



DESIGN DYNAMICS



Designing Your Business

[By Rebecca Brian]

Poorly executed design is easy to spot. As design professionals, it often seems that poor quality work gazes at us from virtually every corner, whether we are inspecting labels at the local drug store or trying to decipher the map of the monkey exhibit at the children's zoo.

Your clients may even present you with shoddy work that had been performed for them in the past. This can often make your job easier because this is something you can see. When you meet a prospect at a networking event (and by networking event, I mean everything from formal business networking functions, to your brother's wedding, to the upcoming Super Bowl party), the second you exchange business cards you often have a strong sense as to whether you have a future client on your hands. Is his/her business card screaming for a makeover? Does it exist at all? Is it so beautifully designed that you know that a first-rate presentation is a strong priority for this person? The answers to these questions, and so many more, are sitting right there in your hand, begging to be critiqued by an expert such as yourself!

The first step is to assess your prospect — is he/she sensitive or will a modest serving of blunt criticism be well received? To navigate some of the thornier of these judgment calls, I often rely on the term "effective" to both help smooth over harsher criticism and avoid stepping on toes. A discussion focused on the merits of a certain design for a business card can be a very useful segue into a larger exploration of the other types of marketing materials that this particular company offers its clients. This type of conversation just as often exposes the lack of such materials. Does the company have a website? A brochure? An active eblast campaign? What other industry-specific suggestions can you

offer on the fly to increase your perceived value to this prospect?

After your brief conversation, be sure to mark down on the back of the card quick keywords to serve as reminders about what was discussed and about any specific projects the prospect showed interest in talking about further in the future. I mark the cards representing professionals who expressed interest in specific possible projects with an asterisk to signify that these individuals are a high priority for follow-up purposes.

A cardinal sin is committed every time you spend precious time and money to meet and develop prospects for your firm's products and services without conducting the follow-up necessary to close these accounts after the event. Within 24 hours of the initial meeting, shoot a quick email letting the prospect know you had a great time talking to him or her. Make sure that this email references a few personal details that you learned during your conversation (check the keywords that you wrote on the back of the prospect's business card to trigger your memory for helpful hints). Also mention in this email that you would love to add the prospect to your list to make it easier to keep in touch (adding prospects without their okay is spam), and suggest that you both grab some coffee to further explore the specific project in which interest had been expressed. If no specific projects came out of the conversation, don't worry about coffee, but make sure they are on your list.

This list is your most important marketing tool. Why? Your list is as good as gold. For example, we just reconnected with a woman I met at an event over three years ago. I had forgotten about the meeting completely, but she knew all about my design firm and what we've been up to for the past few years because she has been receiving our short, snappy eblasts during this entire period. She didn't have any need for our services for over three years but now needs a website, and we have a meeting scheduled for next week. You never know how your list is working for you, or who reads a blast the moment after they realize they need a designer. We get calls and emails for appointments after *every single* blast that gets sent out.

Remember that in the design business, like in most other industries, developing relationships requires high levels of industriousness, energy, and creativity. These are usually the traits that led us to pursue design-related fields in the first place.

Good luck, Rebecca.

About the Author

Rebecca founded Tribeca Designs in the summer of 2002, three months after graduating from UPenn. What began as an come-what-may project has blossomed into an incredibly rewarding business, which celebrated its fifth anniversary this past summer.



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In an effort to find like-minded designers and business owners, Rebecca co-founded Spark, an organization focused on learning and using "best design and business practices" for the graphic design community. She also co-founded Books that Build, a not-for-profit

focused on "rescuing" children's outgrown libraries to redistribute to at-risk youth in New York City.

In her spare time Rebecca is (very slowly) learning to cook, spending a lot of time with

friends and family, and working her way through as many great restaurants in NYC as possible.

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