

Designers in Handcuffs –

Pat Matson Knapp

Reviewed by Les Porter

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Designers in Handcuffs is a resource guide that provides hands-on, in-the-trenches solutions to design's most frustrating obstacles. The reader will find a wide range of design solutions from 'Flash' tricks to cheap-but-eye-popping printing techniques. There are insights about jump-starting creativity and tips about how to spot a difficult client from a mile away. The reader will also learn how experienced designers handle client relations and communicate with their vendors to ensure trouble free projects..

I really enjoyed reading this little hard-back book, it is written as a quick-read reference tool and is organised into four major areas: Time Trials: Money Matters, Rocky Relations and Creative Challenges. I read it from cover-to-cover, but it could be used as a book you can pick up when you encounter a problem, flick through the index and quickly find a case study/solution to help you solve that problem. Each of the pages contains useful case studies, anecdotes, checklists and tips and tricks to help the reader become a better designer.

I think the title is a little misleading. What US authors often mean by 'designer' is different to the meaning we use in the UK. The book has a sub-title 'How to create great graphics when time, materials and money are tight', so make sure you realise this before buy the book. This book is about graphic design and although lots of the case-studies have issues that are generic to all aspects of design – for example; 'some low-budget projects require begging, borrowing, stealing and bartering...' and 'show clients your creativity by thinking outside the box...' could be about any aspect of design; most of the book is about graphic design in its widest form.

Many design houses use Apple Macs as their computing tool and this book makes the assumption that all designers use the Mac when it talks about tips and tricks. Yes, many of the programs such as 'Photoshop' are now cross-platform, but the book makes a lot of emphasis to work undertaken in Mac specific software such as Quark so be a little wary here.

The page layout is interesting and the graphics within the book are stimulating, different parts of the book use different styles and fonts. Upon showing this book to my undergraduates some of them didn't like this approach, but I guess that's down to the individual.

As to where this book might fit into the UK school design and technology curriculum, that is another question! It really is a reference book for a graphic designer embarking on, or developing their own business, but it would be good if there were time in schools to debate some of the issues raised in the book. Things like 'Educate your Clients on the Basics of Professional (Web) design, and 'But My Logo was Designed by My (Insert Relative Here)' are things that all designers need to know.

This is a good book and worth its place in the department's library. To finish my review I'll just focus on one small quotation from the book called 'Diversify Your Client Base' 'Building a balanced client list helps you avoid dramatic business downturns. Losing a key client is one of the most common reasons design businesses fail. And when the key client is your only client the situation is worse. Avoid this pitfall by making sure no single client represents more than 25% of your billings. Diversify the types, sizes and industries of clients you serve to stay flexible during good times and bad.' Surely it is lessons like this that all would-be designers need to discuss.

This book comes from a series of Design Books called How Design Titles. Other titles are 'Inspiration is your key to success as a designer' 'Graphically Speaking', 'Color Index' and 'Design Survival Manual'. Visiting their website at <http://www.howdesign.com> might prove a beneficial visit for your students.

It is a must read for designers who want to please clients whilst maintaining their creative roots. So the next time your back is against the wall, don't despair – free yourself with *Designers in Handcuffs!*



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Appropriate content	////	Generic use	←
Pupil/student use	//	One of a series	Yes
Teacher resource	////	Photocopiable	N/A
Visuals	//	Pupil/student activities	N/A
Overall style	////	Cross-curricular	←