

GRAPHIC DESIGN ESSENTIALS FOR MARKETERS

Transcript

Graphic Design Essentials for Marketers

LESSON 1: GRAPHIC DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND BEST PRACTICE	3
Why Graphic Design is a Critical Skill	4
Design Fundamentals	4
LESSON 2: DESIGN FOUNDATIONS – BRAND GUIDELINES AND CONSISTENCY	8
Building Effective Brand Guidelines.....	9
Understanding Your Design Goals.....	10
LESSON 3: DESIGNING AND BUILDING GRAPHICS.....	12
Designing Graphics by Repurposing Images.....	13
Getting Started: Setting Up Your Image.....	13
Modifying Your Image: Text and Colors.....	14
Modifying Your Image: Buttons, Logos and Exporting	15

LESSON 1: GRAPHIC DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND BEST PRACTICE

Why Graphic Design is a Critical Skill

[1.1.1.1] Today, we're going to look at why it's so important for audience engagement to be able to incorporate great graphics into what you do. As we'll see, it's easier now than ever to put together high-quality images, whether it's to complement that post on social media, or the blog you're going to post. And using the right image DIRECTLY influences your chance of success with your audience.

[1.1.1.2] Consumers today spend so much time plugged in and using devices that digital media provides the best opportunity to engage your audience and attract new prospects. With mobile devices as the most popular way to access the internet these days, it's obvious the best way to connect with them is digitally.

What's also interesting is that consumers have less time and also smaller devices to process messages. That's why great images are the best way to get your message across quickly and easily.

[1.1.1.3] So, what are the benefits to you of adding great visuals into your own deliverables? Well first off, using quality images is a great way to clearly deliver your message. When expressing an idea, as a visual aid it's easier to SHOW rather than TELL. It also builds credibility and trust with customers and prospects – especially on the web. And people process images more quickly than written words. In short, it affects the way that you and your business are perceived.

[1.1.1.4] The other great thing about adding visuals – whether it be an image to support an email newsletter or blog post – is that with the tools available, it's easier than ever to put together some great imagery. You don't need a degree in graphic design to create great images.

[1.1.1.5] You also don't need a massive budget. In fact, there are a variety of free tools that have all the features you'll need for most small design projects. Plus, they're linked to a lot of resources which are also available to use for free. And because they're easy to pick up and use, you'll be able to do pretty much everything you need within a short space of time.

[1.1.1.6] The flip side, of course, is that poor design or inappropriate use of graphics can have the opposite effect. Not only does it negatively affect the way your product and business are perceived, it can also lead to additional costs – meaning changes, delays, and even full redesigns.

But don't worry: If you stick with the fundamental principles of design which we'll go through, you'll have the knowledge and tools you need to avoid the pitfalls and create great design that attract more customers.

Design Fundamentals

[1.1.2.1] Let's look at the important elements to focus on when you're designing a graphic. The key things to get right are color, imagery, typography, and composition. We're going to take a look at each of these elements and their best practices when developing high-quality visuals for your business.

[1.1.2.2] First is color theory. Color is a critical element to get right in your designs. It's used to attract attention, convey meaning, and of course for aesthetics.

We don't usually even think about the colors we look at; we judge things quickly and often measure instantly whether something is desirable, professional, nice, ugly, or even weird based upon its color.

The most important thing to think about using colors is the contrast between them. Contrast refers to how well one color stands out from another. You can use contrasting colors within an image to make text stand out from its background for example. Complementary colors, like yellow and purple, or blue and orange, for instance, provide maximum contrast with one another.

Contrast can also be used to guide people's actions; to let people know what you want them to do. If you want to increase 'click-through,' make sure that there's a strong contrast between the call-to-action button and the rest of the design.

You can check how colors contrast using a color wheel. A color wheel shows how colors are related visually. For example, complementary colors are those opposite one another on the color wheel.

So what happens if we don't have good contrast? Users will have a poor experience and can misunderstand meaning. Colors also give visual cues to meaning – for example, a green button usually indicates an affirmative action, like 'OK' or 'Accept.' But if you were to design a large 'Accept' button and make it red, it could really confuse the user, and in some cases, the results could be disastrous.

Let's talk about the most common colors used by brands, and what meaning or feel they can invoke from their audience.

The color red, for example can trigger powerful emotions – both positive and negative, to create a sense of urgency – which is why it's effective with sales. It also encourages appetite, so it's used regularly in the fast-food sector.

Orange, another warm color, is considered light and fun, so it suits less 'corporate'-feeling brands. Darker shades of orange are associated with autumn, which lends itself to more 'earthy' brands.

Another interesting one is green, which is easy on the eye and synonymous with health. So you'll often see it used by brands promoting health products such as pharmaceuticals or food brands. It can also be linked to growth or power, such as with financial or military organizations.

Blue, on the other hand has a calming effect on the mind and is the color of reason, but also of strength, wisdom, and trust, which is why it's used so widely. It's a safe option for brands, but brands need to consider if it will help them stand out in their space.

What about pink? Pink has historically been used to portray femininity, like with Barbie and Cosmopolitan Magazine. But nowadays, a lot of mainstream brands use it regardless of their audience, such as Lyft. It portrays youth, but also inspires comfort and represents hope. Pink has been used successfully in many industries to 'break the mold.'

The color black is synonymous with luxury and power. While combining with a small amount of a bright color, it can add energy to sophistication. Black is well suited to some industries like fashion, for example – but perhaps not to others, like health.

And finally, using white or silver represents cleanliness and has often been used for a modern look and feel. It needs to be used carefully though, as it can lack personality. Many brands use white to complement another, more dominant color. When executed well, adding white to your design offers a modern, simplistic, and clean look.

You can see more examples of colors in branding and graphics by accessing the online resources with this lesson.

[1.1.2.3] Let's look at how best to use imagery and typography within your campaigns, starting with imagery. We've seen that images lend themselves very well to digital media, but there are some general points to consider.

Firstly, audiences respond well to images with people in them. It helps create an emotional connection as campaigns are targeted at real people and your imagery needs to reflect that.

Image quality is also very important. When customers are considering a purchase online, they want to be able to scrutinize images that give a high level of detail of the product. People often abandon an ecommerce site because the product image is not of a high enough quality to help them make a decision. It negatively affects their impression of the product and you can lose the sale.

So when you choose images as part of a design, make sure that your images are high definition, or HD, and are appropriate to the device your audience will use. They should not be stretched or pixelated.

Next, remember that most web traffic comes from a mobile device – so it's very important that you test your graphics on mobile to make sure they still look okay on smaller dimensions. If not, consider creating a separate version of your graphic specifically to show to people who are using mobile devices.

Here's a guide to the best image dimensions for different screen sizes:

- Banner Image: 2000px wide and 800px long
- Slider: 1920px wide and 890px long
- Icon: 300px wide and 300px long
- Post/ Event: 425px wide and 220px long
- Portfolio: 1920px wide and 768px long

[1.1.2.4] What about the typography, or fonts you use? It's important when choosing a font for your visual, not to try and do something wildly different. Readers expect to see familiar fonts, such as system fonts – for example, Arial, Helvetica, Roboto. Use a maximum of two to three font families on a single webpage, and even fewer for your ads and images.

What's a font family? A font family simply means a grouping of fonts defined by commonly shared design styles. For example, Roboto is a family which has bold, italic, or thin styles.

You will also come across 'Serif' and 'Sans serif' fonts. A 'serif' is a small, decorative line added to a character. The most common serif one is Times Roman. A common font without serifs, or 'sans serif,' is Helvetica. Serif fonts are used to improve the readability of text in things like blogs, articles or newspapers. Try not to use more than ten words for each line. For headings, consider using a heavy-weight, sans serif font with a larger size. Ensure the right emphasis – or size and 'weight' – is applied to the text according to its priority.

It's also best practice not to add text directly to an image, particularly in web design, and instead to work with your web team to overlay responsive text on the image. Why? The problem with text on the image is that, if the image is on mobile, then sometimes the text is too small to read. Another consideration is localization. Because text is fixed, it can't auto-translate.

This slide shows a site translated to Hungarian via Google Translate. You'll see the calls-to-action aren't HTML – instead, they're images that include the text, which means the text can't be translated.

If you need to add text, for example for a social media image or blog image, ensure that there is sufficient color contrast. For example, this website here has been analyzed with two variations of the background color. The second has a better contrast, which makes the text more legible. A quick 'hack' to add better background color contrast is to darken the border, like with this example.

Remember: It's the combination of an image plus your message and how it's worded, and even the fonts you use, that can mean the difference between success and failure in reaching your audience.

[1.1.2.5] Once you know the colors, imagery and fonts for your image, you need to put them together in the best way possible – and that's where composition comes in. Your goal should be to make the design as simple and elegant as possible. Removing clutter and visual noise helps the user to focus on one task at a time.

When you have taken away all unnecessary information, you should make sure that your content – meaning all your images, buttons, color, shapes, and text – is ordered in a clear and logical way.

Each piece of graphic design content should serve one purpose. When you're creating a design, ask yourself: "What is its purpose?" Should it lead the user to do something? Inform them? Nudge them to keep reading? Fill in a form? Or is it just there to give them information?

Even if you have multiple goals in mind for your content, pick one and make sure your design makes it very clear to the end user what the goal is.

[1.1.2.6] Now let's talk about the power of simplicity in your design. As UX expert Nick Babich (2016) says, "Minimalism isn't about stripping away elements, it's about adding just enough to let them tell your story." There are two key ways to keep your design simple. Firstly, ensure to use whitespace; and secondly, remove anything that's not absolutely necessary. Whitespace helps focus the attention on whatever it is you want the user to see. It helps the user to not be overwhelmed by what he or she is looking at. Every item within your design should have a purpose. Unnecessary information can make your design convoluted and distracting.

A great example of 'whitespace' is the blogging platform, Medium. Medium's website doesn't distract its users with ad banners or frustrating pop-ups. Instead, it prioritizes the right content, and shows information that the readers actually want to see. Instead of showing the published date, it actually shows the length of time it takes to read – which is very clever! Look at the simple design here.

Now, everyone knows a 'bad-looking' website when they see it. For example, look at CNN in 2000. The reason we think this is bad isn't necessarily because it's old, but rather, because the composition is a mess and the content is hard to read without getting distracted.

Simple design doesn't have to be dull, but it should prioritize one thing as the focal point of the page. Instagram is another good example of this. The primary purpose is to view the images, and everything else is stripped away.

So just remember: Focus on getting the key things right – color, imagery, typography, and composition – and your designs will hit the mark with your audience.

LESSON 2: DESIGN FOUNDATIONS – BRAND GUIDELINES AND CONSISTENCY

Building Effective Brand Guidelines

[1.2.1.1], [1.2.1.3] Once you've got the basics of color, images, typography, and composition down, you might wonder where you can find templates and examples of each of those things to use for your own brand. Well, the good news is that you can get your hands on all of these easily from a brand style guide.

A style guide is a document that provides guidelines for the way your brand looks in different media, like websites, social media, and so on. Every brand should have their own. Whether you're adding an image to your website, to a social media post, or to anything visual at all, using a style guide means you don't have to guess at colors, images or fonts – they're all available with plenty of examples in your style guide.

The beauty of having a brand style guide is that it puts everyone on the same page, presenting a unified vision of your business, whether your designs are coming from marketing, customer service, sales, or web design.

[1.2.1.2] But what if you don't have a style guide, for example if you're an early-stage company? At some point, you'll need to create one to ensure consistency across your brand. Until you have one, you can ensure consistency simply by making sure your design is consistent with your other main digital assets, like your website or product visuals.

Pretty much every major brand shares their style guide online so that everyone knows what to do and not to do when using their brand, so look there for inspiration.

[1.2.1.5] Let's look at main things you'll need to take from the style guide when you're putting together a graphic. Those are the colors, typography, imagery, and logos. They should be easy to understand, reproduce, and know how and when to use.

[1.2.1.6] First, let's look at the colors or the color palette. You will find a description of the colors and perhaps even why they represent the specific corporate brand. Aside from sample splashes of the various colors, you will also find RGB and HEX values, indicating the exact color codes so that you can reproduce each within the editor you use.

The RGB code, or Red, Green, Blue values, are simply three numbers indicating how much of each primary color is used to make up the desired color. For example, a "Salmon" color might use the following RGB: 250, 128, 114.

You might also come across the HEX code for a particular color. This is a 6-digit hexadecimal number indicating the intensity of red, green, and blue in the color.

[1.2.1.7] What about the typography or fonts you use? This part of your style guide will make sure you're consistent in order to look professional. You may find a number of different fonts and sizes listed, each for a different purpose. The style guide dictates which one goes where and will typically show the spacing between letters and paragraphs as well.

[1.2.1.8] Now, let's think about imagery. Obviously, when you're putting together graphics, you'll want to know which photos or images are right for your brand. The imagery section of the style guide should give lots of examples so that you don't need to get approval for every one you use.

[1.2.1.9] Clearly, your logo is a very obvious part of your brand, and here is an example showing the correct use of the HubSpot logo at the top, and examples of unacceptable use of the HubSpot logo along the bottom. Your style guide should ideally show how NOT to use your logo, so that you or others at your company can avoid misusing it.

To summarize, your style guide should contain all the info you need, including some great examples you can use with your own branding. So whether you're adding an image to your blog post or newsletter, the style guide will make your life a lot easier.

Understanding Your Design Goals

[1.2.2.1] Before you start putting together a graphic, there are a few things you need to establish. While your Style Guide is designed with your general market in mind, what we'll be talking about here is who the specific target audience is for the graphic you're creating.

[1.2.2.2] Some questions to think about are: Who is the target audience – and where do they hang out online? Are they heavy readers who prefer long articles with accompanying graphics; or do they prefer more bite-sized content on platforms like Instagram? Do you want to show the graphic to existing, prospective customers, or both?

[1.2.2.3] Understanding the context in which the graphic will be deployed is essential because it affects the way it should look. LinkedIn, for example, is a professional network which caters to business and corporate. If you intend to use the graphic on LinkedIn, does it best reflect your business goals considering the tone of the platform? Conversely, perhaps the graphic is less serious, even applying humor, and will be deployed to a platform like Twitter or Facebook.

You also need to consider the medium and format of the graphic – will it be used on a website; an email newsletter; a tweet; a post on Facebook; a blog; or somewhere else? Furthermore, you should consider how your audience consumes the content. Do you attract mostly mobile consumers, or is it mostly desktop users? There are a lot of questions you should be asking yourself about where this graphic will go and who it will be shown to. Tailoring the content to the appropriate medium and platform will ensure it has the desired impact.

You will also need to make sure that the design or form supports the function of the graphic. Ask yourself what the overall function of the target graphic is. For example, it may be an image to support a blog intended to increase your subscribers. And while it may not always be formally stated, it's important to ask questions so you clearly understand the desired use. Having clarity around the question of function enables you to encourage your audience to take the action you want them to take – whether that's to subscribe to a newsletter, to sign up to a trial, or to take some other action.

[1.2.2.4] And finally, before you start, it's important to know what budget, if any, is available. Plus, what is the deadline for your graphics? How long you have to put them together?

While you can still achieve a huge amount with few resources, especially if you're reusing existing assets, sometimes it's faster to use or modify a stock image to achieve what you want.

If you intend to use stock images, you will need to account for the cost and time of acquiring the right images, as well as any additional licenses which may be required for the use of the image in different ways. Stock images CAN be free, but can also cost up to \$10, depending on the package you go for. There are a few free stock image sites that we recommend, including Negative Space, Death to Stock, Pexels, and HubSpot's free stock photo library.

By the end of this course, you will be able to design graphics for social media posts; blog entries; newsletters, even content for your website. However, if you're looking to have a complete website designed, bringing in a professional is recommended, which can cost a whole lot more – even with a clear vision of the website in mind. For now, stick with the basics.

LESSON 3: DESIGNING AND BUILDING GRAPHICS

Designing Graphics by Repurposing Images

[1.3.1.1] Once you're familiar with the fundamental concepts of graphic design, you've a set of brand guidelines you can follow, and fully understand the design goal for your project, you're ready to design and build your graphic.

Before you get started, ask yourself: Can the graphic you need use images and logos that already exist? Most of the time, the answer to this question will be 'yes' – especially if you're just starting out.

Let's look at what you can do to save time in finding the right image to use. There are many places you can go to search for and find your ideal visual. Internally, for example, as you've seen, the style guide is a great place to go to get pictures and logos. You may also have a number of existing company assets either purchased from third parties or built in-house.

There are also good web sources for images, fonts, and so on, both free and for a small fee. Finally, you can use templates and graphics provided by free online graphic design tools like Pixlr or Canva.

[1.3.1.2], [1.3.1.3] Another great option is to repurpose an existing graphic – like using a stock photo as the background for a social media image, for example. By 'repurposing' an image, we mean adapting it or breaking it up to use for another purpose. For example, you can take an infographic and turn it into a number of individual images. There are many benefits to repurposing. Firstly, repurposing is quicker than creating from scratch – and time is a precious resource. It's also more cost-effective than purchasing. And of course, if an image appears in more than one place, then it reinforces the message. In short, if you have good evergreen content, always look for opportunities to maximize reuse and save yourself time.

[1.3.1.5] It's worth saying also that there are some great premade templates out there for most of the jobs you need to do. Editors like Pixlr and Canva have libraries with extensive templates and examples for producing social media images and blog graphics that you can use.

Here are some rules when using these to be aware of though:

- Ensure that the quality of the images is HD and free from any copyright.
- Ensure you remove any placeholder text or content.
- Be inspired by these sources, but don't just copy them directly.
- Be careful of the contrast and fonts of some of the templates.

On this template image from Canva, here's an example where some of the text might be accessible on the image, but the location and date text is nearly invisible. Always ensure you use an effective image as the background with a darker contrast.

To sum it up, continue to look for opportunities to repurpose images and pre-existing templates, but remove placeholders and always be careful of the contrast and fonts.

Getting Started: Setting Up Your Image

[1.3.2] In this lesson, we're going to show you how to do a number of things: Creating a new image, setting canvas size, importing another image, modifying by adding text, setting colors, adding buttons and exporting the image. We'll be using the free Pixlr tool to walk you through these steps, but you can use any graphic design tool you'd like – the functionality is pretty standard. So you're free to open up Pixlr or your favorite design tool and follow the steps along.

It gives you all the features and abilities to create your ideal image. I'm going to create a new image, which we want to use in a Facebook post, so I'm going to enter the specific dimensions you can see here, which are the height and width in pixels for a nice rectangular shape, which I can use in my post. The canvas size is really important because you don't want to stretch or squash your image. It's really important to get the right dimensions, otherwise it will appear poorly on your mobile or perhaps your laptop – it's important to have the optimum shape and size so that it looks professional.

And here you can see the canvas we've just created; we can use the zoom tool to zoom if needed.

Here we can add images, text, shapes, color and all sorts of different effects to make the best image for my Facebook graphic. Now I'm going to bring in an image. You can open one locally or from the web, which is what I'm going to do. Here's an image from a site, [pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com/), that I think will work and is compatible with our brand. So if we open this it brings it up in a new canvas.

Now we have the two side by side. And what we want to do is move this image onto our new canvas. So I simply drag the image from this window onto the first canvas and place it where I want. Now we can close this one off. Now what we have is the background layer, and as you can see the image doesn't quite fit within the new canvas. We can rename this to Image to differentiate it, and as you can see the image doesn't quite fit into the new canvas, so we now need to use File/Free Transform which allows you to adjust the size of your image freely – you can even flip it around. If you need to undo anything by the way, you can always use edit undo or the ctrl key and z. However, today we don't want to squash the height or the width – we want to keep the aspect ratio, so if I hold down SHIFT and resize, it will keep those dimensions. Now if we want to go for a nice half size, this would work nicely and apply the change. And now the rest of the content can go in here – like text or a button for example. There you have it: Now you know how to set up your canvas with the proper dimensions and import an image into your design.

Modifying Your Image: Text and Colors

[1.3.3] Now from here we need to think about what else we want to add. Let's start by adding some text. So if we select the Text Tool and click where we want it, this window allows me to enter whatever we wish (in this case "Say Hello to a new Career in Digital"). Bear in mind also that the text needs to be readable – a good rule of thumb by the way is to make it no smaller than 16 pixels, otherwise for a social media post it's just too small.

Now I'll change the font size to be larger. We can also select the style, whether bold or italic and the actual font. There are many fonts available; of course you should check with your brand style guide and stick to the fonts specified including size and color. I'd always recommend going for one that is easy to read and that helps users understand what is happening. If no style guide is available, try and ensure that it's as close to your website style as possible.

Here we're just using regular. Now I can move this text around. I can also add breaks for spacing. So here is my freshly made title and now we can add a new title, which we want to be a lot smaller – we're going to go for about 45 and bold. Now we'll move this in here. And now we want to think about having text for a button, and now we have learnt the basics of adding text.

Now let's have a look at our brand style guide a little more and see how we can bring it in here. Your organization will have different guidelines. Make sure to refer to them. For example, the Digital Marketing Institute has guidelines for typography, logos and of course the different colors to use. It's

worth referring to this quite a lot because it saves you time. I'm just going to minimize this here – to make sure my color palette is good.

Changing colors is a simple but powerful way to change or enhance an existing image.

Now on the bottom left we have our colors for this design, so what I'm going to do is click one of the boxes, and this allows us to enter specific colors. We have a color picker here; if you don't have a specific color in mind, you can use this. And rather than guessing we can also use the HEX color code, which is spot on, so we can enter the exact code. And now you can see it's available to use as one of the main colors in our palette. We can also add other colors as required here. Another option is the eyedropper, which can extract the exact color from your brand guidelines or indeed anywhere.

By now, you know how to add text and colors to an image that aligns with your brand style.

Modifying Your Image: Buttons, Logos and Exporting

[1.3.4], [1.3.5], [1.3.6] Now let's say we want to create a button for this text to go on, but with our brand color. We'd simply go to the Drawing Tool, and create a new layer, so that we can build the ideal button we want.

Now select the drawing tool from the toolbar. You can now create your new shape, which is rectangular, and we'll position the text on top. Now black isn't one of the colors in my palette, so I'll delete this and recreate using blue from my palette. So I'll select the color and recreate using the rectangular shape with the target color, which is my button. If we click on the move tool again...and there we have the button. The button itself won't be independently clickable, but adding it encourages users to click on the graphic itself which is guiding them to the action we want them to take. A key feature of Pixlr is the ability to create shapes. Shapes can add definition and impact to your design. Shapes can also be used to help focus the user's attention. It is really important not just to rely on photography. Shapes provide an excellent way to communicate meaning with your words. If executed well, shapes can appear professional and educational. You can also change the opacity to add interesting graphics. For example, here I've applied a low opacity to this area on top of the image which blends nicely between the image and the light blue colors. And now what we have is the background layer.

And now I think I'd like to add our logo to this design, so we'll use the same approach as previously. If we go back to the DMI Style Guide, you can see that it's available in blue on white, white on blue in both JPG, PNG etc. and there are good examples of using it on an image. In this case I'm going to use the blue on white image, and the PNG, which is transparent, which I've downloaded and opened in another layer, now if we drag the image into the whitespace on the original canvas. And to resize we go to Edit and Free Transform to resize. If we select an area within the logo image which is suitable, then drag this on top of the whitespace to where we want it to be. It's important also to check if there are guidelines in terms of where the logo is normally positioned – top, bottom, left or right. In this case we'll place this in the top left. Normally, it's a good idea not to stretch or skew, or rotate the logo image – that would be a breach of your guidelines – so be careful.

Another thing which you might need to do from time to time is, say, an image for a blog post or article and you'd like to add the author's image. In this case, you will want to upload an image of the author and perhaps place it on top of a circle or other shape. So if we use the Marquee tool which allows you to select the author's image within a circular selection, now we can incorporate this into the graphic. We can also drop this in here. We can also for example change the background color to one of our brand-approved ones using the paint bucket tool and one of our color palette.

And that's a great walkthrough of the steps of putting together a graphic you can use to support your target campaign.

Once you have your finalized image, you're ready to export. Obviously the quality is important, so we'll maximize that. It's important to think about the target use of the graphic of course. For example, if you're doing an email campaign, ensure that the images aren't too large. PNG images are excellent for email as they are compressed but also have transparency options. To make your email stand out, PNGs are also effective for showing shapes and styles. For Facebook and Twitter, JPEG images work well for photographs. Bear in mind that most social media platforms add extra compression to images. Ensure that the quality is as high as possible, without letting the image file get too big. In short, JPEG images are great for photos. PNG files are great for transparent images with full quality. To export the image, navigate to File and Save as. This will present you with a popup giving you the option to change the file format. You can select a PNG or JPEG, which are the recommended image export file types.

Don't forget to save the image internally and also share with your social media or web team.

Hopefully, this lesson has helped you get started with creating and editing your own graphics, whether you're creating an image for social media, your website, for an email newsletter, or something else. There's a lot to learn with graphic design, and you can only get better with practice – so make sure to check out the Additional Resources for more tips and techniques so you can continue to grow your graphic design skills.

References

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