Research & Ideas

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How would you answer the question: 'What is design?' Do you imagine that it's primarily an act of creativity, perhaps something beautiful that an artist might produce? Do you think that it's more a question of technical issues and accuracy?

While good design invariably has an eye on aesthetics and a concern for technical accuracy and perfected details, graphic design, (whether for the web, print, or screen), is essentially about solving problems. Each project has its own set of unique problems to address. What is the first step in problem solving? You begin with research. You immerse yourself in the needs of the client, audience/readership, and the project itself, and become as informed as you can be.

Like most people, I often struggle to envisage original, effective ways to solve the problems presented by each project. This struggle has many causes: a complex or ill-defined brief, lack of constraints, or an environment or process that, rather than inspiring creative thinking, deadens or impedes the idea-generating part of your mind. This section aims to help you overcome these obstacles. We'll go through the design process step-by-step, look closely at how research helps you generate those brilliant new ideas you promised, and spell out how to move smoothly from the initial problem– as the client presented it to you–to something you'll be proud to put in your portfolio. We'll also look at tools that make it all easier, ones I've used almost daily over the past few years to help me as I work.