



N-HOUSE ISSUES

ADVICE FROM THE INSIDE

Being a Mac user in a Windows world, bringing projects in-house and jazzing up boring assignments.

SWITCHING FROM WINDOWS TO MAC

How do you persuade a Windows-based design group to go Macintosh? I started in Windows 12 years ago then went Mac, but with my new job I'm back to Windows. I sure miss my Mac. Not only was it easier to use, but I feel it decreased my turnaround time.

Wade Mickley Multimedia Developer
NEWPORT NEWS, VA

Chip Pearson responds: There are many good reasons to use a Mac for design, and if you have to make the argument to other designers, you might try the following two strategies.

First, design software is developed primarily for the Mac and, historically, Mac users have enjoyed either

more fully featured software or software that's released on the Mac first. Photoshop, PageMaker, Illustrator and QuarkXPress all started as Mac programs and then added PC functionality later. Many plug-ins and other design-software solutions are available for the Mac only. Are you missing out on time-saving innovations because they aren't developed for the PC?

The other strategy I would explore is your upstream and downstream providers. If you're working with freelance designers or an external agency, what OS are they using? Have you had any conversion issues when receiving artwork? How about your service bureaus or printers? Are you slowing down your workflow because your external partners have difficulty communicating with you? A greater degree of compatibility with

ILLUSTRATION BY GARY CLARK FOR HOWDESIGN.COM



design partners can be a convincing reason to make a platform change.

I've been a Mac user at home for more than 17 years but have accepted jobs that required me to use my PC skills as well. Primarily, I was willing to overcome an inferior technology environment because the pay, overtime or parking were too good to pass up. If you've found yourself in a similar Faustian dilemma, where you've accepted your compensation and you want to renegotiate, the answer is simple: Too bad.

In the session I conducted at the InHOWse Designer Conference last fall, several people said they declined job offers from companies that required them to use a PC. I salute them! Setting high standards is one way to ensure that whatever you do flourishes. If the folks working in your shop like using a PC for design (along with jogging in combat boots and declaring every last item at customs) then it sounds like you need to run with a different crowd.

For them, change may be scary, the unknown may be a hassle, and the time and expense required to implement a new technology solution might be insurmountable. If you like everything else about your job, then roll with it. Quit complaining and touting the superiority of the admittedly superior Mac. You're doing yourself and those around you no good by being unhappy in a situation where everyone else is happy.

Now, if your group is trying to convince the IT department to let you use Macs, that's an entirely different story, for another day.

Chip Pearson is responsible for strategy and business growth at JAMF Software, creator of the Casper Suite management system for the Mac. He holds technical certificates from Apple, Compaq and Microsoft, chip@jamfsoftware.com

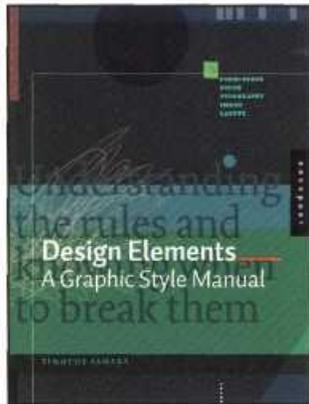
BRINQINQ DESIGN IN-HOUSE

After receiving my degree in graphic design and advertising, I gained employment as a technical illustrator at a manufacturing company. Although this isn't exactly what I wanted to do, I was anxious to get a job and the benefits were good. To make a long story short, I now find myself doing a lot of the creative jobs I'd hoped for, but I'm still responsible for the technical illustrations. Typically, when the marketing department goes over budget they start asking me to design ads and promotional materials. I'm often told by people within the company that my work is just as good as, or even better than, what they've seen from ad agencies. I'd like to concentrate on the more creative projects and start an in-house graphics department, but I'm not sure how to do this. I've expressed my wishes to the marketing director and pointed out the cost savings of doing more advertising in-house, but so far I've not been successful. He seems very protective of the ad agencies even though I explained that I'm not proposing to bring all advertising in-house, just what makes sense. How can I convince management of the benefits of an in-house graphics department?

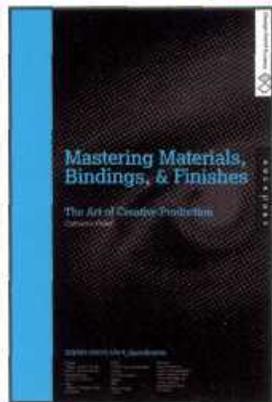
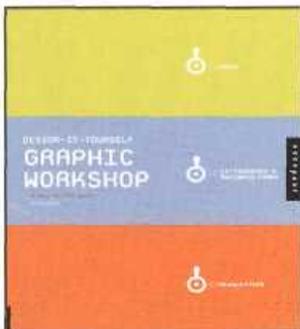
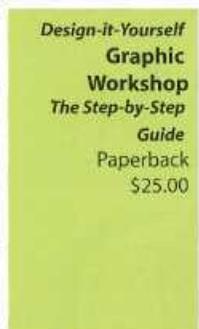
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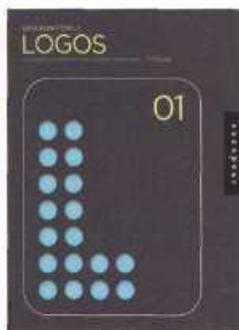
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"Build your reputation by becoming more visible in your company and in local business organizations, strengthening your company's visibility at the same time."

MICHELLE LIVINGSTON

Michelle Livingston responds: Speaking from the experience of moving design and advertising in-house as marketing director for a retail company, I would imagine your marketing director has reservations about taking even a small step in that direction. Switching to in-house is risky and challenging, and it could potentially strain business relationships. The marketing director might be concerned that change could happen as a result of your suggestion and he lacks the authority to make that decision or to control the outcome.

Take one small step at a time. Consider the response to one of your suggestions before offering more ideas. Demonstrate you're ready for more responsibility by staying organized. If you aren't doing so already, suggest the implementation of a job-ticket system to help juggle deadlines, since you've been getting a larger number of design requests. (In designer terms, use creative briefs to manage the production schedule.)

Offer to do your best to help the department plan ahead and stay within budget. Ask if you can submit a bid at the onset of a design project, preferably one that's similar to what you've done before. Perhaps a couple of comparable projects could be planned and budgeted next year to be done in-house.

Build your reputation by becoming more visible in your company and in local business organizations, strengthening your company's visibility at the same time. Get involved in organizations such as InSource and local chapters of the AIGA and the Advertising Federation. Keep your design skills up to date with classes or training. Submit work to the company newsletter and design or advertising competitions.

Create a portfolio of your in-house design projects and display framed samples in your office area, along with any awards, certificates or articles—design-related, not technical illustration-related. Keep your radar up for opportunities to get an expert opinion on your work. For example, I gave my business card (designed in-house) to a business editor for a local newspaper, and she asked to use it for a design story on business cards. The article was written by owners of local design firms, and our company's design got a great review. I displayed the article in my office and submitted it to our company newsletter.

Cost isn't really the issue here; it's value. To make the case for taking a few projects in-house, demonstrate the key values that set you apart from an ad agency, including thorough, inside knowledge of the 39»

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company and its communication goals, and focus and dedication to one account.

Gather any metrics on the success of ads or promotional materials you've designed. Document positive feedback, new sales leads or increases in revenue. Assemble evidence of your effectiveness so that the marketing director will have the information and the desire to go to bat for you. Whatever happens, you'll have prepared yourself for a more creative career.

As marketing *director* since 1999, *Michelle Livingston* oversees marketing, advertising, graphic design, promotions, public relations and the website for *Buffalo Exchange*, a resale clothing store chain with 28 stores and three franchises in 12 states. mlivmgston@bufex.com

SPICING UP BORING PROJECTS

I've been working in-house for two years, and have been designing and redesigning the same projects day in and day out. I basically have three projects that are cyclical: a a6-page, three-color cover, two-color inside sales brochure; a black-and-white catalog section; and the company website, along with sporadic advertisements and addendums. I try to throw in some flair to the old routine, but I'm routinely reverted back to the basic layout that has been in effect since before I was an employee. My boss loves things plain, centered and bland, opting for universal centered text on nearly everything, having me "plug in" products on existing

"Make your client feel like their project is as important to you as it is to them. Getting them to feel like you're their partner is half the battle."

KEITH FINCH

ads, choosing colors that are garish and constantly reminding me that he's an old fogey who likes things his way. Is this common practice for in-house bosses? What should I do to try to give some creative ingenuity to these otherwise boring projects?

Michael Caputo Designer

FORKED RIVER, NJ

Keith Finch responds: Working in-house has its good and bad aspects. On the positive side, an in-house designer has the opportunity to focus on the products and industry of one company, something that is next to impossible for a designer in an agency setting. On the negative side, in-house designers work exclusively on the goods and products of one company, usually with a single style and a smaller number of clients.

Fortunately, I haven't had any bosses like the one you mentioned, but I have had my share of difficult clients. There are some I've been able to ease into a more designer-friendly attitude, while others simply don't play (or work) well with others.

Here are a few approaches I've used in the past with generally positive results:

We're in this together. Make your client feel like their project is as important to you as it is to them. Getting them to feel like you're their partner is half the battle.

Small compromises usually aren't the end of the world. Don't roll over for every suggestion, but be willing to make some small changes if they're practical. Most clients enjoy feeling that they contributed something to the look of the project.

Undersell and over-perform. Be conservative when giving deliverables' estimates. If you're able to deliver well in advance of the estimated time, the client will feel like you've given their project top priority.

Unfortunately, it sounds like this boss may not respond to these tactics. In this circumstance, you must take your case to the highest court—your consumers. Conduct focus group testing to measure your new design concepts against the boss's "plain, centered and bland" approach. Compare both approaches against materials from your competitors.

If you aren't able to organize a formal focus group, gather some of your fellow employees and conduct an informal one. Pull out the key findings and results and develop a short summary for your boss. Doing any kind of focus group testing will add more weight to your arguments.

If these tactics are successful, it's important to develop a brand guide to serve as the definitive reference and get buy-in from upper management. There have been many times that I've referred to "The Brand Book" and thus avoided making unnecessary changes.

When I felt restricted by the routine of in-house design, I looked for another creative outlet—designing rock posters. I didn't get paid, but the poster projects were incredible opportunities to experiment and break away from the norm.

Here are a couple of other options:

Do some freelance work. This can develop your client interaction and design skills.

Find a nonprofit organization in your community and offer your services. Most nonprofits would love to have help from a professional designer.

Don't feel totally helpless. There are ways to cope with difficult clients... and even difficult bosses. BOW

As an in-house designer since J 997, Keith Finch is involved with implementing and overseeing branding across multiple applications for BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee and its subsidiary companies, keifh_/mch@bcbsr.com

If you have an in-house question *please e-mail it to* megan.patricfe@fvvpubs.com. If you'd like to be added to our list of in-house veterans, *please send an e-mail* describing your background and experience.