Ready to Crush 2022?

Embrace These 5 Design Trends

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If 2020 was the year that brought the world to a standstill, 2021 was the year it started moving again. And creative teams led the way. As businesses reinvented themselves for a world that's more digital, touchless and remote, designers defined how those experiences would look and feel. Businesses relied on creatives to reinvent and reinvigorate their brands through unprecedented cultural changes and a generational transformation in the way people work.

Lessons learned during this hard reset of norms will shape the design world in 2022. Internally, designers will cultivate more empathetic organizations as they collaborate with teams across organizations. Externally, they will showcase company values and champion diversity. That's not a nice-to-have — customers are demanding that brands take a stance on major issues, and they aren't shy about switching to brands that more closely align with their values.

Success in 2022 means understanding audiences, innovating and **taking risks** like never before.

In this guide, you'll discover five trends sure to drive change across the creative community in 2022. You'll also learn how creatives can help clients and teams meet the challenges of this complicated new era.

1. Let Empathy Shine Through

Recent years have shone a bright light on something missing in many organizations: **empathy**.

Pandemic-era changes have forced organizations to adjust how they operate. Instead of shuffling in and out of offices and communal workspaces, designers and creatives connect via Zoom Slack and Teams. A 2021 Future of Work study by Upwork found that 28% of American workers are now working from home and expect to continue working remotely for at least the next five years.

Creatives now invite work into their homes. Team leaders, project managers and collaborators have seen more of our personal lives than ever before — and it's having a major impact. Since the pandemic, millions of workers (including many from creative industries) left their jobs. More than 40% cited burnout as a main reason. Moreover, among former office workers, 68% now report some level of burnout.

It's one thing to pile on deadlines from afar, but quite another to make unreasonable demands of people once you've seen their families and pets. This level of personal exposure, while daunting, is also setting the stage for greater empathy among mangers and co-workers. Savvy managers have learned the value of showing empathy for their team members, and it's helping to combat emotional fatigue.

The benefits of empathy go well beyond employee retention. Designers who feel supported and understood produce better work. Stress, anxiety and burnout can stunt creativity, leaving designers unable to access one of the key tools of their job.

Zooming out, more organizations are recognizing that cross-team empathy is critical for cooperation and managing change, according to the Harvard Business Review. Creative teams work with many stakeholders across the organization during the course of a normal project. Often, those stakeholders don't have a clear view of the demands they place on creatives. Organizations should work to foster understanding and empathy between teams to enhance the effectiveness of creative collaboration and the quality of its outputs.

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2. Express Your Brand's Values

It's tempting for business leaders to shy away from discussing contentious issues. But after renewed calls for social change, gender equality and better corporate citizenry, consumers are demanding action. That's particularly true among younger generations. A recent survey found that 83% of millennial consumers want brands to reflect their values.

Creatives play a crucial role in bringing those values to life and making sure they're reflected in every aspect of the brand. In the past, brands have largely expressed their values through traditional communications channels, such as PR and corporate comms. Putting out a statement from leadership or penning an op-ed is a good start, but to truly satisfy today's culture-savvy consumers, companies must express their values loud and proud. That happens on social media, on the company website and within the product experience itself. Your brand's values must be highly visible, easy-to-understand and manifested across content and platforms in a meaningful way. Creatives in 2022 should expect to shoulder a significant amount of this weight.

3. Prioritize DE&I Across the Organization

Expect to see the recent emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) accelerate in 2022. More organizations will look to implement best practices around hiring and retaining a diverse workforce. In a recent survey, 61% of corporate leaders and board members ranked DE&I initiatives as a top priority.

For creative teams, this will mean emphasizing the importance of diverse perspectives at every stage of the creative process and including a diverse range of voices in developing and executing new projects. Diversity is a consumer value as well as an organizational value, so customers will expect to see diversity manifested in their preferred brands in 2022.

Issues of diversity have become both the source of unexpected controversy and a new center of gravity. For talent recruitment, consumer engagement and operational success, DE&I will increasingly sit at the heart of every business decision, including creative choices. Designers will be responsible for ensuring that brands can speak to diverse audiences with an inclusive array of voices.

Creatives must build diverse teams internally and project diversity outwardly by showcasing efforts to create inclusive spaces and experiences. Creative leaders should plan to continuously take stock of the makeup of their teams and the work they are producing to ensure that their organizations' commitment to DE&I issues is transmitted loud and clear. It's their job to ensure the organization is living up to the values it aims to express.

4. Put the Audience at the Center of Everything

Successful design starts with understanding your audience. Today's fast-changing digital environments make that easier than ever. Designers must be prepared to digest new insights regularly from a host of novel platforms, from digital analytics tools to emerging social video platforms. And it's hardly a static process. Consumer tastes change quickly, so best practices need to be updated regularly to continue driving results. Be willing to utilize insights to drive better creative solutions. The more open your team is to new information and adaptation, the better your final project will be.

Your audience is constantly changing. The channels they prefer, how they browse products, how they make purchasing decisions, what leads to a successful conversion — these are all subject to ongoing changes as habits evolve. In 2022, more creative teams will implement a standardized testing process, and even agile workflows, to ensure changes are captured, understood and reflected by design.

Some creatives may wish to beta-test new design work or user experiences with a small group of users before a wide release. These field tests can help to break down organizational group thinking by introducing new feedback and data points not captured by the project planning process. Continuous testing of key experiences and designs — even those that are meeting expectations already — will help to keep your team focused on the future and constantly improving.

5. Achieve Personal and Professional Growth by Risk-Taking

The emphasis on testing and empirical data may lead you to believe that 2022 will be the year of metrics-driven, paint-by-numbers creative. Nothing could be further from the truth. The heart of innovation is the willingness to try new and untested things, especially when it comes to designing creative collateral and unique user experiences in an unprecedented era of change. Data and testing can reveal interesting and valuable insights for creative teams, but the ultimate key to unlocking creative success will always be risk-taking.

Implementing a testing program will allow creative teams to measure the success of a new initiative. Traditional measurements like A/B testing of new social, ad and email creative provide some insight. But they're reactive in nature. In 2022, designers should crave to measure creative risk-taking. That means testing your team's flexibility and helping them build resilience.

As organizations become more data-driven, creative teams are often one of the few parts of a given brand with the freedom to take chances. It will be the responsibility of designers and creatives to push the boundaries of brands and ensure they continue to evolve and thrive in the challenging new environments ahead. Creative leaders should focus on creating a safe and supportive environment that encourages risk-taking even when big swings don't work out, and on finding ways to channel the learnings for hits and misses into better creativity moving forward.

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Creatives Lead the Way to a Successful 2022!

They will showcase how company values have evolved, highlight a brand's DE&I efforts and understand audiences on a more intimate level. Creative leadership will help organizations take bold risks and help internal teams work together more efficiently and seamlessly.

It's a big job, but we know creatives are up to the task. And if it turns into a year of dramatic change like 2020, we know you'll be ready.

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GET INVOLVED TODAY!

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