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INFO-I 101

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    Envisioning Technology

Part One: My Interests

    Graphic design is basically using art to convey a message or idea. It’s a form of communication design that combines easy-to-interpret images—such as a colorful pie chart or appealing characters—with simplified, understandable text. The goal of a graphic designer is to take a concept—whether it be a compilation of data, a slogan or even a story—and create a visual interpretation of it so that it may be easier to understand than if it were just a blob of text on a paper or screen. Humans are visually inclined, and it is a graphic designer’s job to bridge the gap between information and people.

    One of my biggest interests in life has always been art. At first, it was just simple things like coloring in a Harry Potter coloring book or drawing in a sketchbook on the way to my grandma’s house for Thanksgiving dinner. Then, as I got older and I was exposed to art classes in school, I became interested in all the different kinds of media in art, like acrylic paint, watercolors, Prismacolor pencils, charcoal, oil pastels, clay, metals, and so much more. When I finally reached high school, I discovered digital art, but more specifically, graphic design.

    I was first introduced to graphic design by my older sister. She had been a part of my school’s newsmagazine, “Spark,” and convinced me to join by telling me that I could create as much art as I wanted to for the paper. It may not have been the type of art I was expecting, but I ended up loving it and spent the majority of my time on the Spark staff creating infographics for the magazine. To create an infographic, or any type of graphic design, I learned Adobe programs like Adobe Illustrator and InDesign.
These programs—and the type of art I could create with them—were what intrigued me the most about graphic design. There were so many different tools to use; type tools, drawing tools, shaping tools, painting tools and graph tools, there were different image effects and brush types to try, and best of all, there was a built-in color palette which I used to make any type or color scheme I wanted. It was like a whole new medium of art to learn.

While all graphic designers need reliable software—such as the Adobe programs mentioned above—to create their artwork, they also need a strong enough vessel to support the projects on which they work. This can come in many shapes and sizes of Mac and PC computers, but according to the “All Art Schools” website, from an article called “Graphic Design Technology,” more graphic artists “are opting to use pen tablets to interact with their computers.” More specifically, a “graphic design tablet,” which is like the technological version of a sketchbook and a pencil. However, it is different from something like an iPad because it doesn’t have touchscreen technology. It’s a flat tablet that acts as a surface for the designer to draw on and a pen that acts almost like a computer mouse. Every motion made with the pen over the tablet translates onto the computer screen.

The graphic design tablet has largely impacted the graphic design industry today. First, it allows artists to integrate traditional art techniques into graphic design. Artists can accomplish much more precise and refined tasks with a stylus than they could with a traditional mouse because the pencil-like object is easier to manipulate in whatever way the artist may choose. This also opens the door for artists to incorporate their personal style into the design work because the tablet makes adding details and making touch-ups to pieces more manageable. The pressure-sensitive tip of the stylus makes details such as variations in the lightness or boldness of lines possible. In addition to allowing artists to use more precision and detail in their work, the tablet and stylus pair also make working more comfortable for graphic designers. Gripping a traditional computer mouse for hours causes hand strain which may distract an artist from their work. Because of its pencil-like shape, using the stylus is more comfortable, which allows artists to work more efficiently and for longer. According to Shea Laverty, in her article,
“Advantages and Disadvantages to Graphic Tablets” on the Techwalla website, there are a couple of disadvantages to the tablet as well. In her article she states, “despite their precision in rendering artwork, graphic tablets make a poor choice for basic operations like pointing and clicking to make menu selections.” The stylus can become slightly awkward to use for functions other than a piece of artwork because most computers are “designed for a mouse.” The other downside to the tablet is that they can be expensive. This can be detrimental to an artist, especially when most tablets—just like any other piece of technology—are guaranteed to decline in quality over time.

Despite the disadvantages to the graphic design tablet, I think that the advantages will outweigh the cons and this technology will truly allow the graphic design industry to continue growing. Because the tablet allows artists to work efficiently, they will have the opportunity to make either more pieces of art in a smaller period of time or in-depth pieces they wouldn’t have been able to create with the resources they previously had. This efficiency may also play a role in a graphic designer’s salary. Creating better pieces in a faster amount of time will help artists make more money in the long run. Overall, I think this piece of technology will continue providing graphic designers with amazing opportunities, as it already has.
Part Two: In the Media

Project Runway is a reality TV show that supports the use of many different technologies. Every season, a new group of sixteen fashion designers are chosen to compete on the show hosted by supermodel Heidi Klum and fashion consultant Tim Gunn and are judged by Heidi Klum and fashion designers Michael Kors and Nina Garcia. Each episode, the designers must create a garment to fit the challenge and walk the runway. At the end of each runway, their work is critiqued by the judges and one designer wins the challenge while one loses and gets eliminated.

In season 8, episode 10: “There’s a Pattern Here,” the designers’ challenge is to create a textile design inspired by a significant moment in their lives. After the designers create their textiles on HP’s “TouchSmart” technology, their design is printed out onto fabric for them to use in their garments for the runway. In this episode, there are seven of the original sixteen contestants left. Mondo Guerra wins the episode with his design of a high-waisted pant made from the textile he designed to represent his HIV positive status while Valerie Mayen is eliminated because of her uninspired design. In order to create their textiles, the designers were provided with HP’s “TouchSmart” technology, which is a line of touchscreen computers ranging from tablets to desktop computers.

Although this technology was provided to the contestants of Project Runway for episode 10, they were not able to keep the computers after the show. However, the HP computers are currently available for anyone to buy, including the designers. That being said, the technology may not be accessible to everyone given the price range of the computers. The smaller computers in the TouchSmart line range anywhere from $100 to $400 while the bigger desktops can be anything from $700 to over $1,000. On Amazon, a used HP TouchSmart IQ524 Desktop PC—the model provided to the designers—is over $1,500. So, despite the fact that this technology is in stores and online to be purchased by anyone, only someone with a generous salary would be able to afford it. Because professions such as fashion design and graphic design are not rewarded with a large salary, this resourceful technology would most likely not be available to workers in those fields, despite how useful it may be to their profession.
In addition to being expensive, there are other disadvantages to the touchscreen computers, but there are advantages as well, which is shown in the episode of Project Runway. As stated previously, the winner of the challenge, Mondo, uses the TouchSmart computer to create a textile that represents his HIV positive status. Because he got the opportunity to work with technology on which he could actually create a personalized design, Mondo was able to make a statement on HIV. Technology such as the TouchSmart line gives artists the ability to speak up and make statements on societal issues, just like Mondo did. Like any other computer, a TouchSmart computer can be used for good by anyone—maybe by a journalist writing an informative news article, an animator creating a cartoon or a graphic designer making a poster promoting love and equality. Yet, touchscreen computers aren’t all good. According to Franklin Tessler in his article, “The Hidden Danger of Touchscreens” on InfoWorld.com, all touchscreens, including touchscreen PCs, can cause “stress-related injuries.” He says, “touchscreens positioned upright are ergonomically inferior…vertical touchscreens force you to use the large muscles in your shoulder and arms in a way that promote fatigue.” Because of the unnatural, vertical angle of the computer screen, touchscreen laptops are creating new injuries in users, which is definitely a problem.

Another problem, while touchscreen computers do not immediately jump out at me as being “unethical” technology, is that they could be used to accomplish immoral things. At the surface level, it’s just another type of computer. There’s nothing wrong with a computer with a heightened screen display that can be controlled by fingers. It can be used to accomplish anything a normal laptop can accomplish, for example, an essay, a spreadsheet in Excel, an email, social media accounts or maybe a poster on Adobe Illustrator. But this also means things like identity fraud, a hacked bank account, catfishing—anything unethical that can be done on a regular computer—can be done with the TouchSmart technology. That’s not to say that the actual technology itself is unethical, just that if someone with twisted morals gets their hands on an advanced computer, they will be able to use it to their advantage to commit crimes.
Even with the risks that this type of technology may impose on people, I don’t see it diminishing anytime soon. In fact, I think the touchscreen craze will only continue to grow. First there were touchscreen phones, then came tablets such as the iPad, then came touchscreen PC laptops and huge touchscreen conference room monitors. I won’t be surprised when someone comes out with a touchscreen TV. Hopefully in a few years, this technology will be more accessible to people who couldn’t afford it when it first came out. If more and more models are invented, the prices of the older models will decrease, allowing more people access to touchscreen technology.

In conclusion, this advance in technology is actually a great resource for people to use. Though there may be risk of injury, other computers—not just touchscreens—can cause stress-related injuries as well. The same can be said about the dangers of immoral people using these computers for their gain. That kind of issue is inescapable, there will always be bad people who want to do bad things, and it doesn’t matter if their computer has a touchscreen or not. These things shouldn’t prevent the technology from being used to create amazing works of art. The endless possibilities of amazing things to create with TouchSmart technology dwarfs the bad.
Works Cited

