# # Intro

The purpose of this web page is to provide a critical comparison between the two creative studios of Sagmeister Walsh and Reactive. Although not exclusively, both of these studios operate in within the same sector and specialisation as each other - that is, the sector of Design Consultancy and the specialisation of digital design. The two studios operate in very different capacities; Sagmeister Walsh is a small studio working on the international level (Sagmeister & Walsh, 2015), whilst Reactive is large studio operating primarily within Australia ("What We Do," 2015).

With digital design in the sector of design consultancy being such a broad field ("Design Disciplines," 2015), the differences and similarities between a small and a large firm will no doubt be significant and noteworthy. These differences and similarities will be highlighted and contrasted to provide a well-rounded look at this sector and specialisation.

# # What is Digital Design?

"Multimedia and web designers develop and prepare information for digital publication with particular emphasis on clarity of communication and the matching of information styles to audience requirements."

- DIA, 2015

# # The Companies

## ## Sagmeister Walsh

### ### Overview

Originally founded in 1993 by Stefan Sagmeister and then later merged with Jessica Walsh in 2012, Sagmeister Walsh is a successful, award winning international design studio ("S&W Awards," 2015) based in New York. The creative studio works within the sector of visual communication design spanning multiple specialisations including branding, web & interactive, print and other types of design; they are truly a multi-disciplinary design studio (Sagmeister & Walsh, 2015). This large pool of disciplines easily places them within the specialisation, and focus of this comparison, of digital design.

### ### Studio Size

Sagmeister Walsh is a small design studio with only 2 partners and 3 full time staff. From high end eastern fashion ("Aishti Identity," 2010), to European car manufacturers ("BMW Book," 2010), the small size of the studio hasn&#39;t limited themselves in terms of the quality and size of clients they have the opportunity to work with (Sagmeister & Walsh, 2015).

## ## Reactive

### ### Overview

Founded in 1997, Reactive is an award winning Digital Agency serving both Australia and New Zealand with offices in Sydney, Melbourne and Auckland ("Who We Are," 2015). Reactive works within the sector of visual communication design with a focus on the specialisations of Web, Interactive and all forms of digital design. This clear-cut association with the digital design specialisation played a large role in selecting them for this comparison.

### ### Studio Size

Reactive is a large studio; with over 130 employees they not only one of the largest and longest running digital design firms across Australia ("Who We Are," 2015) but are also supplying constant jobs to young designers across Australia and New Zealand ("Current Opportunities," 2015). The large scale of this design firm has allowed them to work with some big name clients including Coles ("Coles Supermarket Website," 2013) and Nissan ("Nissan Website," 2015).

## ## Comparison

For these specific design firms, the size of the studio has been irrelevant to the clients they have had the opportunity to work with. This goes against the traditional way that one would normally perceive the size of a company.

# # Design Approach

## ## Sagmeister Walsh

### ### Conception of Design

Based on previous work that Sagmeister and Walsh have created ("Work," 2015) and an interview conducted with Jessica Walsh (Treggiden, 2014), one of the partners, we can begin to piece together an idea of what the design approach of Sagmeister Walsh is. As is shown in the diagrams above, Sagmeister Walsh is identified as being a fairly even mix between ‘Problem Solving’ and ‘Applied Creativity’. Their conception of design (Franz, Ferreira, Thambiratnam, & Jerome, 1998) is identified as laying between ‘Technical’ and ‘Philosophical’. These conclusions have been reached due to the large number of both technical (web design, branding, etc.) and artistic (album covers, etc.) projects the studio has undertaken.

### ### Creative Process

The information provided by the Jessica Walsh interview (Treggiden, 2014) gave information on her creative process, seeing as she is one of the partners of the firm along with what Stefan Sagmeister says regarding her position: “Jessica will be in charge of the more commercial pieces” (Butler, 2012) we can infer that her creative process is a good indicator of the firm’s creative process. These pieces of information have informed the above flowchart for the design process of Sagmeister Walsh.

### ### Small Case Study – Jewish Museum Re Brand

Sagmeister Walsh was to conduct a complete rebranding of the Jewish Museum located in the Upper East Side of Manhattan. The goal was to connect the historic with the contemporary to engage visitors of multiple generations.

The outcome was a brand is founded on the geometry of the Star of David. All design precedents are drawn from this grid from the typography to the illustration work. In order to cater for photography in this design language an app was developed that transformed any photo or webcam stream into a Jewish Museum style artwork.

The final outcome consisted of a new identity, stationery, packaging, advertising campaigns, promotional materials, and a new website. ("Jewish Museum Identity," 2014)

### ### Reflection

The sheer reputation of Sagmeister Walsh allows them to be picky with their clients and at the same time, take on full creative development for their ideas. They only ever pitch one final piece of artwork their clients. This is VERY different than how most other creative studios would operate and major point of difference over a studio such as Reactive.

## ## Reactive

### ### Conception of Design

Based on previous work that Reactive have created ("Browse Work," 2015) and the interview conducted with one of the founders of Reactive, Tim O’Neill (Sagripanti, 2012) we can infer the design approach that Reactive takes as a studio. As shown by the diagrams above, we can see that Reactive leans more toward the ‘Problem Solving’ side of the chart - though, being a creative studio is also present in ‘Applied Creativity’. Reactive’s conception of design (Franz et al., 1998) has been placed right into the technical corner of the triangle. This has been decided due to their substantial foothold in technologically driven outcomes such as web sites, content management systems and user experience/interface design.

### ### Creative Process

Although Reactive do not explicitly state what their creative process is, by studying professional standards from others in the industry we can infer a creative process that is likely to have similarities to the process that Reactive implements. You can see the design process I have appropriated from information gained in a Smashing Magazine article (Reimer, 2011) on a typical web designer’s process.

### ### Small Case Study – Jewish Museum Re Brand

In 2013, Reactive was tasked with the design and development of a new website for Tesco Finest, a subsidiary of one of the largest retailers in the UK, Tesco. The ultimate goal of the website was to “instill immediate confidence in the consumer with the quality of Tesco finest products”.

What resulted was an innovatively designed website that allowed for the Tesco story to unfold in an intuitive and beautiful way. This is accomplished through large, captivating imagery, immersive videos and content that gently guides the user through the experience.

The website also features responsive design meaning the design can adapt and reflow to best suit the viewing device regardless of its size. This is one of the most sought after features in web development with the boom of mobile computing. ("Tesco Finest Case Study," 2013)

### ### Reflection

Reactive seems to take a more methodological approach to their design work compared to Sagmeister Walsh’s artful, expressive designs. This could be summed up to them being a dedicated digital studio rather than an all rounder such as Sagmeister Walsh. From an outside perspective, Reactive operates in a much more conventional way than a studio such as Sagmeister Walsh.

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