8 digital brands that designed custom typefaces to save millions

It seems our current digitised era is perpetuating the era of customisable typefaces. Online streaming service Netflix just announced its collaboration with London type foundry Dalton Maag to create its own typeface, Netflix Sans, not long after the BBC announced its Reith in-house typeface last year. These digital brands aren't just choosing a custom typeface for brand aesthetics and ownership – it's also a smart move to save millions every year on font licensing.

But Netflix and the BBC are only the latest addition to a increasing list of digital brands choosing to design custom typefaces over forking out massive yearly licensing fees for "off-the-shelf fonts", as Dalton Maag puts it. These brands join Apple, Samsung, YouTube and Google among others.

Here we take a look at the custom typefaces designed by in-house teams at digital companies – in conjunction with type foundries from across the globe.

Netflix

Netflix brand design lead Noah Nathan worked with Tanya Kumar and the team at Dalton Maag to create a new, more "ownable" geometric grotesque typeface that works alongside the brand's aesthetics.

The uppercase proportions of Netflix Sans are designed to appear cinematic and the lowercase proportions are compact and efficient. Noah describes the letterforms as clean and neutral.

The arched cut on the lowercase ‘t’ is apparently inspired by the “cinemascopic curve” of the brand’s wordmark. Netflix Sans comes in different weights including regular, light, thin, medium, bold and black.

BBC



The BBC worked alongside Dalton Maag to replace using Gill Sans (which it had since 1997) with its own custom typeface called Reith, named after the corporation’s first director-general Lord Reith.

Work on the typeface began back in 2015. The BBC wanted a single suite of fonts to function as a brand typeface, an information typeface and a reading typeface for small and digital screens, surely because most of us consume news on our smartphones now. The humanist sans and serif are designed to work together, constructed of open counters, regularised proportions and sharp connections between bowl and stem.

BBC Reith made its first appearance across BBC Sport in August 2017.

YouTube



YouTube Sans rolled out in May 2017, designed by its in-house UX team alongside brand consultancy Saffron and type foundries Letterjuice and URW++.

Inspired from the the design of YouTube's iconic red play button logo, YouTube Sans is a sans-serif typeface that's simple, bold and curved with diagonal cuts which reflect the white triangle in the centre of the play button.

The play button itself is incorporated into the custom typeface as a glyph, so it can be typed like any other letter.

The YouTube Sans font family includes light, medium and bold weights, which are used across digital and physical manifestations.

The typeface was unveiled during the launch for YouTube TV – the video site's live television service.

YouTube Sans is used across YouTube TV’s products and communications.

Google

Alongside its own typeface library, Google Fonts, Google also created and then open-sourced typeface Roboto for Android and Chrome OS, and Product Sans, a sans-serif typeface created by Google for branding purposes. It came into effect in 2015 as Google’s branding grew its presence across a multitude of devices.

Google Product Sans



Product Sans was created so the Google logo could be portrayed in constrained spaces and remain consistent for its users across platforms. Roboto is also part of Google's general material design language seen across its services such as Inbox and Google Play Music. The typeface has been open sourced on GitHub for anyone to modify.

Apple



There's pretty much no surprise that Apple designed its own typeface, San Francisco, back when the Apple Watch was launched in 2015 – and it's now used across all iOS devices and systems. You'll also spot San Francisco on Apple keyboards. With a focus on clarity and legibility, San Francisco works well in small sizes.

Anyone can download San Francisco free from Apple here.

Samsung



SamsungOne followed in hot pursuit after Google and Apple announced their own typefaces.

Designed to be used across all of Samsung's devices such as phones, TVs and fridges – as well as the brand's marketing and advertisements – the font family supports 400 different languages and more than 25,000 characters.

SamsungOne appears to resemble the original Android typeface, Droid Sans, but with more embellishments on the letterforms. The typeface provides Samsung with a separate visual identity to Google's Roboto.

USA Today



Daily national newspaper USA Today created two custom-designed fonts to use across its online, mobile, app and print platforms. It was important to unify its services under one consistent brand, according to Dalton Maag, who worked with USA Today on the project.

Unify Sans and Unify Serif were designed for both print and digital, offering a wide range of weights and styles to be used for headlines, quotes and texts.

Nokia

Nokia Sans

Nokia Pure

The oldest custom typeface for a digital brand in this list is Nokia Pure, created by Dalton Maag in 2011 to replace Nokia Sans. Its main use was for Nokia devices.

What’s special about Nokia Pure is its development to support Latin, Cyrillic, Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, Devanagari and Thai scripts where released in 2011 and extended to support Armenian, Ethiopic, Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Gurmukhi, Gujarati, Bengali, Oriya, Sinhalese, Khmer, Chinese and Klingon by 2013. The Nokia Pure typeface includes regular, light and bold fonts that also have been hinted to ensure a high quality image rendition for displays.

Nokia Pure won the Graphics category at the Design Museum’s Designs of the Year in 2012.

https://www.digitalartsonline.co.uk/news/typography/8-digital-companies-that-designed-custom-typefaces-to-save-millions/