

Introduction

“Difficult situations breed astonishing results.”

— Jeffrey Veen

Have you ever struggled to complete a design project on time? Or felt that having a tight deadline stifled your capacity for maximum creativity? This book is for you.

Within these pages, you'll find eighty creative challenges to help you reach a breadth of innovative design solutions, in various media, within any set time period. By completing these challenges, you'll round out your skills by exploring projects along the full continuum of design disciplines, from the bread and butter of branding and collateral to the wild world of advertising to the user-centered practices of creating interactive projects. Along the way, we'll take brief forays into wayfinding, editorial design, video and motion graphics, and many other areas of our continually expanding practice.

To aid you in conquering these challenges, I'll provide useful brainstorming techniques and strategies for success. By road-testing these techniques as you attempt each challenge, you'll find new and more effective ways of solving tough design problems and bringing your solutions to life.

BECOMING MORE CREATIVE TAKES PRACTICE

Designers are often encouraged to bluff their way through unfamiliar deliverables in order to bootstrap their way toward a stable career, and my experience was no different. My first decade as a designer was humbling. A typical day in the life looked like this:

Two fresh logo sketches for your new wine bar by tomorrow? Catalog cover designs for your cruise line's venture into South America? Home and secondary page user interface examples for a technology consulting web site by Friday? No problem. I'll figure things out before I collapse on my keyboard, exhausted, at 2:00 A.M.

During those years in the trenches, I discovered that:

Failure is a necessary component of creativity.

Well-seasoned designers understand that resilience in the face of repeated failure is the only path to success. Improving as a designer requires us to consciously choose to explore novel territory as part of our daily work. David Kelley from IDEO calls this “enlightened trial and error,” and it is the best way to seek out a great result that fulfills your client's business need.

Process is more important than the final product.

As architect Matthew Frederick notes, “Being process-oriented, not product-driven, is the most important and difficult skill for a designer to develop.” Being aware of your working process as a designer and reshaping it to fit the problem presented to you is a lifelong practice that will define your career. However, don't forget what Mark Rolston of frog design says: