

600 into 1 doesn't go...

6pm, Friday 23rd September, and we sent our ad for a Junior Designer down the wires. The following Monday, we had close to 200 responses. By the closing date, there were nearly 600. It's a situation that brings daily news of economic difficulties into context and our overriding emotions, when faced with this bursting inbox, were sympathy and trepidation.

It's a frustrating situation for everyone. Whilst senior staff spent the entire weekend and more looking through every single CV, it would take weeks to respond to each individually - despite many valid requests for feedback. It struck us, however, as we waded through the good, the bad and the occasionally unsettling, that it was important for those looking to start or further a career in design to understand the reality of the job market at present and for us to offer some words of constructive criticism and encouragement. What follows is not copy and pasted from some jobs site, but borne out of reactions to these recent applications. It's important to ask, therefore, when reading, is this me?

1 Portfolio

Thankfully, we saw evidence of some really talented people. Their applications stood out and, in contrast, made others look that much weaker. Applications to job ads will live or die by the quality of the portfolio, so if you're looking for a job through this channel, your portfolio needs to be wonderful. Go to degree shows, look in the press and on blogs. Ask yourself, does my portfolio compare to my peers? Be honest. If the answer is no, do something about it. We were looking for someone with flair and ideas and didn't expect a huge amount of professional experience. Self initiated projects are fine, as long as they are executed with the same ambition and diligence as a "live" brief. Also, being competitive with your peers doesn't mean copying them - play to your strengths. We saw hundreds of applicants who professed a love of typography and letterpressing. That's great, especially if you're brilliant and use these disciplines meaningfully. After 600 CV's however, we'd seen a lot of tightly kerned AvantGarde. Ideas, on the other hand, are ownable and show your character (thoughtful, playful, soulful) as well as your commercial skills.

2 Get real

Not everyone can be a superstar, and nor should everyone expect to be - there should be room in the world for all sorts of levels and abilities. However, this is a climate where superstars are doing the photocopying on placement, so it's important to be pragmatic. If you can't create a portfolio that stands amongst the best but are still keen to give this game a go, are there other channels where you can kickstart your design career? Think of, and tap up every possible contact and seek out unorthodox opportunities with passion and enthusiasm. Not every break is advertised and that wedding invitation you do for a friend could become the centrepiece of your new portfolio.

3 Get the basics right

In an ideal world, a caring prospective employer would look upon your application with understanding, seeing your potential shining through the typos and incompatible file formats. In reality, the deluge of applications means a tired HR person looking for a reason to cull. None of the below is a disaster, but if you do apply for jobs advertised, the following may affect your chances of getting noticed:

- i **Read the ad** Are you applying for the right job? Do you fit the criteria? Unless you can quickly justify any discrepancies, you'll be rejected from the off.
- ii **Follow instructions** For example, if the ad specifies a pdf portfolio of a certain size, try to meet this criteria. In the absence of these instructions, I'd always favour a pdf, inclusive of CV and 4-7 examples of work, under 3MB. Including work as separate jpeg attachments decreases your chances of being considered as they're time consuming to open and suggests you're naive to efficient studio practices.
- iii **Spellcheck and make sure any links work** A few people split links within pdfs over two lines, sending us to youtube homepage rather than their animation.
- iv **Using greek or placeholder text in portfolio examples is very bad.**

Thanks again to everyone who applied. Good luck.