15 Unexpected Career Paths of Graphic Designers

There’s never been a better time to work in the creative industries, with countless career options open to those with artistic flair.

In years gone by, as a graduate, you may have been limited to just a handful of roles, but graphic design qualifications will now set you up for all manner of jobs – from book cover designer to copywriter. Here we share 15 of the most unexpected occupations of graphic designers to help inspire your creative career, as told by the graduates of Shillington.

1. Fashion Designer

As you’ll know, creatives are seldom interested in just one area of design. Fashion, for example, is an extension of many other forms of visual expression, and so it makes sense that some graphic designers turn their hand to garment and accessory design. Shillington New York graduate, Greg Bemis, took his illustration talents to Nike’s headquarters in Oregon where he excelled in the Basketball Footwear department. “I think it is a career that allows you to wear different hats and do a multitude of different things.”

2. Marketing Manager

Having a background in graphic design will particularly help with roles that involve briefing creatives, such as marketing, for example. Marketing Managers are expected to oversee all aspects of the mix, from brochure and website design to written communications. Shillington Sydney graduate Alexander Wu-Kim applied his skill-set to a role as Digital Marketing Manager at fashion label, Local Supply.

3. Teacher / Lecturer

At Shillington, a high number of our graduates go on to become lecturers, with some returning to the places they studied to help nurture the careers of budding professionals.

Laura Weldon, part-time teacher at Shillington Manchester, explains the appeal: “I teach because I am as passionate about design today as I was first starting out. I love seeing that passion and interest for design in the students. It’s such a great process to be part of—we have students come in that have never used a Mac before, and they graduate with the skills to be a designer. It also keeps me on my toes and gives me a fresh perspective on things as I am surrounded by 22 students that have completely different outlooks.”

4. UX/UI Designer

Although the visual element of design is the main reason many people choose to study graphics, some prefer to explore more of the behind-the-scenes ‘process’ when entering the industry. UX and UI provide fantastic careers to the technically skilled, utilising designers’ abilities to help users to easily interact with a product. Shillington Melbourne graduate, Lori Beth Kaye, has done just this.

5. Wedding Invitation Designer

Weddings are now big business, with the average bride and groom spending £33K on their special day. With the industry booming, roles for the creatively gifted are plentiful, with couples requiring all manner of stationery, from save the dates to table plans.

This is a path that has enticed many Shillington graduates, including Emily Kerr, who has a few words of advice for designers entering the field: “My main learning from doing invites is that its key to involve mother of the bride from the start. So many times friends have been charmed by quirky personalised first drafts. However, later down the line, the family get to see and suddenly things have to become more traditional!”

> *I love that my days are never the same; every day poses a new question or problem that I have to solve through design.*

6. Letterpress Printer

Cemented in the heritage of graphic design, letterpress printing is likely to be on the list of dream careers for many. However, being a highly skilled practice, it takes years of work to develop the trade. Shillington graduate Eleanor Rogers worked as an administrative assistant in corporate finance before deciding to kickstart her creative career. After graduation, she landed an amazing opportunity at Chapel Press, a specialist letterpress print studio in Melbourne, and has enjoyed her unique role since.

7. 3D Illustrator

Rather than opt for a career that fully encompasses traditional skills, 3D illustration can be a happy medium between this and focusing on contemporary computer processes. At Shillington, we host a ‘handmade day’ to encourage more exploration into this field. One of our recent guest lecturers, Kyle Bean, who’s worked for clients including Google, Emirates, Kinfolk and Wallpaper, offers advice to those considering a career in 3D illustration: “Having good making skills is only half of what is really necessary when it

comes to this kind of work. You also need to be good at communicating your ideas and carefully planning your projects.”

8. Book Cover Designer

Ebooks may now be a popular choice for readers, but printed pages are still very much in demand by book lovers the world over. As such, there is high demand for enticing covers that will draw in potential readers – great news for creatives. Holly Ovenden is a stellar example of an inspiring designer that specialises in book covers. She is currently working in-house at Bloomsbury Publishing in London, after graduating from Shillington. Similarly, guest lecturer David Pearson has created critically-acclaimed artwork for a variety of clients including Penguin.

9. Sign Painter

Again drawing on the more traditional elements of design practice, sign painting and hand lettering is still a highly coveted skill, especially in the hospitality industry. Restaurants hoping to stand out in a crowded market may call upon designers to help create unique signage. Shillington guest lecturer Josh Harris, aka The A Board Dude, has dedicated his career to the art.

“I kinda stumbled into it purely by chance while I was working at The Breakfast Club in Angel, London. I noticed their sandwich board design was looking pretty flaccid and decorated with outdated trivia. So, I scribbled on it. And another board. The big boss man, Jon took a liking to it, informed my manager at the time and she offered me a new role painting the boards at their four locations around the city every week! The

rest is history.”

10. Surface Pattern Designer

Designers and artists tend to work across many different mediums, using a variation of materials along the way. Fabric provides an interesting canvas for designers to work on, enabling them to apply their art to a number of end products. Shillington Melbourne teacher Spenceroni decided that surface pattern design was the route for him, after originally studying science and then graphic design. He’s since gone on to win awards with his bright and engaging visual style. Shillington New York graduate Courtney Capone also specialises in surface design and illustration – check out her inspiring work and her pattern tutorial.

11. Game Designer

For fans of 8-bit, Oculus Rift and everything in between, gaming design might seem a tempting challenge to apply your skills. Winner of the Shillumni competition Vanille Cuvelier, caught our attention when she designed a mobile game called Shillorun, with no previous game design experience. On developing her new skill-set, she said: “Creating a game is really straightforward once you get the hang of how rules, behaviours and attributes work.” If you’re looking to make the segue into this creative offshoot, Vanille recommends GameSalad as a starting point.

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12. Packaging Designer

Brands are constantly on the lookout for new and creative ways to market their products, and as such require designers to help produce engaging artwork for their packaging. From drinks companies to confectionary and toiletries, there’s a whole

host of opportunities for savvy designers and illustrators to be part of this lucrative industry. Shillington graduate Roo Cassels works for UK branding and packaging agency, Big Fish. He secured a job after working in advertising. “Every day’s different so sometimes I may be cutting and sticking, making mock-ups, designing on the computer, on a photo shoot or at a meeting with clients—it’s definitely an upgrade from my old job.”

13. Web Designer

In addition to UX and UI, truly memorable websites require strong design aesthetics, which is where graphic designers can make their mark. Shillington graduate and the former Head of Digital, John Fry, knows more than a thing or two about the world of web design. Running Sixheads, alongside co-founder Bec Brown, John uses his 15 years of design and development experience to assist his clients in achieving websites that both look and work beautifully.

> *I still sketch ideas out to explain to clients what I intend to do—that is a really important stage of the process.*

14. Email Marketing Designer

With brands now having the opportunity to reach a mass audience through social media, email marketing is arguably now more important than ever before. Curated lists ensure that companies can talk directly to potential customers, through controlled and customised messaging. In order to ensure the brand’s identity is conveyed across all forms of communication, many design agencies and creative freelancers are finding their niche in specifically designing for email platforms. For designers with a penchant for digital, this could be a sidestep into the career of your dreams.

15. Muralist

In cities all around the world, street art is becoming increasingly celebrated for its unique visual appeal, which can instantly transform the ambience of a street or entire area. Shillington Brisbane teacher Adam Busby creates striking hand painted, indoor and outdoor large-scale murals, making his work internationally renowned. His clients have included the Brisbane Street Art Festival 2017, Brisbane City Council and even Shillington’s Brisbane Campus.

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