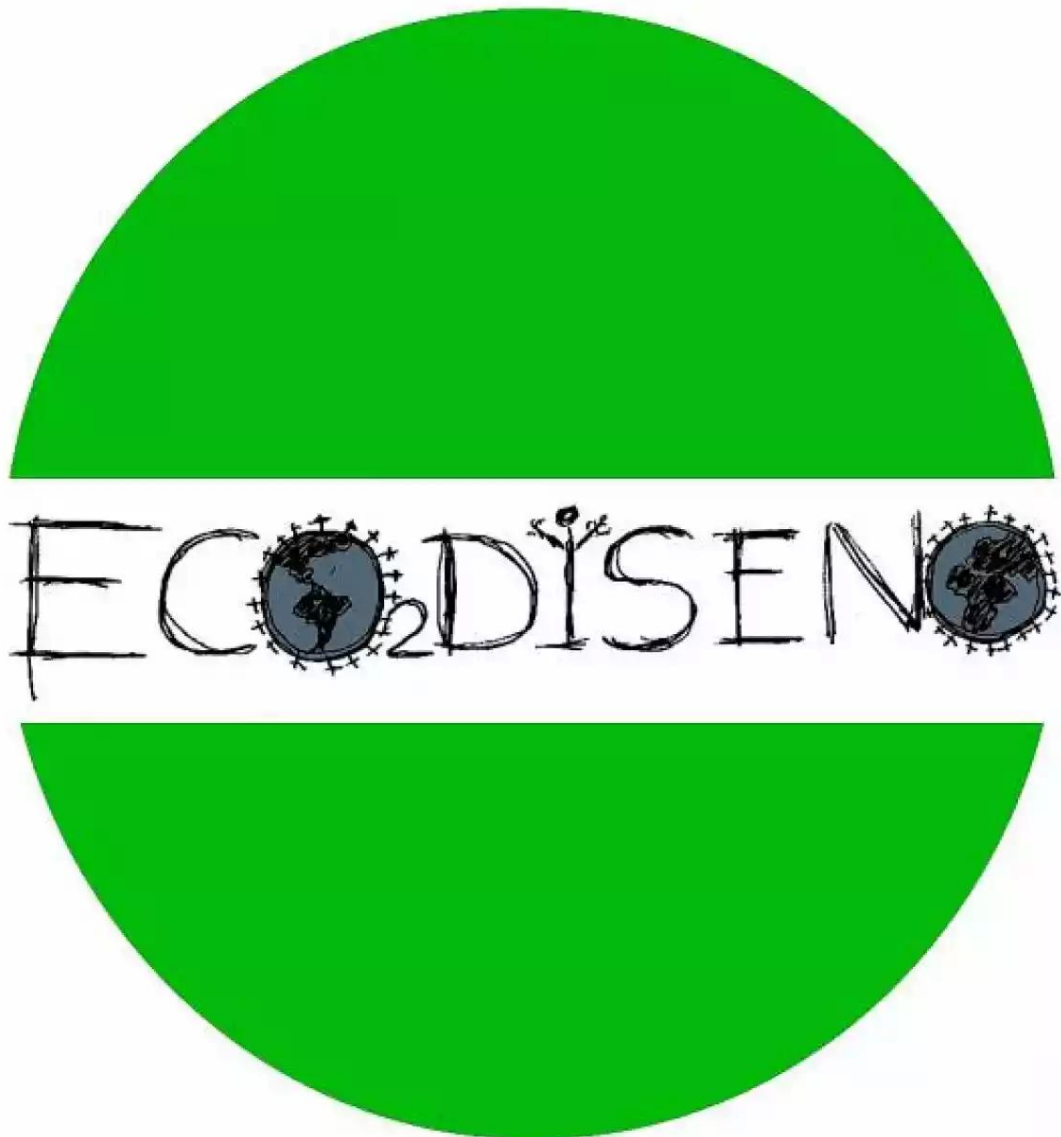


Graphic design's carbon footprint

By Fernando Navia Meyer

Carbon footprint is defined as the total amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse effect gases, bound to a product or service.



Nowadays, we humans have more knowledge in comparison to our ancestors and at same time, we're responsible for the most cruel degenerative, dire process the planet suffers. Graphic design's carbon footprint, accumulated throughout the centuries by huge direct and

indirect designer actions for institutions, people, government, companies, products and services, is part of the constant rise of greenhouse effect gases warming the planet.

The north american Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has just certified that Summer 2014 has been the hottest summer registered on the planet. Designed visual messages include multiple tasks and activities that correspond with large energy consumption. For each stage of a designed visual message lifecycle, the carbon footprint gets deeper, starting with text, image and sign design in multiple conventional and digital formats for editing; digital press, rotation, rotaries, offset, typographic and puncher printing; paper guillotining, compagination, plastic finish, UV varnish, metalizations, plus packaging, distribution, transport, broadcast, until the end of the useful lifecycle of the designed visual message.

In addition to energy consumption due to the intensive usage of computers, mobile devices, screens, peripherals, Internet, satellites and optical fiber wiring for the design of digital visual messages, a sum of direct and indirect actions on behalf of the graphic designer involve him in his contribution to the planet's CO₂. For the past six decades, CO₂ concentration increased in almost 100 ppm (parts per million), rising 2 ppm per year, surpassing the unprecedented number of 401.3 ppm in Mauna Loa (Hawaii), during April 2014.

The World Weather Organization's Secretary-General, Michel Jarraud, has stated that «time is running out». The immanent, ubiquitous and constant presence of designed visual messages is the anthropogenic mirror of their three millenia accumulated carbon footprint, manifesting an irreversible degenerative process if action is not taken.

Billions and billions of packaging, signs, magazines, brochures, catalogs, newspapers, etc., use billions of tons of paper, ink and others. Greenpeace states that the paper industry is at the fifth place of the industry sector in worldwide energy consumption, and uses more water per produced ton than any other industry. Designers are direct and indirect co-responsible of their carbon footprint, of the cities' visual contamination and of the consumist accumulation that has provoked a visual pandemic of disastrous proportions.

An archeology of spread visual messages in several formats throughout the world, manifest purposes and goals of human groups regarding their personal and social development in relation to the planet's resources. Human beings have laid the sign of their extinction.

Ecodesign, sustainable design, social design, responsible design are euphemisms to cover up the powerful carbon footprint of stealthy design. Ubaldo García (2011) said the price of things isn't in its immediate, direct cost, the price one pays for a service or product, but in the general repercussions of each action. In the collateral, invisible effects of action lies the perpetual destruction from which design is an accomplice.

The spirit of our times, with so much knowledge and so much power of destruction, must understand what is the final meaning of our acts. What fate do we want? What is the mission for the current and future designer?

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