

Ten principles of graphic design

By Norberto Chaves

A suggested decalogue of “good practices” for graphic designers.

1. Conventionality

The sign must be configured according to some combination of culturally active graphic codes. The concept of “new graphic languages” is absurd: if a language is new, it is not understandable.

2. Occurrence

Occurrence compensates conventionality by giving relevance to the message. However, the level of atypicalness required isn't always the maximum possible. Each case requires a different level of occurrence.

3. Effectiveness

The sign must fulfill, at least, all the functions it has been created for. Values, such as aesthetics, cannot subordinate the effectiveness of the graphic communicate and can, instead, empower it.

4. Property

The sign must be inscribed in the sender's identity paradigm. The signature is not enough: the communicate itself must identify the sender. Identity isn't about talking about the sender, it's about talking like the sender.

5. Respect

As it occurs with the sender, graphic must be adjusted to and respect the receiver's codes. It speaks for him, so he can understand.

6. Pertinence

The sign must be adjusted to the registry of the communicational link established between sender and receiver. Only knowing that link it is possible to establish the proper tone for each occasion.

7. Density

Between what's empty and what's full there must be a relation of meaning. The sign must be saturated, that is, lacking of zones deprived of meaning. If when eliminating an element nothing is lost, is because that element was unnecessary.

8. Economy

Wasting is communicationally negative. The sign must not contain superfluous redundancy or graphic excess.

9. Transparency

The sign must lack parasitary significations that operate as noise to its specific message.

10. Anonymity

The sign must be autonomous, reference-free in regards of its production process or its author. The sign isn't its production process' story: it belongs to the sender and its creation must become invisible.

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