

# How to get a career in graphic design

As a young graphic designer, it's tempting to imagine there's a single set of rules to follow that will enable you to achieve gratification, recognition and success.

Other designers' life stories (especially when told with the benefit of hindsight and some judicious biographical editing) often seem to suggest this is how things work. And we all want to emulate our design heroes and see our names and images appear in bookshelves and blogs like theirs.

## The reality

Truth is, though, that life has a habit of not following neat narratives, and what worked for one person doesn't always work for another. However, that doesn't mean there aren't broad lessons to be learned. Some pieces of advice will almost always come in handy - whether you're a design student, recent graduate or simply starting out to get into the field.

In this article, I'll look at some common ways to turn your dream of a successful career in graphic design into reality. These aren't mutually exclusive: quite the opposite, in fact. Pursue as many of these avenues as possible, with vigour, passion and determination, and you stand a far greater chance of getting to where you want to be.

- *Looking for a job in graphic design? Check the [Creative Bloq jobs board](#)*

## 01. Join design organisations and/or volunteer to their events



Getting involved in a respected design organisation like AIGA can really help to open doors

Take advantage of the discounts you get while still a student to join design organisations such as [AIGA](#). The benefits of interacting with like-minded people and networking are extremely valuable. Participating in design organisations will provide a rich understanding of the field, who's who in our industry, and give you the chance to speak to inspiring people.

The opportunities for learning and growth are tremendous. It's important to soak up all the possible knowledge and advice on offer; to get noticed and respected by colleagues.

## **02. Work for charities**

One way to start a network base, add solid work to your portfolio and get noticed is to offer your design skills to charities in your community (not to mention the great cause that you support, of course!). These projects could potentially lead to both non-for-profit and for-profits paid work. Approach a local gallery or business, an animal shelter... do good work for a really good cause close to your heart.

## **03. Get internships**



Design

agencies such as Mark Boulton Design run internship programmes - read more at <http://www.netmagazine.com/features/reinventing-web-design-training>

An internship with a good design studio or at an in-house department can offer invaluable experience that you will draw on throughout your design career. You'll become seasoned in how design organisations are run; have a better understanding about client requests and how work load works. With luck (and bear in mind you need to make most of your own luck), you'll get to show your skills and commitment to the company and land a full-time position, gain some skills and start your own network.

#### **04. Nurture a network of peers**

This tip may seem obvious, but in practice we tend to see our peers as competition instead of supporters or collaborators. Instead, actively nurture our network of peers: it really does pay off. The project that someone passes on due to a busy schedule or a short budget can be a project that is a good fit for you - and a great piece to add to your portfolio that eventually opens doors to bigger opportunities and new ventures.

- You'll find more tips on networking for designers [here](#).

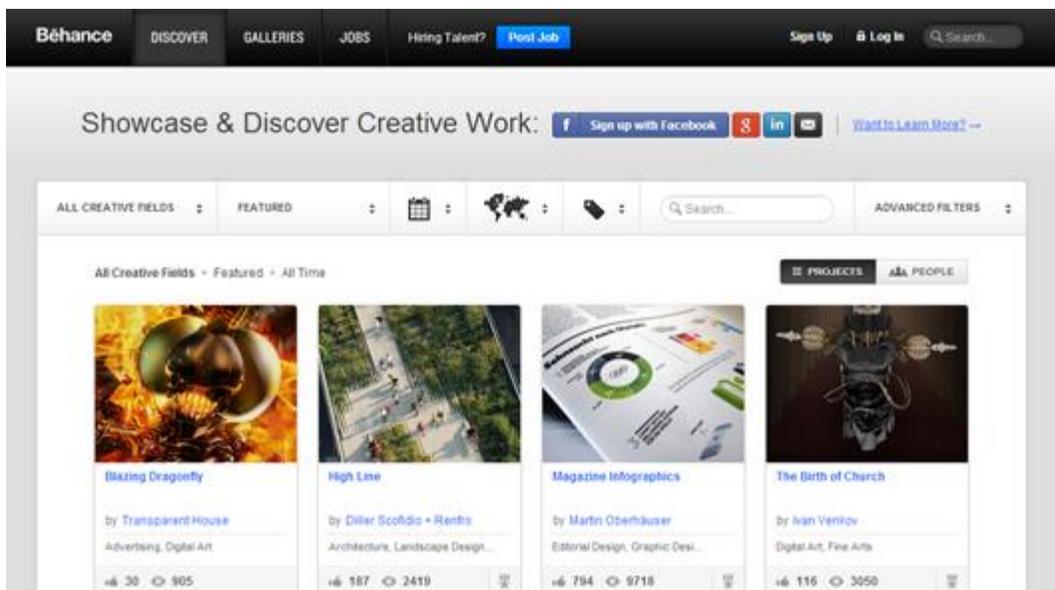
## 05. Send fan mail

We all like getting notes from admirers: it lifts the spirits and strengths us as an industry. So why not let your design heroes let them know that you respect them and their work?

Sending genuine short emails (either notes or a good-looking promo mailer) to people who you admire can lead to many opportunities. One of them may be just what they are looking for - when firms are hiring, for example, or needing someone to commission for a project that matches your skillset.

Of course, that won't always happen, so don't get discouraged if the phone doesn't ring immediately. It's always good to send a follow-up material showing your newest work; this keeps recipients interested and reminded of your availability.

## 06. Create an online presence



A portfolio service such as Behance can help you get an online presence quickly without any need for web design skills

This might seem obvious, but these days you simply have to have an online platform to express yourself and maintain a constant dialogue with other people interested in your work. And we're not just talking about a Twitter account or Facebook page. Prospective employers will expect

you to have either your own bespoke blog or website, or to use an online portfolio service like [Behance](#).

## 07. Exploit your other skills

If you have illustration or photography skills to add to your graphic design skillset, this can also lead to significant work under the art direction of very talented people. Put together your best pieces in a simple yet elegant PDF, or in print format, and get ready to mail it to all those agencies that you're interested in.

## 08. Submit work to competitions

Having some accolades under your belt certainly helps building a reputation and getting under the radar art directors and editors. It will also help a hesitant creative director to make a decision on choosing you over another talented designer.

## 09. Be nice, be bold, be humble



Asking polite

questions and creating good relationships is key

We're in a business where making human connections is vital to our growth, regardless of whether we're doing on or off-line work. So being genuinely friendly and interested will hands-

down help you to make prospect and repeating clients. Quite simply, building relationships and communication is at the core of our profession, so you can't shy away from it.

## **10. Start your own projects**

"You're creative." You can do so many things as a creative person, so if no doors are yet opening then make your own projects.

Divide your day between looking for traditional ways to get your work out while also creating your own projects. These could be ebooks, postcards, great pack icons for free distribution, CMS themes, anything you can think off to get you started.

Doing things on your own is risky but worthwhile. There is certainly merit on creating your own opportunities. The tools to connect with friends, colleagues and like-minded people are available, and you can freely explore your creativity and skills using them. This new online culture we observe today is changing the rules of the game, so get on board and make it work for you.

## **11. Keep going**

One final piece of advice: keep moving forward. Keep up your task of calling, emailing or whatever you do on a constant basis. Don't take rejection personally and discard envy. A rejection today could land you a job tomorrow or a new client further on.

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Source: Velux Creative Blog, September 2, 2013

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