraken and Stephen Farrell.

- Robert Nakata, professional graphic designer, namely the *Heinz Ketchup model degree project.*