



A FUTURE IN  
**COMMUNICATION  
DESIGN**





## WHAT IS COMMUNICATION DESIGN?

Traditionally known as graphic design, the term 'communication design' is a relatively recent term. It encompasses the complexity of skills required of graphic designers in the 21st century, the changing role of graphic design in the business world and the way designers are utilising new technologies beyond print.

Career paths are defined by the specialised activities entered, including web design, branding, UX design, illustration, advertising, media design, photography, graphic design and art direction.

The aim of communication design is to make an impression on people's understanding, behaviour and attitude by broadcasting messages to specific audiences for specific purposes. While usually visual, the message can also be multi-sensory, eg tactile, aural, even taste!

The idea of audience is really important. Designers need to understand **who** it is they are communicating to and **how** to get their message through.

Do you want to be able to affect people's knowledge, attitudes or behaviour? Can you visualise things easily? Do you have strong drawing and story-telling skills and the ability to communicate your ideas to others? Then a communication design qualification may open up great career options for you.

## OUTLOOK AND TRENDS

The design field is highly competitive. To stand out, designers must keep developing creatively and technically, and keep informed of current practice and future trends and technologies.

Interactive design, social media and multimedia are creating new opportunities as organisations race to get ahead of competitors with the latest social media and mobile technologies. Social media skills are now deemed essential across all aspects of communication design making those skills in high demand.

Continued development of visual vocabulary is driving a lot of marketing and design (Alexandra Levit, Quickbase Intuit blog) as imagery like photos, emojis and video snippets become increasingly preferred to text. Short videos rather than emails may be the way of the future.

Increasingly, employers in graphic design and advertising firms are working with contractors and freelancers, rather than permanent staff. A global trend in many industries, this opens up initial opportunities for graduates, provides employers with a range of talent, but makes full-time permanent work harder to come by (McKinsey 2012 Global Institute Report).

A co-design approach, embracing input from a range of stakeholders, is becoming more common with complex projects. This involves a number of experts from different fields working on different parts of a joint project.

Social media is increasing opportunities for overseas employers to recruit New Zealand design talent.

## WORK SETTINGS

Graduates of communication design find employment with design and advertising agencies, print production and publishing companies, film and multimedia companies, web design companies, and sign-making companies.

Some find employment in small boutique design studios specialising in branding, moving image, packaging, publishing or a combination of these. They will usually work with a small team of more senior designers on a range of large and small projects. Other graduates become part of large design teams for big design or printing companies.

There is an increasing demand for designers to work in-house for non-design-related sectors, such as marketing or media departments for radio stations, accounting firms, government departments and manufacturers.

Freelancing is another option for graduates, working on a range of one-off contracts to build up their networks and clientele. Often, they team up with other graduates from their course or networks to form small companies or collectives.

Some graduates start in design agencies as Mac operators working on existing designs and preparing design work for publication. With that experience they can then move into creative design roles.

Not all work by designers is client commissioned or commercially driven. Sometimes designers work for an exhibition or create their own designs while doing commercial work. For example, a typeface designer might design and place an experimental typeface onto their portfolio website alongside other client commissioned typefaces. If it is a good design, other designers will pay to use it.

## CAREER SECTOR OPPORTUNITIES

### Communication and marketing

Designers interested in communicating specific messages to the public find careers in design studios, advertising agencies, marketing departments and creative consultancies. Specialisations include branding, advertising, packaging, publishing, presentation design, environmental graphic design and corporate communications.

Social media is a huge growth area, with communication design graduates in demand for their ability to merge visual communication skills with an innate understanding of virtual communities and networks.

### Digital media

This involves conceiving and producing screen-based design solutions for application to websites, mobile and tablet apps, interactive kiosks, animation, videos and short films. Interaction is an increasingly large part of digital media, with user interface (UI) design and user experience (UX) becoming increasingly important in research and design processes. Digital media design skills are in high demand as mainstream communications move into the ever-expanding digital space. Positions include interface designer, graphic designer and digital media designer.

### Management

Graduates in communication design also can enter studio and agency management roles, including account management (finding new clients and looking after existing clients' accounts), studio production and marketing. There is high demand for people with design management skills who are well organised with excellent interpersonal skills.



## RANGE OF SKILLS

Designers need two heads; a business/strategic head that serves the needs of the design problem and the creative head that will explore, challenge and push boundaries. This requires the following skills:

- Highly competent in use of Adobe Suite, including Adobe Illustrator, InDesign and Photoshop
- Competent in moving image software such as Adobe Premiere or After Effects
- Broad knowledge of software applications for Mac; knowledge of PC systems also useful
- Fundamental knowledge of layout, typography, hierarchy, colour, iconography, context, popular culture, history, trends and influence
- Hands-on digital integration experience and digital user awareness
- Ability to be open to criticism and pragmatic about tailoring designs to meet a brief
- Excellent written communication and presentation skills; ability to effectively listen and communicate with team members, collaborators, suppliers and clients
- Problem-solving skills, an ability to work independently, take ownership of projects and deliver multiple, concurrent projects.

## PERSONAL QUALITIES

- A creative risk-taker and experimenter
- Empathetic
- Curious with strong interest in the world and culture
- Artistic, imaginative, visual, agile, flexible, good at making connections
- Strong team orientation, highly organised and able to meet deadlines

## SALARY GUIDE

Pay range depends on company size and calibre of clients.

Mac operator graduate	\$30,000 - \$35,000
Graduate designer	\$35,000 - \$45,000
Intermediate designer	\$50,000 - \$80,000
Senior designer	\$80,000 - \$100,000
Digital creative designer	\$90,000 - \$150,000
Account manager	\$45,000 - \$65,000
Account director	\$100,000 - \$120,000

Sources: [www.onlinesalarysurvey.com](http://www.onlinesalarysurvey.com) and Market Pulse, June 2013, NZ Insights [www.payscale.com/research/NZ/Job](http://www.payscale.com/research/NZ/Job)

Salary range is indicative of the New Zealand job market at the time of publication and should only be used as a guideline.

## PROFESSIONAL REGISTRATION

Membership of Designers Institute of New Zealand (DINZ) is recommended.

## THE AUT ADVANTAGE

In addition to developing necessary technical skills, AUT communication design graduates learn to research, analyse, think strategically, make informed design decisions, debate and present. AUT offers studio pathways in visual communication, graphic design, advertising, branding, digital media design and communication arts.

## FURTHER STUDY OPTIONS

Further study in communication design is available at postgraduate diploma, master's and PhD level. AUT research areas include design innovation, technology and entrepreneurship, branding, sustainability design, design craft, design education, design history, animation and typography.



## EMME JACOB

Freelance Graphic Designer

Bachelor of Design in Graphic Design\*

"I am currently working on two freelance jobs. My first job is rebranding an architecture company. This has been a big job involving identity design, stationery, cars, and a full new website.

My second job is with a digital publishing agency, where my boss has taught me how to build and animate apps, which has been really great. I'm making them for iPhone and iPad magazines.

I thrive on the pressure of needing everything to be done on time, and making sure everything is perfect before it goes out into the public. I have many meetings with my bosses to present each stage of the work but both jobs also involve spending many hours alone figuring out how to solve design problems.

Seeing your work out in the real-world, especially with the iPhone magazines, has been a thrill. Knowing that thousands of people are flicking through something I've built is pretty amazing.

The biggest challenge for me has been that freelancing can be solitary – it's not as easy to bounce ideas off other designers. I always love a pair of fresh eyes across my work!"

\*The Graphic Design major is now called Communication Design.

## INDUSTRY COMMENT

"The way graphic designers visually communicate is moving away from print to digital, but traditional visual communication skills are still vital. The principles of effective design stay the same, whether print or web.

Simplicity and clear communication is always the most effective approach. When a graphic designer is looking at a piece of design they need to ask what can be taken away, rather than what can be added, to make the meaning clearer and/or stronger.

With graduates, I look for someone who can listen and communicate clearly back to me. I want someone who is capable of independent work, but looks for advice when they are stuck and takes ownership of their work; always checking things they don't understand."

**Fraser Gardyne**

Creative Director and Partner

GardyneHOLT

## USEFUL WEBSITES

**Designers Institute of New Zealand**  
[www.designersinstitute.nz](http://www.designersinstitute.nz)

**The Big Idea**  
[www.thebigidea.co.nz](http://www.thebigidea.co.nz)

**Idealog**  
[www.idealog.co.nz](http://www.idealog.co.nz)

**Design Assembly**  
[www.designassembly.org.nz](http://www.designassembly.org.nz)

**Portfolio recruitment**  
[www.portfoliorecruitment.co.nz](http://www.portfoliorecruitment.co.nz)


## FURTHER INFORMATION

For the most up-to-date communication design information, visit our website:  
[www.aut.ac.nz/communication-design](http://www.aut.ac.nz/communication-design)

### FUTURE STUDENTS

Contact the Future Student Advisory team for more information: [www.aut.ac.nz/enquire](http://www.aut.ac.nz/enquire)

[futurestudents@aut.ac.nz](mailto:futurestudents@aut.ac.nz)


 @AUTFutureStudents

### CURRENT AUT STUDENTS

Contact the Student Hub Advisors team for more information: 0800 AUT UNI (0800 288 864)

[www.aut.ac.nz/enquire](http://www.aut.ac.nz/enquire)

[studenthub@aut.ac.nz](mailto:studenthub@aut.ac.nz)

 @AUTEmployabilityandCareers

### EMPLOYABILITY & CAREERS

For other Future Career Sheets visit:  
[www.aut.ac.nz/careersheets](http://www.aut.ac.nz/careersheets)

For employability and career support, AUT students can book an appointment through  
<https://elab.aut.ac.nz/>


### CITY CAMPUS


55 Wellesley Street East, Auckland Central


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640 Great South Road, Manukau, Auckland

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The information contained in this career sheet is correct at time of printing, August 2019.

