

The glitzy graphics of Glitschka Studio

by Admin on July 1st 2010



Von Glitschka's former boss deserves a round of applause. Is it because of the valuable insights he passed on? Or, maybe for taking a young artist under his wing and nurturing his talent? Nope, not this time. This ovation goes out for giving the Vonster the boot. This abrupt invitation to the unemployment line was the catalyst that launched the award-winning Glitschka Studio. He never made it to the line, though. Von embraced his fear and dove in.

From his digs in the rain forest of the Pacific Northwest, Von churns out boat loads of unique logos and complete brands; GUI designs & icons; print collateral; advertising; product graphics; flash animations; character design and, of course, illustration. Poised for versatility, his clients are typically larger ad agencies and design firms, along with in-house corporate art departments. As Von puts it, "I've established many professional relationships with local and out-of-state agencies. They know they can throw me pretty much anything and I'll take it and run. This is a big benefit for a large agency. Art directors love being able to just dump work on me, knowing they don't have to hold my hand and while they move on to other pressing projects. They have confidence in knowing I'll execute the one they gave me with precision."

Getting started

While we're handing out kudos to Glitschka's former boss, I suppose Pythagoras, and his numerical cronies, deserve a round of applause, too. It was a case of math anxiety that ultimately would lead Von into a design career. Von said, "I looked into film school, since some friends and I had made our own movies and stop-frame animations. But, this was all before the dawn of the Internet and we couldn't find any in Washington State. Then, one day, a representative of the Seattle Art Institute came into our class and showed us a book of student work. At that moment I knew I wanted to go to art school."

Glitschka graduated at the top of his class. But, since it was during an economic slump, it took him eight months to find a paycheck. An ark full of interviews resulted in comments like, "Great work, but you don't have any experience," and "I don't hire anyone whose work intimidates me." One ad agency loved his work and asked him to help them work up some concepts for a project. He did and never heard another peep from them. As Von says, "I was young and ignorant and several people took advantage of that."

Over the next 18 years, he worked at small and large design firms, ad agencies and corporate art departments while honing his craft and vision. Each step brought new growth and the opportunities to expand his creative abilities.

Influences

We all have those whose work we admire and help shape our own creative slant. The 1950's LP art director, Jim Flora, was a huge influence on Von. "Flora did a lot of LP covers for RCA during the latter end of the big band and swing era. My parents owned a lot of these LPs and I was fascinated by the artwork and design. It wasn't until 1999 that I realized who the talent was behind the art. I was too late to tell him how much I admired his work. He passed away in 1998. I did get the opportunity to talk with his son and told him how much I admired his dad's work. He emailed

me some later work his dad had done that I'd never seen, and it too was great stuff.

Early in my design career, (right when computers came onto the scene professionally) I noticed the amazing work of Neville Brody. Simple, bold, powerful graphics distinctly labeled his work as his own. That caused me to look at myself and how I worked. I realized I wasn't investing enough of a voice into my work, and from that moment, I changed the entire way I approached a job. That fundamentally changed my work and my attitude towards what I do.

Other influences were MAD magazine, of which my mom didn't approve, so I would smuggle it into my room in my pants and hide it under my bed. Another biggie was the work of Norman Rockwell. My parents had a book of his art on our coffee table and I would always just sit and look at it. What struck me was the settings were not too terribly interesting but the amount of visual voice he could give his characters absolutely captivated me," said Von.

When asked about his business style, he noted, "My style, specifically the briefs I use, have been compiled from what I thought was the best of other firms I've either worked for or with. I admired the way they handled certain aspects of business and, since I learn by example more than reading, I just picked up on it."

None the less, Glitschka is an avid reader. You can often find him perusing the pages of 'Creativity,' 'INC,' 'Wired' and 'Fast Company,' among others. He usually finds many good suggestions for running and operating his business. Von added, "I am also fortunate to have a friend who used to be one of the head corporate suits for Gallo Wines and Coca Cola. As my business mentor, we meet once a month and he holds me accountable to goals I have and gives me good feedback on things."

It's all about the process

One of Glitschka Studio's main strengths lies in its process. It's what allows the firm to create a solution that's appropriate to the project's scope and goal. Von commented, "The methodology for our creative process has a lot of up-front left brain thinking for the sole purpose of freeing the right brain to execute the work and keep it on track with the target audience and project specs. We do this with our creative briefs whether it's for a logo development, web site, printed piece or icons. This only applies to our own managed clients, however, and not the larger agencies we work for who have their own established methodology."

He continued, "One approach that makes us a bit unique in terms of how we work is that we value input from the client. But, that said, we never allow that input to limit our approach. It's pretty easy to determine up-front a client's expectations and, as much as it is possible, we try to create work that goes beyond our clients perspective and look at it in a different way. Our batting average has been good and this approach has won over many clients who, now when they approach us, just say, 'Here. You know what you're doing.' That is a very rewarding relationship to have with your clients. Your best interest in good design serves their best interest as well."

The art of the doodle

Doodling has always been second nature to Glitschka. He's been actively and artfully doing it since he was around two years old. Although it tickled him pink, his teachers weren't always impressed with his schoolwork being decorated down the margins. Perhaps it's a genetic thing. Now he gets a good laugh when his daughters' teachers complain about the same thing.

Von said, "I always doodle. Literally, doesn't matter where I am at or what I am doing; if it comes to mind, then I'll find a way to get it on paper. Some of my best doodling and ideas come while sitting in church during a sermon, much to my wife's chagrin. Or, I might do it while talking on the phone with a client. It's not that I don't pay attention, but I actually pay better attention, and I am not really thinking about what I am drawing; it just kind of flows out of my brain onto the paper."

This pastime has lead him to create his doodle folder and binder. He keeps all his doodles, sorts them, cuts up this and that and stores them in a folder. After a few months, when the folder is full, he sorts and edits, putting the best in a binder. Sometimes he'll even embellish a few with stories. It's one of Von's most prized art-related possessions. So much so, that he keeps it in a fireproof vault. You can take a gander at some at <http://www.glitschka.com/archives.html>

Joys and challenges

Von considers himself a dreamer. Being able to take some of those dreams and make them a reality through his work has been a source of enjoyment for him. Glitschka added, "Being my own boss has freed my creative process so much, I no longer merely execute another person or agency's creative vision. I have the luxury of picking who I work for now, and that affords me the choice of what I want to do. It enables me to have the type of control I desire with my projects. The fact that agencies approach me solely on the basis of having me work the way I like is just simply a great thing. And having a client get as excited about a design or illustrative solution as I do is icing on the cake."

On the flip side of that are those days when the creative well dries up. For Von, the way around that is to take a break and recharge. As he says, "Some days I just simply lack the ability to draw and I have to take a break and re-charge. Doesn't happen a lot but usually when it does it's at a critical deadline, so it drives me nuts.

I also have a hard time keeping my mind on track. If I don't really focus, my mind easily strays onto rabbit trails of thought and a few hours will go by and I'll think, 'Oh yeah I was suppose to be doing that.' Then I'll change gears and start where I left off 2 hours prior. What helps me is to plug into my iPod and listen to old time radio dramas and just start cranking on my project."

Getting results

When asked how he sees professional design affecting the business community, he replied, "A good design solution can benefit a company in powerful ways. Both equity-wise in the public at large in terms of an identity and bottom line in terms of profits directly related to their marketing efforts. Lots of money is wasted on poor design that will return nothing.

It's impossible for me to look at design without critiquing it. My wife probably gets more tired of this than anyone else because she tends to be the audience that gets to hear it. Sometimes she doesn't agree with me and then I have to analyze my own take on it and see if I am just too close to the industry and just don't get it. When that happens, my wife is usually right. I see so much work being done for large companies that could be done so much more creatively and thus be more effective for them.

I've always liked the name Don Wellers used for his design firm: 'Weller Institute for the Cure of Design'. This name embodies the attitude I take on design. I look at companies and what they are doing and I want to remedy their design sickness. Then, when the design is cured, enjoy watching

the company become healthier."

Major challenges facing designers today

Gone are the days of t-squares, triangles and border tape. stat cameras, 360 pads, and hot press board have been replaced with scanners, software and computers. Although many don't miss type galleys, rubber cement all over the place and that missing sub-head that managed to get stuck to your elbow, digital workflow has created its own set of problems for designers.

As Von said, "Computers have added so much ease to what we do now. But this ease has also lowered the level of ability once needed to enter this profession. The lack of craftsmanship and talent that once prevented the marginal wannabe from entering this industry is no longer there. This has created a common mentality in the public-at-large towards our industry. Many now do not see the intrinsic value of good design. They hold to the belief that if you own a PC, software program, some clip-art and fonts, then you too can be a designer."

On bargain basement identities, he added, "One of the most important things a new company can invest in is a solid identity. A well-crafted logo can go a long way in helping a company position itself in the marketplace, gain needed exposure, build brand equity and become one of their most important assets.

If you do a Google search for 'Logo Design' you'll pull up a plethora of "do-it-yourself" logo sites. Template logos, where you just drop in your name and, for a mere \$29.95, you're done. These sites and tactics aren't being done by professionals who know the importance of a well-conceived identity based on solid marketing principles and well-conceived design solutions. It's being propagated by those who know how to use the tools (software) and want to make a quick, albeit cheap, buck.

Lets face it, the public-at-large is ignorant about design in general, not to mention an identity. Good designers educate their clients and, when it is done properly, the clients know the value of their services. They see the practical benefits. You get none of that with these fast and dirty logo whores. All they do is feed the ignorance toward our industry and lower the perceived value the public-at-large has for what we do. \$29.95 doesn't even cover any self-respecting designers fee for one hour's worth of work, yet these hacks are willing to crank out your company's image in a matter of minutes and move on to the next victim."

Challenges facing the client companies

As for the client companies, Von, sadly, sees a trend toward mediocrity. "The compromise of creative ideas and concepts for the sake of 'safe' marketing is something I just see happen way too much," he said.

Another problem are marketing folks with a yearning to play art director. He believes too many companies view their creative department as mere extensions of Marketing's arm. When a project or new product fails to achieve Marketing's goals, they seem to never take the blame and then, pointing at the creative department, say, "The design wasn't right."

Advice from the Vonster

Glitschka suggests that up-and-coming designers take time to refine their process. He feels it's critical to work through your concepts, refine, work through them again until you have solid, concept-based, design directions developed. Then, and only then, touch the computer and begin

executing them. He summed up, "Perfect your creative process, don't settle for mediocre. View every project as a potential portfolio piece.

If you don't like what you're doing, odds are the client won't either. The design and illustration have to speak to you first, your voice needs to come through. You have to invest something of yourself into the project and then, once you do, the whole process will flow easier, you're solutions will be stronger and your batting average with clients approvals will go up.

If you don't doodle, start. And don't tell me "I can't draw a stick figure." because that's a doodle. Anything goes. Here's a creative exercise I do with my two girls. I draw a random squiggly line on a sheet of paper and then they have to use that line and make something. I got this idea from a friend in Electronics class in high school. He was too lazy to go find a pencil sharpener and rolled his pencil on a sheet of paper to sharpen the point. I saw these squiggly lines and drew something out of each one. My friend saw that and it started a weekly ritual to pass the time during class. So grab a pencil, draw a squiggle and doodle something today!"

As for clients, Glitschka suggests finding a good designer who not only has good design sense, but a solid understanding of marketing. Then, trust him or her with your company's image and vision.

Beyond this, he suggests checking www.aiga.com and find a local chapter near you to get a referral. You'll be directed towards a professional, not a hack who knows the right pull-down menus and has some clip-art and a PC.

Down the road

The Vonster has a vision. Down the road he'd like to see his practice grow to 3-7 creatives working in a loft studio cranking out killer design and illustration. He anticipates producing more of their own product lines and, as he puts it, "generally having a swell time hanging out together doing what we love to do. I think it's a very real possibility."

Farther down the glitzy road, the Glitschka looks forward to the day he hires his oldest daughter as a designer/illustrator and watches as she flourishes in her creative career.

Read Von's profile Name: Von R. Glitschka Company: Glitschka Studios Job title: Art Director Services: Logo/Brand Identity Development, Print Collateral, Advertising, Product Graphics, Interactive Flash Animation, GUI Design/Icon Development, Illustration, Midget Juggling Practising since: 1987 Country: USA City: Pacific Northwest URL: www.glitschka.com