What's Next: The Future of Graphic Designers and AI

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Issue Brief #4- Final Assignment
Issues in Communication
April 7, 2024

Attention:

Interestingly, this issue brief revolves around the question of "what's next," which is something that I ask myself frequently. Given that in this class, we talked about AI, I would like to discuss this issue brief regarding my career advancement and the influence of AI. The reason I am here today studying for my MA in Marketing and Communication at Suffolk University traces back to my quarter-life crisis during the summer of 2023. After being laid off during my last job due to downsizing and immersed in the frustrating world of job applications, I was deeply concerned about the possibility that AI might not only intersect but potentially dominate my career as a graphic designer. With AI, innovative tools and software are available to almost anyone, allowing people to undertake design tasks without being a professional designer.

Statement of Need:

AI-powered tools have transformed the design landscape, making sophisticated design capabilities accessible to non-professionals and a broader audience, intensifying additional competition for professional designers. Some examples include:

- Canva: Originally, it started as a straightforward design platform. However, it has evolved significantly with its AI integration, targeting non-professional designers with user-friendly, powerful tools. Its AI features include:
  - Smart design suggestions
  - Pre-designed templates that cater to various needs and preferences
  - Magic Design™: AI design generator that creates custom, on-brand, and appealing designs in seconds. Users describe their requirements and needs and can upload images as references, and Magic Design™ creates tailored designs suitable for social media posts, presentations, posters, and even videos/animations.
  - Premium Membership: Subscribers gain advanced features, such as background removal, color adjustments, blur effects, and broader access to graphics and stock photos. This positions Canva as a direct rival to traditional design software such as Adobe Photoshop and Lightroom.

- PowerPoint: Microsoft has added AI-driven functionalities to its applications. One that stands out is the "Designer" feature, which offers various professional layout options for each slide and enhances the visual content. This serves as an invasion of the work of professional presentation designers and freelancers.

- Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator: Although these applications were once exclusive to professionals, today, they are more accessible to non-professionals thanks to user-friendly tutorials and AI enhancements. Photoshop's AI features, like content-aware fill, allow people to perform complex edits efficiently. Illustrator's AI tool enables quick conversion of sketches to vector graphics. As these become more

user-intuitive, professional designers face the challenge of distinguishing themselves through other skills/tools.

- <u>Designs.ai:</u> This platform allows users to design logos, videos, and graphics effortlessly. As seen on its website, "no design experience [is] necessary." Design.ai uses advanced AI to guide users through the design process, providing tools that simplify complex creative tasks. It lowers the entry barrier for high-quality design, undervalues designers, and allows professional-looking results without training.

All these examples strengthen the reason behind my existential crisis and position professionals in a complex situation where they must navigate a rapidly evolving landscape. Designers are now forced to redefine their roles, emphasizing attributes AI cannot replicate—innovation, conceptual depth, and emotional appeal. They are challenged to elevate their skills beyond mere technical visual skills. In other words, professional designers, including myself, now need to think of different ways to differentiate ourselves (sell ourselves to the business world) and convince the corporate world why they need professionals for creative roles.

To better understand this, an employer can ask, "Why should we hire a professional designer when we can hire someone who can do the same job with AI tools even if they are not professional and pay them less?"

Significance of need:

Graphic designers are significantly affected by AI for several reasons:

- <u>Automation of routine tasks:</u> AI can automate many creative routine tasks, such as resizing images, creating layouts, and suggesting color schemes for a brand. Though it can increase efficiency, it raises concerns about devaluating graphic designers' skills.
- <u>Increased competition:</u> AI-powered tools like Canva and Designs.ai allow people with little to no graphic design training to create professional-looking designs.
- <u>Ethical and authenticity concerns:</u> With AI's ability to design, issues around originality and authenticity might appear. Designers must navigate these challenges, ensuring their work maintains a human touch.
- <u>Economic impacts:</u> Though AI reduces the time and effort required for design tasks, this can affect pricing and project timelines for graphic design professionals. Also, businesses could hire a non-professional to do the same task a professional would do for a lower salary, impacting job creation, and there is a risk that many might also lose their jobs.

Businesses and brands could also be affected by AI in their design needs:

- Though platforms like Canva and Designs.ai offer a broad range of options, they might lack distinctive branding elements such as logos, as they might end up with similar-looking designs. They need to understand that the creative skills that professional designers bring build compelling and unique brand identities.

Steps that will alleviate the problem:

Though I used to see AI as a threat to graphic designers, now I see it as an opportunity and as a very useful tool. Though my crisis led me to study for a master's degree to elevate my skills, differentiate myself, and bridge the gap between aesthetics and outcomes, I also had to embrace AI as a part of my professional life. To be honest, I was skeptical at first, yet I have noticed significant positive effects on my day to day. For example, I used to do animations in Photoshop and Aftereffects, which took me 5-6 hours to complete. Now, with Canva, I can have the same result but in much less time. Also, AI in Illustrator and Photoshop have enhanced my results and have made my workflow more efficient and intuitive.

All this change and transformation in my professional career has led me to undertake the position where AI should not replace designers' jobs but rather be a tool and collaboration for them. Though some might still believe that AI could potentially replace designers or empower non-designers to replace professionals, I propose a plan to tackle the challenge of ensuring designers remain valuable and employable even as AI becomes more dominant in our field.

For this plan to work, steps should be taken:

For Designers:

1) <u>Embrace and learn:</u> Understand the capabilities and limitations of AI in design. Use AI as a tool to enhance creativity instead of replacing it.
2) <u>Stay motivated</u> by improving soft skills AI cannot replace, such as problem-solving, teamwork, and understanding human emotions and cultural aspects to visually satisfy clients' wants and needs.
3) <u>Build a personal brand:</u> Establish a unique value proposition that differentiates you from what AI offers. This could be done by highlighting your creative process and your ability to innovate.
4) <u>Network and collaborate:</u> Engage with other professionals and communities to stay updated on industry trends.

For businesses hiring creatives:

1) <u>Understand AI capabilities:</u> Educate business leaders about what AI can and cannot do in the creative space.

2) <u>Value human creativity:</u> Acknowledge and learn about the irreplaceable value of human creativity, insight, and emotional intelligence in design.
3) <u>Invest in continuous learning:</u> Provide opportunities for designers to learn and adapt to AI advancements.
4) <u>Ethical usage of AI:</u> Establish guidelines to ensure that AI is used responsibly in design processes, supporting human workers rather than displacing them.

Through these steps, designers and businesses can create a balanced environment where AI enhances human creativity rather than replacing it.

Visualization/Solvency:

Designers' jobs are less likely to be replaced if these steps are taken. AI is indeed present, and even though it hurts to admit it, almost anyone can do my job with a few tutorials (how they do it is different). However, I still defend the idea that professional designers' unique insights, design thinking, and creative depth are invaluable. By integrating AI as a tool rather than viewing it as a competitor, designers can enhance their work, improve efficiency, and offer innovative solutions that AI alone cannot do. Businesses that recognize and invest in the irreplaceable qualities of professional and human designers will create a more dynamic and innovative design environment and achieve more authentic and significant brand identities and results. Ultimately, by adopting these previous steps, the future of design can visualized as a collaboration between human creativity and AI, ensuring that the profession remains relevant and indispensable in an AI-augmented world.

Disadvantages:

If designers and businesses don't implement AI as a tool and instead use it as a replacement, serious consequences could happen:

<u>For designers:</u>

- <u>Risk of obsolescence:</u> Designers who do not embrace AI in their skill set may risk becoming dated. As the industry increasingly adopts AI for efficiency and innovation, those who do not keep up with this might find it harder to get employed.
- <u>Limited job opportunities:</u> Many employers and clients might prefer designers (or even individuals who know how to work with AI even though they are not professional designers) who are proficient with AI. Designers who avoid AI might see fewer job opportunities as their skill set may not align with the evolving demands of the market.

- Reduced efficiency and time management: Designers who do not use AI tools might spend more time on tasks that could be faster with AI, such as data analysis, routine design adjustments, or market research. A personal example of this is that as I am part of an agency that works with multiple clients and projects at the same time, sometimes I use ChatGPT for brainstorming when I am burned out or when I have to write several social media captions and blogs about topics I am not an expert on. Interestingly, I have addressed the use of AI with my boss, who has said that using AI is acceptable; even more so, she encouraged me to use it. However, she emphasizes the need for the result to be more human than robotic, which I also stand for.

For businesses:

- Brand similarities: If businesses over-rely on AI for design, it could lead to a lack of distinctiveness in brand identities. AI-generated designs might output similar aesthetics and themes due to the algorithms encoded. This results in challenges for brands to stand out in a competitive market.

- Loss of human insight: A human touch is essential for any business. AI lacks the human experience and emotional intelligence that professional designers bring. Without them, AI could produce results that fail to connect with the target audience.

- Ethical and legal challenges: Issues could arise around the originality of AI-generated designs, copyright infringement, and data misuse in creating designs. These challenges could lead to reputational damage and legal complications for businesses.

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