Defining Design Essay, Research Paper

defining design

Graphic Design, so what exactly do you do? This is the reply that I invariably receive from anyone who enquires as to what it is that I study. The simple fact is that most people have very little idea of what graphic design actually entails and this is primarily due to their lack of understanding of the term design . For a practise that carries such deep-seated global importance Graphic Design is a term that while familiar to most remains largely undefined.

In its most basic form, the definition of Graphic Design involves the systematic planning of graphic forms, essentially referring to the deliberate and careful structuring that results in work that can by definition be neither random nor without meaning. Graphic Design is a visual language that communicates through use of shape, colour, type, images and symbols and it is therefore through this communication that meaning is present. Messages are deliberately constructed through such techniques as a means of reaching and affecting a targeted audience.

The average person rarely gives it a single thought, but everyday they are surrounded by thousands of different examples of Graphic Design that spans every single form of the discipline, from printing to packaging to everyday signage. Impossible to escape, Graphic Design is a part of virtually every product and advertisement as well as communication mediums such as newspapers and broadcasting. So ingrained into our everyday lives is graphic design, that this may in fact be the very reason as to why it is largely taken for granted. Perhaps this is the way good design should be, unobtrusive, functional and aesthetically pleasing.

The importance of graphic design along with its wide reaching effects is clearly illustrated through advertising, as it is through this practice that we see the most dramatic implications. In a global society where consumerism is the predominant driving force it is easy to realise that visual communication as rendered by design is of key significance. In order to sustain the continued expansion and development of our culture it is necessary that consumer demand for new and improved products and services be stimulated in order to fuel national and global economies, something that has a knock-on effect in ensuring continued forward development in all areas of life. It is in this role that the designer becomes a catalyst for cultural and social development.

In order to stimulate demand for a given product, the designer is first faced with the task of establishing what factors may be involved in persuading consumers that making a purchase will positively affect their lives. Perhaps the most important aspect of the task, once completed this will allow the designer to construct and present specific messages and concepts that will influence consumers fears, weaknesses and desires. Such influential communication can always be achieved through conscious, obvious messages, but is just as often fashioned through well-planned semiotic devices such as colour, shape, images and other more indirectly indicated symbolism.

While the surface message presented by a designer will be a key factor attributed to influencing a consumer it is the hidden meaning, below the surface, which can often be of greater significance. When communicating the virtues of a particular product it is not simply enough to plainly list its benefits, especially when it is possible through semiotics to cultivate a feeling of genuine quality and prestige. When designing packaging for tea, for example, a designer may attempt to instil in the consumer the belief that such a product has a rich, longstanding heritage of prestige and quality. This can be achieved through use of symbolism including traditional styling along with devices such as a coat of arms or a written history.

Some see such booming consumerism for which design is to a large extent responsible as merely a form of irresponsible opportunism. However many would argue that rather than this being the truth, it is in fact much more a case of social necessity. In modern society, consumers are faced with an almost overwhelming variety of choice when it comes to making purchases of any kind whether essential or not, and while far from complicating life, this instead allows us the all the ability to express our own identity. Furthermore it creates an opportunity for individuals to aspire to an improved lifestyle, a by-product of what could be seen as a design-led social revolution of sorts.

Historically design has not always played such an important role in product development, but in more recent times manufacturers and corporations have come to value the notion that good design is an exceedingly valuable tool. As a means of creating a corporate identity among consumers graphic design plays an indispensable role, and far from just being tools of communication, designers are now appreciated for their ability to generate instantly recognisable visual messages of quality values and goodwill.

Designs role in society extends far beyond that of simply enabling spiralling consumerism. In what has come to be known as the information age, ever increasing importance has been placed on the value of information and communication. The advent of the World Wide Web has seen the world become a smaller place, almost anyone, anywhere in the world has been given the power to publish to an audience that consists of the entire human population.

This revolution has meant that the tools for Internet publishing are available to anyone and everyone, and while this ensures that this new form of communication is unrestricted, it also means that such tools are widely used by those with neither the skills nor the understanding required to communicate effectively in this new medium. This has inturn seen greater emphasis placed on the role of the graphic designer by organizations and corporations seeking to maximise their use of the Internet. Such parties recognise the fact that while virtually anyone is capable of creating this new electronic media, as with more traditional forms of publishing, its use is effective only when coupled with the knowledge and skills possessed by trained communicators.

Just like the printed page, the electronic page benefits from both aesthetics and hierarchy, however along with the advent of the somewhat abstract concept of the hyperlink, equal emphasis must be placed on navigation. This fact is one that sees the designers role move from just that of communicator to that of guide as well. Where the linearity of a book ensures that in most cases the path travelled by the audience is that intended and created by the author, this new electronic media with its self serve premise, ensures the need for the designer to establish and maintain a degree of accessibility. Not only responsible for effective and meaningful communication, the designer must now take charge of directing an audience while at the same time allowing for and cultivating choice, just one example of the designers continually increasing relevance in society.

The role of the designer continues to evolve and never has this been more evident than in recent years. The great irony is that the exact same forces whether, social or economic, that are changing design, were in the beginning, caused by design, this fact itself is tribute to the disciplines importance. However in a world increasingly reliant on the spread of information along with cultural development, it is undoubtedly the case that good, unobtrusive design and those who fabricate it will continue to be recognised as important catalysts in the unstoppable charge for improved living.