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## Laying Out your Future

CAREER WORLD

Nov./Dec. 2004, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 24+

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### Laying Out Your Future

By Anne Flounders

- *Desktop publishing blends technical and creative skills...and it's a hot field!*

*WANTED: Creative people who love working with **computers**. Must love solving knotty problems. Knack for looking at a blank page and imagining possibilities. Communication skills a must.* Does that sound like you? Then computer graphics, which includes desktop publishing, is a field you should definitely investigate.

[\(See picture, "Desktop Publishing Layouts."\)](#)

Computer graphic artists use their computer know-how and design skills to combine words and pictures into stimulating, inviting pages--on the Web or in print.

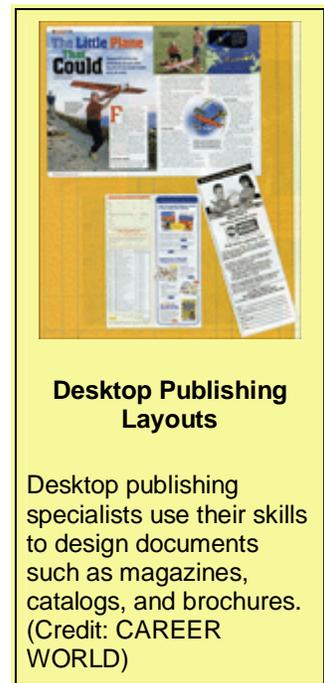
Desktop publishing software forever changed print publishing when it first appeared in the 1980s. In those "ancient" times, layout artists and typesetters would spend dozens of hours drawing and redrawing pages by hand. It was long, painstaking work, and it took many people to get one page ready for print.

Flash forward to the 21st century. Today, powerful software and fast **Computers** make the publishing process easier, quicker, and cheaper than ever. Trying out different layouts and options is much less time-consuming.

Desktop publishing is one of the fastest-growing fields in the United States. Ed Hogan, program coordinator for the Graphic Design and Multimedia Studies programs at Manchester Community College in Manchester, Conn., says, "One of the reasons it's probably marked as one of the fastest-rising or 'hot' careers is because, as an umbrella term, [desktop publishing is] incorporating all the other kinds of really fabulous multimedia developments," including Web design and computer animation.

#### What's the Work Like?

If you've worked on your school's yearbook, newspaper, for Web site, you probably already have a



good idea of what desktop publishing is all about.

The field gives you the tools you need to turn a great idea into a graphic reality. Jobs tend to draw people who are both tech-savvy, and creative. The work combines both skill sets.

"Sometimes [the attraction to desktop publishing is] the technology itself and the possibilities that it affords people," Hogan explains. "Other times it's the creative impulse and just wanting to learn...I have these great ideas; how can I execute them?"

That creative impulse drew graphic designer Lia Ribacchi, 34, into her career, which she began by developing desktop publishing skills. She had majored in anthropology and began to work in that field after college. "I had to do a project where I made a newsletter," Ribacchi says. "I was like, 'Wow, I really like this visual problem solving.'" She shifted gears and took a year's worth of design and computer courses.

Today, Ribacchi is an art director for Dark Horse Comics in Milwaukie, Ore., where she and her staff work on comic-book, catalog, and ad layouts. At Dark Horse, an entry-level graphics associate will lay out a catalog that is sent directly to comic-book sellers. This involves taking electronic images of the products and using page-layout software to place them on the page. The associate then adds text from a word-processing file into the layout and sets the type so that it's easy on the eye.

"There's not a whole lot of design involved, but you need a little bit of an eye [for design] because certain pages need a little bit more layout," says Ribacchi.

Windy Schneider, 24, does computer graphics work at a non-profit corporation in Tyson's Corner, Va., where she maintains the design and content of her department's Web site. "At any point during the day, someone could come to me and ask for anything from a quick graphic to a new Web site," Schneider says.

### **Road to Success**

The most basic building block for a career in computer graphics is knowing the software, including page-layout, illustration, image-editing, and animation programs. Schneider, who has a bachelor's degree in media arts and design, suggests knowing how to use the software on both Macs and PCs. "You never know which system a client may be operating, or what a company you work for may support," she says.

Hogan notes that being able to design and build a Web page is an advantage in the field today. "Any person in a job interview who says, 'Yes, I can [create a Web page]' will be ahead of anyone who can't."

Success in computer graphics depends on a combination of technical skills and some nontechnical strengths that people can't learn in school. Ribacchi hires entry-level graphics associates who are good at organizing information. "You need to be able to...communicate with different people within the building to get what you need," she explains.

Schneider notes that patience and flexibility help pave the way to success. "Clients are always changing their mind after you have spent hours working on a project," she says. "You have to learn to be calm, smile, and not take anything personally. All people have different tastes."

Above all, creativity and artistic talent will give people the greatest advantage in this field. Hogan reminds his students that the computer is just a tool. Their approach to using it will set them apart from others in the field.

"You can't sit down without an idea in your head and create something fabulous," says Hogan. "If

you sit down without thinking ahead of time, without sketching, without planning, you will only do what the computer will let you do....If you [have] a creative idea, you're going to figure out how to make the software make that. You will push yourself and push the software to the boundaries, because you're not designing to the computer. You're going to make the computer design for you."

\* \* \*

#### **Q. What's the difference between desktop publishing and graphic design?**

**A.** *Desktop publishing* refers to using software to create documents for publication. *Graphic design* is a broader field that includes desktop publishing skills but also involves looking at the "bigger picture" of art and design.

## **AT a Glance: Computer Graphics**

- More than 35,000 people work in desktop publishing. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a 21 to 35 percent rise in new jobs through 2012.
- The field offers a lot of flexibility. People can often work from home or on their own schedules.
- Two out of three computer graphic artists work in publishing (newspapers, magazines, books, brochures, catalogs, directories) and printing.
- Jobs are available--throughout the country, with most in large cities.
- Train at technical schools, two- or four-year colleges, or art schools. Schools offer certificates, associate's degrees, and bachelor's degrees in graphic arts. You can also train on the job.

## **Discuss**

#### **Ask Students**

- Besides computer skills, what skills or qualities could help you succeed in a computer graphics position?
- If you wanted to pursue a career in computer graphics, what could you do now to prepare?

## **Write**

#### **Research Graphics Jobs**

Using a job search engine like **Monster.com** or **Hot.Jobs.com**, have students search for listings using the keyword "desktop publishing." Have them record the different jobs that come up, and list the skills required for each position.

## **More Resources**

About.com's desktop publishing site is frequently updated with tips, projects reviews, and editorials from people in the profession. Reading through this site is a great way to get a sense of what the work is really like: [desktoppub.miningco.com](http://desktoppub.miningco.com)

