



EXPRESSION
by Mark Busse

Reinvention: The designer's key to happiness?

A friend recently confided in me how unhappy she was. Her career was routine and unfulfilling. Her relationship literally bored her. She had come to a point in her life where a full reboot was the next step.

This got me thinking about how fortunate I've been to enjoy a career in design with its constant challenges and opportunities. I'm never bored, and I believe it's the frequent rate of renewal, relearning and reinvention that fuels the passion I bring to work.

Since graduating university over 20 years ago, I have been through numerous career shifts. I've had to discard skills I was proud to be an expert in, let go of old responsibilities and learn to master completely new ones. I derive great satisfaction from helping others solve real problems using creativity and craft, and the constant learning it involves makes me happy.

Although change is a constant in every profession, it is important to recognize that communication design has been undergoing rapid reinvention for a couple decades. In fact, being able to endure the stress and tension of not knowing the way forward and being flexible and adaptive enough to new and uncomfortable situations defines leaders in the design field.

When my career started, we would manually set type, shoot PMTs, use waxes to create paste up and strip film. That all got tossed aside with desktop publishing and we all scrambled to learn Pagemaker

or Quark. When the web hit, we were forced to learn interface design, HTML and Flash in order to remain relevant, now even those are being discarded.

As my design career progresses, I find myself focusing less on production and more on strategy and ideas. As I spend more time in front of clients, I am forced to develop facilitation, interview and communication skills I had not previously been trained in. Ultimately I've had to reinvent myself as a design studio leader and a business and marketing expert. All of these career reboots were built on layers of learning and resulted in some stress, but ultimately provide tremendous career satisfaction.

No one reading this should be surprised that learning and change are a designer's constant companion. But designers should recognize the value of major shifts of focus and the impact those experiences can have on careers and personal lives.

One thing that I push myself to do—unless it is literally silly or impossible—is when asked to do something new and scary, I say, “Yes”. These opportunities often involve tremendous effort and are not financially rewarding, but the learning opportunities have been invaluable.

Past examples include: accepting nominations for leadership positions, launching volunteer-run non-profit organizations, chairing award shows, public speaking, or even writing for industry magazines. Few of these were directly related to my firm, and they were all terrifying in many ways, but by stepping up to the task and muscling my way through I learned tons in the process.

Sure, not everyone is suited to saying yes to scary opportunities. Some folks quietly seek less dramatic career paths, and that's okay. But it doesn't negate the need to stretch, learn and evolve as the design industry (and the world) changes.

Every time I dive into something new I emerge feeling smarter, stronger and happier. Yes, happier. Had my friend been more motivated to live like a designer, seeking out opportunities to dive headlong into learning and reinvention, I suspect she'd be happier in her job and relationship. Life reboot not required.

Speaking of reinvention, I'd like to offer congratulations to the new owners of *Designedge*. I view this as the beginning of a new era, and I'm excited by the potential of this relaunch. I also challenge the new team to own the word “edge” in their name by embracing this opportunity to be more than merely a news, trends and awards publication. I hope to see a nation-wide dialogue about issues that are important to the design industry, one aimed as much outwardly to the broader public audience we serve as inwardly on topics we are frankly growing tired of hearing about.

Together let's reinvent *Designedge* and the Canadian design industry itself and enjoy the happiness it will bring. 

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