

Slathered in

We can blame the Swiss. The world of typography in the 1950's was the wild west. Type was exaggerated, it was eccentric. It was a mess. Trying to solve the typographic problems of the day was like plotting an assault on the Maginot Line. The world was entrenched and something had to change. When a couple of Swedes released their admittedly swiss, neutral typeface, they did not expect controversy. But for the world of typography, Helvetica was blitzkrieg.



Helvetica is everywhere because it works. It is extremely legible and it does not take much to make it look great. Seasoned designers and amateurs alike are able to use it effectively, which means anyone can use the typeface to make something with impact. Of course, Helvetica is not without its critics.

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Helvetica

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Introduced in 1957 by Max Miedinger and Eduard Hoffman, Helvetica was designed with legibility and clarity in mind. In contrast to the typographic styles that preceded it, Helvetica is very geometric. It was designed on a grid which gives it a pleasant mathematical symmetry. Helvetica fits into whatever box you put it in. For established brands, Helvetica was a breath of fresh air. They were able to separate themselves from the flamboyant excess of their past, and make a cool, clean impression on the new generation. Helvetica was a sensation. But why?

Helvetica marked a conformist trend during a raucous counterculture era. To quote the esteemed graphic designer Paula Scher, “Helvetica was the typeface of the Vietnam war”. Scher equated it to the fascism of her era. It defined the visual language of big corporations, causing every company to look and feel similar. When asked which type defined the Iraq war, Scher jokingly replied that it was again, Helvetica.

It is not the typeface with the most personality, but it is extremely good at what it does. You can find the typeface and its variants plastered up and down almost every north american street. It is the right choice for brands whose products have enough personality to stand on their own. At the end of the day, Helvetica is about effective communication, which means for better or for worse, it isn't going anywhere.

You are not alone.

WATCH YOUR STEP