

John Reinhardt's

BOOK DESIGN NEWS

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VOLUME VI ISSUE I

"BECAUSE IT'S YOUR REPUTATION . . . AND MINE!"

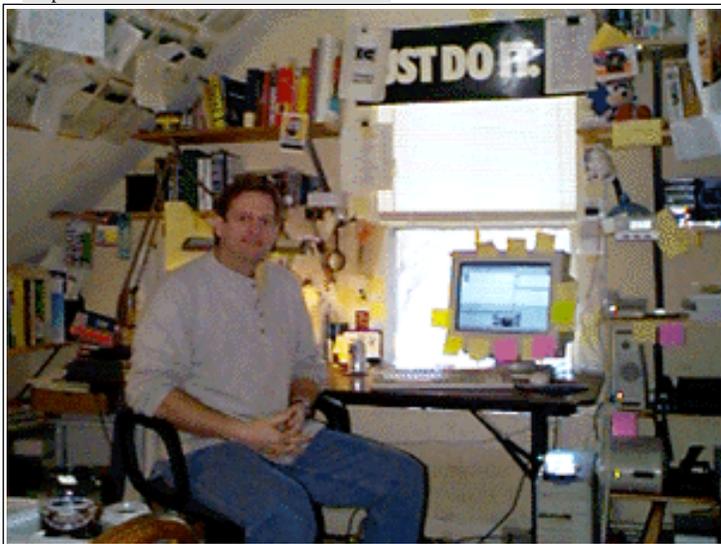
CELEBRATING TWENTY-THREE YEARS IN BOOK DESIGN

• **Getting to know me.** Many of you have seen my running picture(s) on my web site, but few have ever seen me in my "work environment."

My office is in the upstairs of my house overlooking the green mountains of Vermont. Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves consume my office along with two networked PCs, two laptops, 19-inch TV (naturally), an HP network printer, and about a gazillion post-its!

Due to an increase in my workload the past several months, I was unable to produce my winter and spring issues. I hope I'm back on track with this, my seventeenth, BDN issue.

After many years of working in a "downtown office," the biggest advantage of having my office at home (six years) is that I can work day and night. Of course, the disadvantage of having my office at home is that I *do* work day and night! My family affectionately refers to me as "the man upstairs!"



ALL IN THE FAMILY

A week doesn't go by when I don't get e-mail from either a college student or someone wishing to embark on a career in book design. They all ask the obvious questions along with one I can always count on: "What is the secret to succeeding as a book designer?"

First of all, "success" has a different definition for each of us. As many of you know by now, I firmly believe in "form follows function." Therefore, goals are not limited to the results but rather to the functions that create the results. In other words, if making a lot of money is your idea of success (which, by the way, I believe is the worst goal you can have), focus not on the money, but rather on the functions that will produce money.

There is no denying the importance and necessity of acquiring knowledge and skills of typography, book composition, printing processes, computers and design-related software, and all of the other elements of the book design trade. But there is one key ingredient that stands out head and shoulders above everything else—the relationship between you and the publisher.

We all work hard in making our personal relationships succeed. Our professional relationships should be no different. In fact, on a daily basis, many of us spend more time with our professional "families" than we do our personal families.

I work with many publishers and authors from all over the country. Some I have met, others I have seen pictures, and still most I wouldn't know if they were sitting next to me right now. But when it comes to working for them, I consider myself part of their family.

Along with giving these publishers the best product I can, being a part of their business family means that:

- they can count on me 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week.
- if a crisis occurs, I'll be there for them.
- I won't charge outrageously high prices, nor will I charge for every little change or correction.
- I will do what I say—when I say I will do it.

- I will be here today, tomorrow, a year, or even ten years from now.
- I am not working simply for the money.
- I'll return their phone calls or e-mail immediately.
- they can freely complain or criticize. They can share their honest opinions and feelings with me.
- I'm working *with* them, as well as *for* them.
- we'll have fun working together. We should enjoy what we do . . . and we do!
- this is what I do, it is what I am.
- I won't play mind games. Honesty is foremost.
- in times of crisis, personally and professionally, I'm here for them.

It's a funny thing, though, many publishers seemingly treat their "outsourced" staff simply as hired help, expecting respect and devotion without having to give any in return. This is also true of too many independent designers, creating an image of unreliability.

Over the years, I have worked with dozens of publishers who treated me with little respect. Their's was just a job. They were simply looking for an inexpensive solution to a problem. I, like you, have little tolerance for arrogance, disrespect, and inconsideration. Remember, **people and attitude** *do* make a difference!

I treat my regular publishers with respect and honesty and I expect to get the same in return. We work hard to develop this relationship and I am fortunate to work with several "pretty neat" publishers that share a similar love of books and zest for life.

Full-time, "on call" devotion to these publishers does, however, take its toll: Working through the night to get an unexpected job done; or giving up a family weekend in order to get some pages finished and shipped because the author is suddenly leaving town for a week; or cutting the costs (not the corners) on a project because the publisher's small budget has taken a hit this year.

So, what do I tell these people who write to me and want to know what they can do to be a successful book designer? It's simple:

. . . Be a good friend to your publishers. Live by the Golden Rule—personally and professionally. Don't just work for someone because you *have* to, strive to become part of the [publisher's] "family" because you *want* to!

Yes, it's imperative to know the book trade inside and out. That goes without saying. But without the commitment to the publisher, knowledge of the book design trade just won't be enough. It's like two halves to a pair of scissors—one doesn't cut it.

First, you must put the coins in the Pepsi machine. Most of the time you will be rewarded with a refreshing, ice-cold Pepsi. If, however, the Pepsi doesn't come out, swiftly walk away and don't look back.

Publishers, editors, authors, and production managers, book designers . . . We are all people with hopes and dreams. If we give each other the effort we expect in return and we can all succeed together.

20-20 VISION

My daughter's weak area in school is her handwriting. If you're going to take the time to write something for others to read, I tell her, do it in such a way that it can be read—and understood!

The same applies to book design. It's amazing how much time, money, and energy is invested in producing a book and, in many cases, the design is given little thought or attention.

That's like spending hundreds of dollars on a pair of eyeglass frames and then toss in any pair of lenses. The eyeglasses are essentially rendered useless by the incorrect lenses. If you can't see out of them, why will you wear them? If you can't read the book because of the design, why bother?

Or how about a really terrific speech poorly presented by someone who either mumbles or speaks so softly no one can understand?

Communication is a combination of presentation and comprehension. The design of a book assists the reader in absorbing the material. The better, or more appropriate the design, the higher the comprehension.

There are usually several design concepts that will work for each book. But, more importantly, there are even more that won't.

So how do you know if the design is correct? That's a good question. My hunch is if you use a "professional" book designer, you have a pretty good chance that the design will work *for* the book, and not *against* it.



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