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Eight reasons why you should consider employing a GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Designer PAUL SHADBOLT says there are good reasons why you should involve an expert in designing your next book

EXPERTISE

On my first day as a graphic designer my employer said to me: "Hardware and software are meaningless without wetware. Anyone can buy a computer and be trained to use a design program, but if you want to design meaningful work, you'll have to use the wetware between your ears".

He was of course referring to the expert skills and knowledge that an individual accumulates while working in a particular field over a period of time. His advice was good then and is even more relevant in today's world where most people have access to a computer or smart device. While this new technology is exciting and allows us to share our creativity with the world, please remember that taking a photo using Instagram does not make you an Annie Liebovitz. Likewise a high score in *Flight Simulator* does not mean you can fly a Boeing 747, nor does making it to level 10 in *Desert Storm* qualify you to operate an assault rifle.

Yes there are online book design programs, yet they only provide the software – not the *wetware* – not the knowledge and not the expertise. The most important role an author can perform for their book is that of being an author. Choosing to work with a designer will produce professional-looking results that are beautiful and marketable, as well as alleviating you from undue stress. Leave your book design to someone who is trained and experienced in creating visuals that will allow your expertise to shine.

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OBJECTIVITY

A collaborative relationship with a designer has the advantage of an objective set of eyes. A good designer will have your best interests and outcome at heart without being emotionally attached to your work. They will be able to see your book from a reader's point of view and be able to offer fresh creative options for you. A good designer should also be able to tell you if the cover idea that was born during dinner with a few friends and a bottle of wine should have stayed at the dinner table.

PROCESS

Most designers will have a structured work process that will help you to define a brief that sets clear goals for your book and ensures all possibilities and requirements are covered. This process will be able to set (*and adhere to*) an agreed-upon timeline, outcome and budget.

VISUAL SOLUTIONS

There are many visual solutions for a book cover beyond an image with a title and this is where working with a designer will provide maximum results. For example, a typographical solution can provide an interesting and cheaper alternative compared to a photographic solution. There are a multitude of print processes like: *embossing*; *over-glossing*, *foiling* and *special inks* that will make a printed book stand out. A designer will also be able to provide mock-ups that will give you a realistic view of the final concept.

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TYPOGRAPHY

Typography is an art form and any good designer will tell you that it can take a professional lifetime to master it. If you think there are just 26 characters in the alphabet, then you are not seeing those characters visually. There are literally millions of typefaces (*fonts*) to choose from. Each one has its own unique nuance and personality.

A typeface conveys more than just the sum (*words*) of its parts (*letters*). It has its own visual language that needs a delicate and considered approach to its use. If the terms: *kerning*, *leading*, *Grotesk*, *pica*, *pixel* and *point size* leave you scratching your head, then please don't contribute to the growing visual landfill of bad typography that is consuming the world. Typography is a subject you could write a whole book about and fortunately Erik Spiekermann wrote an excellent one called *Stop stealing sheep*, which I thoroughly recommend to anyone with a passing interest in type. For those with a shorter attention span, hire out the entertaining documentary film *Helvetica* by Gary Hustwit.

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IMAGERY

Do you know your CMYK from your RGB? Your 300dpi from your 72dpi? Can you use an image you found on line? Are royalty free images really free? What's the difference between *vector art* and *pixel-based art*? Why does an image look so bad in print when it looked so great on screen? For answers to all of those questions I refer you back to the first point in this list... 'Expertise'. A designer will not only know how to correctly format an image, they will be able to purchase it, download it, crop it, tweak it, effect it and manipulate it to perfection. Get them to give your author's biopic a touch-up while they have Photoshop open.

FINAL ARTWORK

More than likely, a finished book will be rolled out as two versions – one for print and one for screen. A designer will be able to design for both analog and digital publications. This is important as each version will have its own set of specifications and unique variables that must be considered and adhered to. High quality final artwork will produce a high quality final result. Most designers will also keep a *source file* of the final artwork that allows for future reproduction into different formats.

MARKETING

Almost all designers have some basic knowledge of marketing and can be helpful in providing suggestions on how to market your book. From posters and invites for book launches to building online engagement via social media, your designer will be able to provide a variety of marketing collateral to promote your book. Make sure you ask for a set of good quality cover images that can be used for both print and online promotions.

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When not designing books or receiving hugs, Paul Shadbolt can be found ferreting around in book shops or surfing the web for visual goodness. He has designed many books and proudly displays them online at his website, foundationdesign.co.nz.

AND FINALLY – be a good client – good clients with good designers get great results.

Getting a book designed can take time. Start the process early and instead of *waiting around* for a designer, use that time to finish or hone your book.

Invest time in choosing the right designer for your project, and then trust them.

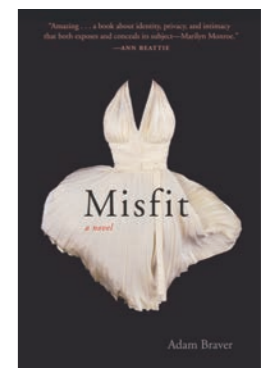
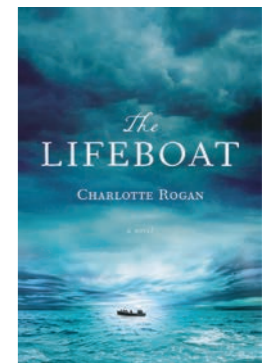
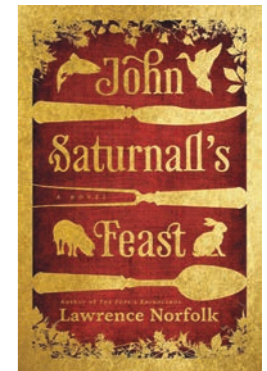
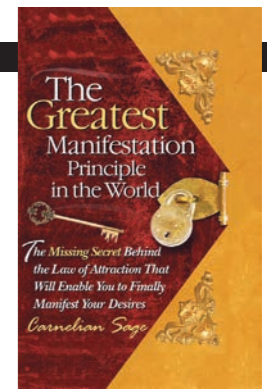
Provide a solid brief for your designer to work from. Include a synopsis of your book and its structural elements (*physical size*, *page numbers*, etc.). Describe the target audience, what publishing formats you want and a timeline with a completion date.

Tell your designer what you do, and don't like in a cover. Provide cover samples if need be.

If designing internal spreads, provide your designer with sample text that includes the longest and shortest chapter headings and any other element that requires a design style.

When providing the final text file, make sure that it is clean and unformatted (*particularly if a final format is an e-book*)

Be honest and decisive with your feedback. Be generous with your praise as designers are gentle creative souls that often need a hug! ●



Good cover design should address two points. One, the overall look and style of a cover should reflect the subject matter. And secondly, there should be a cohesive visual idea to support the title and/or content. An example of this is the key and lock motif of Carnelian Sage's book which encourages the reader to 'unlock the missing secret'.

John Saturnall's *Feast* is a great example of an illustrative solution. The colours are rich and complimentary and the designer has made clever use of integrating the illustrative elements with the title.

Finding an image that perfectly conveys a book's title can take a lot of time and some luck, but when it's done right it can have a very powerful effect as shown in Charlotte Rogan's *The Lifeboat*.

If the perfect cover image is being elusive, clever editing of an image combined with a good idea can produce a striking cover as shown in Adam Braver's *Misfit*.