



Read the trend

If you don't know where you want to go, you should not complain when you arrive somewhere else.

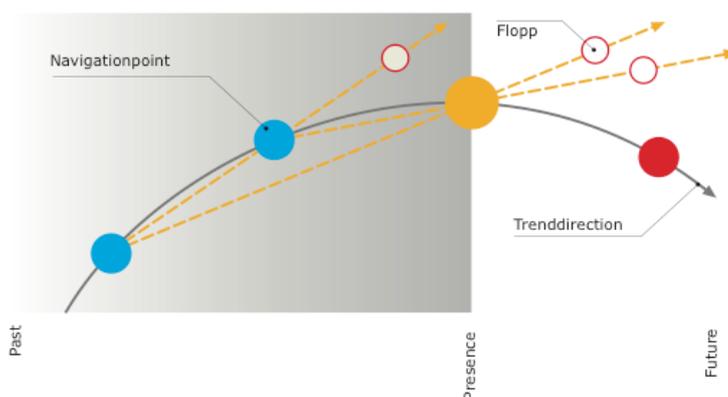
Design is in most cases planned for the future. Today, car designers throughout the world design the cars, which will be regarded as good design in 12 years. Today, fashion designers throughout the world design clothes we will see as fashionable in 2 years.

Those designers must have a very precise feeling today what people will be looking for tomorrow. If you as a designer copy today's trend you are a designer of yesterday. If you have no antenna to feel the future you have no talent to be a good designer.

How can you learn how to read the future?

There are specialists dealing with the research about the future. We can learn from them and listen to what they say. It is very important not to mix up fears and wishes. There are clear indicators you must know, read well and respect. It is like navigation:

1. You have to know your position today.
2. You have to know where you came from
3. Then you can estimate the future direction.





All successful inventions in the late past have got something to do with time.

Example:

Train, car, plane.

Telephone, radio, TV, Internet

Psychology informs us that:

People want to have everything: now, individual and convenient.

Every invention, which is fast, individual and convenient, will be successful.

Every invention, which is slow, mass-oriented and inconvenient, will disappear.

Let me give you two examples of future developments following this rule, which will be of high relevance for the visual communication designer, a question of surviving in this profession:

Example No. 1

The future of printed media

"Who want yesterdays papers" sang the Rolling Stones in 1965. The idea of a newspaper was to inform the public in the shortest possible time. But today we have new media like TV and Internet, which are much faster. When a newspaper reaches the reader, the content is already old. Today we want news equal to time. Newspapers have no longer the advantage to be actual. They are not individual either. When I buy a newspaper I am not interested in the stock exchange news or sports or the huge stupid ads telling me what I have to buy if I want to be a good man.

They are not very convenient either. I am often sitting in planes and the fight with the newspaper and my neighbor's newspaper could be the content of a funny film.

But:



We like newspapers.
They are an important part of our culture.
And I can read everywhere.

Somebody said quite rightly: You don't take your laptop with you when you go on the toilet. You could also add that the laptop has no additional cleaning value.

But: There is a new generation coming up which has been born in the computer age. They are not used to newspapers; they are not willing to get used to them. Newspapers are not part of their culture.

They take their Nintendo to the toilet and consider newspapers not to be soft enough.

The newspapers as we know them today will most probably die because of financial reasons. The number of readers will become so unimportant that the advertisement income will disappear.

This development has started and become visible for example in Germany. It started seemingly unexpected but the warning signs have been visible for a long time. Nobody wanted to be aware of it. But this does not mean that we will only read from monitors in the future.

It is interesting to see the development of the books. There are different types of books that will see a different development in the future. While specialised books are struggling, belletristic is increasing.

Specialised books are

Inconvenient

The buying process and the storage is complicated and time-consuming

Slow

It takes a lot of time to find the relevant information

Not individual

A lot of the content is not relevant



Belletristic literature is convenient, you can read it everywhere, time does not matter; in fact the time you spend with a book is pleasant and it is individual.

What about the future of printing as such?

The new media is about to replace a lot of printed matters of the past.

New media are often much better in fulfilling the task of former printed matters. Again they are faster, more convenient and more individual. New printing systems and methods to increase speed, convenience and individuality have been developed and on their way to be used.

Computer to plate

30 years ago a colour separation took up to 2 weeks, today you can do the same within 4 minutes.

In the 60ies of the last century, offset was winning the race against letterpress printing. The plate processing was the winning factor because it was faster than letterpress preprint.

Trying to make things even faster, the idea came up to develop software to go directly from the DTP to the plate. This meant the death of two very old professions: The typographer or typesetter and the lithographer.

We have to understand the historical context: Gutenberg's invention of the letterpress has changed the society and lasted for 520 years. Within less than one year this technology was wiped away. A revolution is taking place that might have the same impact on the society like Gutenberg's movable letters.

If big changes are happening, how can we continue to think small?



Computer to print

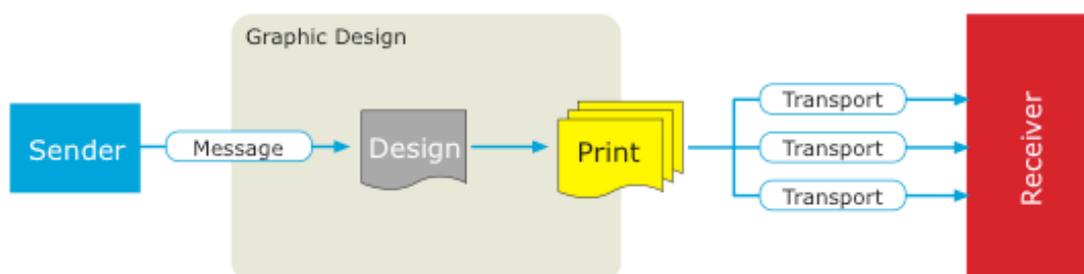
The idea is simple and you will find out not even very new: Increase the speed of preprint and individualize the print. Again the rule counts: Speed, individuality and convenience.

Everybody today is working on increasing the speed concept to market. To give you an idea what I talk about: Today the developing time for a new product in food is about 1.5 years. We are working in my studio on a design management project to increase the speed from 1.5 years to 24 hours. From the idea to the consumer!

Computer to print is nothing but the laser printer we have today. The print cylinder will be loaded electro-magnetically and the activated parts take on a pigment powder that will be laid on the paper and fixed through heat. With every turn of the cylinder this loading must be renewed. This gives the advantage that with every turn of the cylinder; a new picture can be printed. There are still technical problems to be solved like light stability and calibration. There is also a cost problem. Issues of up to 5.000 prints in digital printing are cheaper than in offset, in big issues offset is still cheaper. The engineers are working on this and they will find solutions soon.

But another effect will kill the classical printing:

Today we have huge printing factories. From there the printed material is transported to the customer and from there to the single user. The transportation is time, energy and cost consuming. The whole concept is slow, inconvenient and not individual.



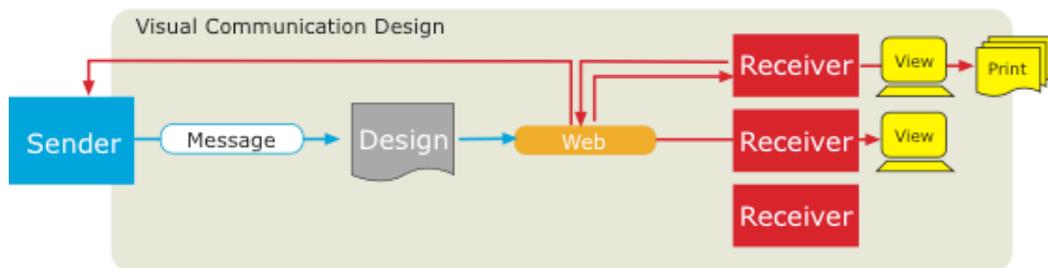


The printing industry has built up over-capacities in the past. Giant machines are today fed with small projects just to keep them running. There is hardly money to earn and many printers go bankrupt: Too big capacities and too much competition for a decreasing amount of work.

Printing will be decentralized.

The new technology makes it possible to have smaller printing units closer to the user. The final consequence could be the printing machine at the desk of the user. And this is not future, this happens every day: You find something interesting on the web but you don't want to read it on the monitor. So you print the relevant information on your own laser printer.

But this has influence on our profession. We have to change our way of thinking.



Let me give you an impression of the development:

In my studio we have been specialists for printed media since nearly 30 years. We designed catalogues, brochures, stationary, leaflets etc. This made 80% of our income. Today, it is less than 5%. But new fields of activity came up that turned out to be much more interesting and filled this gap. We are earning our income today in conceptual and strategic design consulting. We have doubled our turnover while many colleagues earn far less than before or even went bankrupt.

Designers have to understand that the communication process is more important than the communication product.



Example No. 2

The future of the supermarket

The supermarkets we know today have come from America to Europe not earlier than the 60ies of the last century. So they are something like 40 years old. In an incredible speed they changed consumer behaviour and led to the economical end of many shopkeepers. The process was cruel.

As a consequence the density of food distribution became reduced. Where you found many little shops in the neighbourhood you now see huge markets mainly in the outskirts of cities.

This has also brought problems for the old or handicapped people or people without cars.

Supermarkets are not only a visual pollution. Huge parking space is necessary due to their position at the outskirts and not in the centre. It means a huge waste of real estate. All customers have to use a lot of their time to go there. The amount of petrol that is used for the food supply is a total waste of energy resources.

So Supermarkets are not convenient, not individual and not fast.

And so they will die in a short time.

In the nineties, tests with new, convenient, individual and fast supply systems, using new media, took place in the USA and in Europe.

But they all flopped.

The right idea, presented in a wrong way to the wrong target group at the wrong time is not a bad idea, but a bad execution. The concept will be standard in less than 10 years and today's supermarkets will disappear in latest 20 years.



Tomorrow I will organize my food supply with the help of my computer. He will tell me what I have to buy, make proposals for the cooking and tell me exactly how much I will have to pay and how much money is left on my account. He knows me. I can accept the proposals or change them. When I click enter, the bill is paid and at the same time a caddy starts to make his way through the storage hall. Arriving at the ramp the caddy will be loaded in a little delivery car, driven with electricity or water, will start. At a convenient time someone will ring my doorbell and hand out the goods.

Do I read this in a crystal ball?

How do I know that this will happen? If I tell you that one and one makes two, I am not a magic fortune-teller, I am just logic.

- a. Supermarket shopping is no fun. Fun shopping is something else.
- b. Technically these distribution systems exist and are standard in b to b.
- c. With an increasing number of Internet users and the normality to use this medium, the critical margin of potential users will become crossed.

Comparing the existing supermarket with the new system shows that the new system will be more convenient, faster and more individual and thus winning.

There are also consequences for the visual communication designers involved:

Today, food-packaging design is concentrating on the highest possible shelf impact. The product has to stand out from the shelf and beat the competing products at the PoS, the point of sale.

But as there will be no shelf tomorrow, you don't need shelf impact.

But it has to make a good impression at the PoU, the point of Use.

And yes: much information will no longer print on the packaging. Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) will replace the barcode on products. Electronic chips like on banking cards will contain information and new functions.



It is the task of the communication designer to make these new functions available. These functions help to individualise mass products. The concept is that you get your personal milk-box, with your name on it and individualised information: For example allergic warnings etc.

This individualisation combines new distribution systems with new printing technologies.

Again: We just have open eyes and can add one plus one.

As designers we have to have these open eyes, travel a lot, go to conferences and read a lot of specialised information. We have to learn how to read trends, see the chances and risks that come out of social, economical and technological developments and work from the future to the presence, not from the presence to the future. We have to design today what will be tomorrow today's design.

If we design today's fashion and Zeitgeist and the design will be published tomorrow we are designing today yesterdays design. If we only decorate products we don't understand the power of designing process.

A designer needs the skills and the talent to see into the future, and make a design for a precisely defined time in the future.

Reading the future includes the risk of error. But if you see the specialists in future reading you will be astonished how precise they are. It is a little bit like the weather forecast. You can be pretty sure that it is correct. And in the few cases when they have an error you can be sure that it is raining instead of sun, not the other way round.