9 Graphic Design Trends We'll See In 2020

With a fresh cup of coffee and some tunes on in the background, sitting down in a patch of sunlight next to the window to create a fresh new design can feel like the entire world is just us and our big creative ideas. We are graphic designers; we love our jobs and wonder how we got so lucky to study and work in our industry. Sometimes it's easy to feel like it's just us in our little creative bubbles.

However, it's important for us to realise that we do not exist in isolation and there are perceptible graphic design trends that may or may not influence our decision making. We are communicators of messages and those messages are constantly shaped by patterns in marketing and advertising, architecture, technology, popular culture, as well as social and economic trends.

The world around us will ultimately influence the constantly evolving perceptions of visual ideas and therefore influence the visual messages we send. Because of this, there are perceptible trends and cycles that emerge in graphic design.

Oddly enough though, we currently do find ourselves in a kind of isolation. In light of Covid-19, we are facing the biggest challenge to our modern society yet. We are already seeing similarities emerge in the responses for designers and we are likely to see some of these patterns remain and become trends.

> *Whether we want to step in line with these trends or defy the norms in favour of another path, understanding these changes and staying on top of key trends in graphic design is a crucial part of being a designer.*

At the start of 2020, we have so far seen quite polarising

trends and like all good, fluctuating movements, it will be interesting to see which remain the dominant trends of the year. Read on for 9 of the current graphic design trends we can expect to see more of in 2020.

1. Design for Good

Sara Andreasson

As designers, we are constantly seeking to create something that will make a difference and it’s not the first time we’ve seen creatives step up to the plate to help create positive social impact. Throughout history, designers have used their skills to help extend visual messages about global health crises.

From “broadsheet warnings of Indian cholera symptoms issued in 1831 and malaria warning posters from the dark days of 1940s wartime.” Through to “the colourful graffiti painted onto Liberian walls that educated the illiterate on the symptoms of Ebola and warnings of the late 20th century’s principal medical menace—Aids” check out the multiple ways designers have promoted activism throughout history.

In our current situation, we are seeing an upswing in the number of designers creating works and using their platforms to spread the messages about how to slow the spread of coronavirus. This is taking the form of powerful images and animations to try and spread the message, including visual depictions of symptoms and providing some comic-relief through representations of self-quarantine.

Check out the awesome typographic illustrations by Sara Andreasson and the magical imagery created by Sara Shakeel to get inspired to do your part.

2. Even More Minimalism

New Logo and Identity for Uber by Wolff Olins and In-house

Reflecting the ongoing importance placed on the honesty and transparency of businesses in today’s landscape, minimalism really flourished in 2019 and is expected to continue well into the 2020s. “Design will continue to strip away extra flair and embellishment and move toward a much simpler, straightforward presentation,” says group creative director Brian Dixon at Grady Britton.

This means design will be all about trust and believability and therefore tend towards simple or intuitive visual elements; flat designs, two-dimensional illustrations, primary colours, easy-to-read typography and even veering into design that feels intentionally unfinished. Andy Capper, creative director at Echo Brand Design says “From digital lifestyle

brands like Uber we’re seeing a softening and a simplicity, through their use of more approachable typography with fewer capitals, more circular letterforms and clean, naturalistic icons. In recent campaigns from Nike and Adidas, we’re seeing greater honesty to styling and photography, focusing on real individuals in less staged environments, reflecting a desire for more one-on-one conversations.” (via: Creative Bloq)

3. Sustainability

Conserva Collective

In addition to honesty and transparency, consumers around the world are now prioritising our relationships with our earth and vastly questioning the impact of certain materials and

production processes on the environment. This in turn, is urging brands to review the design of their products.

This new favour of eco-conscious products will lead to further simplification of materials, packaging and branding and will mean a continued focus on design that feels organic, calming and natural. Check out this example of minimal plastic-free packaging design for Conserva Collective. The minimal approach is a nod to the preservation mission of the brand’s products themselves.

“More brands are trying to make a positive contribution by transitioning towards innovative approaches to packaging, such as using recyclable or ethically sourced materials,” says Charlie Smith, creative director at Charlie Smith Design. “The types of inks we use, the different finishes we see and the materials we specify are all contributing to a more pared-back design trend and this is set to gain momentum in 2020.”

4. Type-Only

Seachange

However, not all designers are choosing to take the calm and minimal road. There are a growing number of designers taking an experimental, type-only approach and exploring more artistic or decorative typography and playing with scale. We're also seeing a rise in designs that are typography-led over photography or illustration. Nazar Begen, Head of Project at Crello, notes that "designers are playing with typography more than ever, to create more innovative and modern compositions. Artistic typography, maxi typography split into multiple lines and semi-transparent fonts forming various shapes are all on the rise."

Take a look at this unexpected, experimental approach to branding by Seachange for Supertrash—a New Zealand based,

family-run business that is trying to repurpose, recycle and reimagine how we dispose of waste to help divert from landfills. London-based agency Made Thought took a similar approach with their type-based takeover methods for A Plastic Planet, who’s mission is to ignite and inspire the world to turn off the tap of plastic. The type-based design aims to be disruptive and cut through the noise to “represent and reframe the predictable conversation and aesthetic around sustainability to encourage people to see and think in a different light”.

And it’s not just sustainability campaigns taking this approach, we’re seeing full brand identities emerge that are letting typography take centre stage. For example, 2019’s branding for Assembly hotel by Ragged Edge turns the expected approach to hospitality branding on its head with a bespoke typeface-led identity to support it’s energetic, in-your-face tone of voice.

5. Mixed Media

We Are Collins

Even more designers are beginning to rebel against the ubiquitous flat design aesthetic that emerged in 2017 and is continuing into 2020. Another trend we've been seeing is an explosion of overlapping and more layered compositions that play with texture, volume and analog materials laid out in a collage-like manner. We're seeing designers experiment with depth-creation and a mix of varied elements such as photography and illustration with torn paper edges, fabrics, cutout text and even paint strokes.

Consuela Onighi, UX designer at Illustrate Digital, is seeing similar things. "I've noticed that over the past few months, most designs have created a 3D feel by combining layers of typography, images and abstract shapes, often reflective of

the company branding, to create depth," she says. "This is often paired with bright, vibrant colours and gradients, which I believe will become a strong trend in the next year too."

This beautiful campaign for Self, Made by Collins gives us an inspiring peek at what's to come. The exhibition at San Francisco-based museum Exploratorium, tackles the theme of human identity. Collins says, "Our approach to the campaign was inspired by the complex confluence of unseen forces that combine to create the self. We are a mash-up of our experiences, emotions, environments, DNA, teachers, music and more. With that in mind, we developed a series of portraits that show how identity is an evolving collage, not a photograph."

Even our own Shillington students are on top of this trend! This packaging design by Marusa Rimc shows us that this graphic design trend is surely here to stay.

6. Three-Dimensional

Diller Scofidio + Renfro

Furthermore to the emergence of the layering approach to creating depth, we've also seen a marked increase in designs utilising 3D elements over the last year. Thanks to today's technology and software capabilities, it is becoming a lot easier to create 3D graphics. Therefore, we will expect to see much more of these awesome 3D graphic design compositions.

This visual identity and campaign by Droga5 produced for Greenwich Peninsula is a great example. A fluid, evolving, three-dimensional shape, used static on posters and animated for digital media, creates an eye-catching visual statement to promote Greenwich as London's new creative neighbourhood.

Moreover, designers are often combining it with other visual

elements, such as photography and 2-dimensional objects. These 3D designs by Leo Natsume for Huawei showcase how three-dimensional renders can be combined with photography to create engaging compositions that stand out in a crowded tech market.

7. Motion and Animation

[embedded content]

In a world where attention spans are becoming shorter and shorter, we're seeing more and more brands using moving content to further cut through the noise, capture attention and create more interesting experiences for their audiences. Even simple animations like GIFs, achievable for any graphic designer, are having a big moment.

Mark Chatelier, executive creative director at StormBrands, agrees, "Think storytelling, dynamic use of identity and content, animated mascots and brand assets that move and interact with each other across websites and social media. Designers can no longer afford to sit still."

Emma Newnes of B&B Studio adds that, "As we move into the future, brands will attempt to gain recognition for their style of motion graphic or brand sound. Visual brand equities will transcend into kinetic equities as multi-sensorial branding takes on a whole new literal meaning."

For the future seekers, Los Angeles-based motion giants Man vs. Machine are inspirational as ever, creating incredible multi-sensorial motion campaigns for Nike, Squarespace and ITV.

8. Zero Negative Space

Baptiste Carin

At complete odds with a trend towards minimalist, some designers are rebelling to create a fresh and revived experience through to use of maximalist, edge-to-edge designs. By filling the page completely, leaving no negative space behind, the results can be energetic, loud and fun.

“There are signature works by established designers whose work embodies this trend, such as Richard Niessen and Esther de Vries, or Paula Scher. On the one hand, this graphic approach can be calming and obedient, or in other instances claustrophobic and cryptic. In either case the repetition creates eye-pleasing visuals, a maze full of secret treasures.” says Michal Sloboda, co-founder of Trend List.

Sloboda says, “This trend has been around for a while and it comes back periodically. In 2020, however, designers should be more careful about what they want to convey by filling the last empty space and how the final visual feels. It can be pleasing, provocative, abstract or full of information—as long as it’s constructed with an intention.”

9. Breaking the Rules

Fixture font by Sudtipos

Perhaps refreshingly, this year we are seeing a greater number of designers scraping the rule book altogether, getting experimental and pushing the boundaries of graphic design. This kind of approach is a great way to create visual tension

in your designs. It’s raw and unpolished and stands out well enough to grab attention.

The unpolished look is no longer reserved for small, rebellious start-ups trying to make their mark. And this is a good thing, according to Curro de la Villa, Creative Director at 72andSunny Amsterdam, “It gives designers a chance to experiment, almost vandalise typefaces, use bold, contrasty and unexpected layouts, absurd kerning, neon colours…all combined in crazy ways, embracing imperfection.”

Perhaps it’s that quest for imperfection that has inspired the one broken rule that is topping them all, stretched typography. Stretched typography has emerged as a trend with the new innovations of variable fonts and shows no signs of slowing down. With variable fonts, you can now extend, stretch, shrink and flex your type to any given size, screen, or platform to create proportional balance, consistency, or even animations.

“What we were first taught not to do, we now do by intention,” says Michal Sloboda “There are many more rules to be broken and by doing so we can come across something seemingly bizarre, but also unique or beautiful.”

The graphic design trends of 2020 seem to exist on a wide spectrum that can only be exemplary of the same polarisation that exists in the world around us. The last few years have seen a spotlight shone on the honesty and transparency of businesses, the immediacy and global concern of environmental degradation, alongside mass political division. Now, in the light of Covid-19, we are facing the biggest challenge to our modern society yet.

These are factors that we all have an individual reaction to. Therefore it’s only natural that the same division in social responses can also be seen in the visual messages that we as designers are creating. From ultra-minimalism through to

throwing out the graphic design rulebook in protest, we can expect to see a vast array of exciting trends emerge this year. Hang on to your hats, it’s going to be a wild ride.

For type lovers, we’ve curated this list of top 20 typefaces for this year—these are fonts from some of the best type foundries in the world. And for some help with font pairings, check out these 10 examples that we’d recommend giving a try for your next design project.

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