FULL TIME
GRAPHIC
DESIGN

A comprehensive guide for strategically obtaining
a full time graphic design position

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BELIEVING IT'S POSSIBLE

It was May of 2008 and I was weeks away from walking across the stage to receive my BFA in Graphic Design from SCAD Savannah. At the same time, the US happened to be experiencing one of the worst recessions in recent history. Of course, I didn't realize how bad it was because I was in college, and who listens to the news when they're in art school?

I knew I had to get a job though. The rest of my family was in Upstate NY - and although my entire childhood was spent there, the choice of SCAD Savannah was a conscious effort to leave the NY winters behind me..forever, and without a job, I would most likely be heading back (which wasn't an option). Cue anxiety. Cue urgency. Cute depression, exhaustion, doubt...hope.

If you've ever experienced the desire to find a graphic design job, or attempted to obtain one, you're familiar with those friendly emotional cues. It seems every cool place you'd want to work for asks for experience and has award winning work. And you're never sure how your work stacks up to your competition for the same positions. How do I get them to notice me? Did they throw my email away? Even if you were to get an interview, you freak out trying to prepare - is what I'm presenting good enough? Do they like my work? There's so much riding on this...

The process is stressful to say the least.

I get it.

When I tried finding my first job, thousands of people (with experience) were losing their jobs. And I was asking for one. With no experience. With a portfolio filled with fictitious clients. With student loans I would soon be paying.

But,
I got one.

No matter what you're facing, I'm here to encourage you that it's possible. It doesn't matter if you're self taught. It doesn't matter if you only have a 2 year degree under your belt. It doesn't matter if your resume wouldn't impress anyone.

What *does* matter, is your portfolio. It's the designer's true business card, resume, and cover letter all baked into one. Within the portfolio, it's easy for a potential boss to see your passion, skill, desire, and your drive to be a professional graphic designer. Your portfolio is a reflection of you. With passion, a strong work ethic, and the refusal to make excuses, you can get that graphic design job. You can get a full time salary + benefits. You can stop worrying about never hitting your full potential because no one's ever given you the chance. You can do it.

I'm going to show you how.

CHAPTER 4
THE RIGHT FIT

So! We now have a great looking portfolio playing to our strengths as a designer. Now it's time to figure out who we're going to send it to!

Consider this part 2 of your personal creative brief. We've problem solved how to show what job we're looking for to play to our strengths, but now we need to reflect on what kind of environment and location we need that job to exist in, if we're going to be happy.

When you think about yourself as a person, outside of your passions as a designer, what makes you happy? Small town suburbs or big city living? What about climate? All 4 seasons or year round green grass? Figuring out the answers to these simple questions first will help to start narrowing the field where the job search will begin.

Now that you've narrowed down how big of a city you'd like to be in and what kind of climate is ideal, it's time to focus on the environment of the studio. Big firm or small firm? Agency or Inhouse?

The agency or inhouse comparison has always been a discussion topic, and as a designer who has worked in both environments, here's how I would compare them:

Pros for Agency:

• Work with larger companies on a bunch of different projects/campaigns.

• Lots of collaboration between creatives: designers, writers, programmers, etc.

• You learn a lot about different industries in a short amount of time

• You'll be hired with a specific job to perform at large agencies

Cons for Agency:

• The work you're tasked with isn't always exciting

• Time management is crucial when working on projects for multiple clients at a time

• raises/bonuses rely on how many and how big the projects the agency brings in each year

- You'll be hired with a specific job to perform at large agencies (wearing many hats may be more in line with your personal needs. If this is the case - look for a small agency or inhouse position)

Pros for Inhouse:

- It's easy to get into the groove of things once you become familiar with the product and the company's positioning (aka quicker artwork approvals, fewer revisions)
- Learning experience: you get an idea of how a company with a specific product markets and promotes their products
- More financial stability with raises/bonuses/benefits each year working for a company with a proven product
- The opportunity many times to work in areas outside of your specialty (wear more design hats)

Cons for Inhouse:

- The work can get dull after awhile/monotonous always promoting the same product
- It's difficult to build a varied portfolio for future graphic design jobs when all of your professional work centers around one company's product
- In a smaller company, there are fewer creatives to bounce ideas off of/be inspired by

Once you finish your personal reflection on the size of the city/town you'd like to live in, the climate for that area, how big of a firm/studio you'd like to work for, whether or not you'd prefer inhouse or agency, and you apply the area of design you're strongest in, you can say you've officially filtered the field.

Even if you don't get to check every box of what you're looking for, this is a great place to start to check some of the boxes you know will lead to your personal happiness. Trust me when I say, just because you get a full time graphic design job does not automatically mean you're happy every day.

When you begin your job search, start with location (the first two questions you answered above). Then start your googling for agencies that fit what you're looking for, or companies that have a great reputation that will need the services of an inhouse graphic designer. When you come upon possibilities, see which "happiness" boxes they check for you.

When searching for companies that are actively looking for graphic designers (online job boards), the best resources I recommend are:

Creative Hotlist (creativehotlist.com)
This is Communication Arts magazine's job listing site. You can narrow by location, experience, and design

CHAPTER 5
THE REACH

Ok! So far:

- We have a super strong portfolio highlighting our strengths as a designer and displaying our well-roundedness
- We know what part of the country/world we'd be happiest working in, we have an idea of the size of the city + firm we'd like to be in AND we're leaning either towards a job in an agency or one inhouse
- We've dug around the internet for info on firms we're interested in, we've scoured job boards for positions that fit our wants, needs and specific skillsets AND we now have a list of places we'd like to reach out to.

You're killing it on preparation. Treat yourself to an ice cream or a delicious beverage. You've earned it.

So, we have a list. When you don't have a personal connection to any of the locations you listed (the whole, 'it's who you know' deal), you basically have two options to make yourself known to the creative director or person who would interview and hire you: a cold email and/or a promo mailer.

While it's wise to do both, a cold email keeps costs lower if you're applying to a bunch of places. Not only do you have to put up postage for a mailer, you also need to factor in the cost of production, whatever the mailer might be. If you choose to do mailers, I would reserve them to just your top picks, unless you have it in your budget to send more. If you don't have a budget for mailers, don't stress over it.

That leaves us with the free option of a cold email. This free option, however, is also available to your competition, aka others applying for the same position you'd like to obtain. Because you'll be in an inbox with countless others, we have to make your presence count and stand out in every way possible.

Since we need to craft a cold email worthy of being opened among all the others, let's take a look at some actual cold emails to see what you'll be up against. No kidding, on the next few pages, these are 100% real:

CHAPTER 6
IT'S A DATE

If it's been over a week since you sent your email, you followed up with another email and still haven't heard back, it's time to move on. They've either already filled the position, are too busy to entertain interviews, or considered you the wrong fit and didn't want to take the time to break it to you (which is their loss, obviously ;)

But let's say your cold email did work and they've reached out to you. You're almost there! This is awesome for three reasons you should be very proud of yourself for:

• Your work was acknowledged by a place you admire and made the first cut

• You have a real shot at obtaining the position you desire

• Even if this position doesn't end up being the right fit, you'll be getting interview experience, which will help you to interview even better for future positions (no matter how much you practice on your own, nothing beats actual interview practice)

Don't go into an interview seeing it as a win or lose, you've already won by having your work acknowledged and you can only win more.

Not every position is the right fit for everyone. I remember being soooo bummed by not landing a job I interviewed for the last time I was looking. I had my heart fully set on working in that studio. I did land the next job I interviewed for (which wasn't my first choice), and that's how I got to create work for Coca-Cola, Visa and three Olympic games. I also met my husband working there.

Things always have a way of working themselves out. Have faith in that and don't let any disappointment you face affect how hard you continue to work towards your goals.

But let's get back to this interview opportunity. When you receive a response, here are some tips:

• If you receive a response right away (as in, within 24 hours of sending your email) and you're asked to

WANT MORE? CLICK THE BUTTON!

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