

## Interview with Multimedia Designer

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The interview conducted with Josh Baker served to illustrate one possible career path for a trained multimedia designer. Baker is a multimedia designer who works in the corporate office of Lockheed-Martin, a major government contractor in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. With an educational background in multimedia design and a goal of eventually designing independent computer games, Josh Baker sees his current position as a step in the right direction and a place to hone his skills while working toward his future goals.

### METHOD

This interview with Josh Baker, multimedia designer at Lockheed-Martin, was primarily conducted through an e-mail exchange due to geographic constraints. A series of questions, shown below, was presented to Baker, to which he responded within two days time.

1. What is your educational background? Specifically, what part of your education (or what courses) prepared you to create multimedia projects?
2. What attracted you to the field of multimedia design?
3. Describe a recent multimedia project on which you worked.
4. What software tools did you use?
5. What were some of the standards imposed by the organization (i.e., templates, logos, bullet styles, etc.)? Do you have to work within organizational standards, industry standards, or both? Explain.
6. Who comprised the development team for this project (e.g., client, users)?
7. What problems did you encounter and how did you deal with them?
8. What kind of testing was done (i.e., usability, technical)? Did the testing produce any problems? How were revisions handled?
9. How did the intended user(s) react to the product? How did you gather this information (i.e., surveys, etc.)?
10. To what extent are you allowed creative freedom on a given project? If you are allowed creative freedom, describe how you might use your training and experience on a project.

### RESULTS

#### *Background*

First becoming interested in graphic design in high school, Baker describes himself as having always been artistic. With the rise of gaming and computer animation during his high school years, Baker obtained a copy of 3D Studio MAX and “just started messing around with it for fun.” He says, “I loved the freedom it [gave] me to create animation and artwork and knew I wanted to learn more about how to do it.” Noting that he was also interested in logo design

and photography, Baker found that he wanted to pursue an education in the multimedia design area.

He obtained his Bachelor of Arts in Multimedia from the University of Advancing Technology in Tempe, Arizona, and is continuing his education at the University of Maryland University College for a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science. Baker is qualified to do a wide range of projects for his employer but focuses mainly on presentation design at the corporate level. Certain courses in particular have helped Baker in his current position. Courses in color theory and “classes on Visual Identity ... [and] the basics of Typography have been very valuable.” *Visual identity* is described by one design company in U.K. as follows:

Every successful business or organisation knows the importance of being easily identified to its target audience, and the consistent application of a distinctive and easily recognised visual identity or brand image is the way in which this is achieved.

This can be as simple as the presentation of an eye-catching logo on stationery and promotional material, or as comprehensive as a corporate design manual to ensure the consistent use of all design elements across a larger organisation (*Sustainable Design*, n.d.).

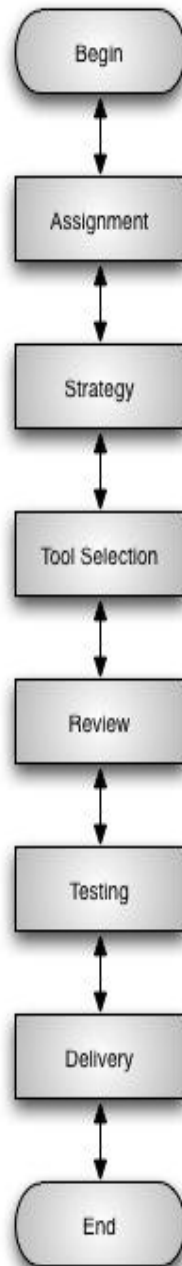
Baker further states that he has “found that following the ideas [he] learned in these classes has helped to create professional quality work. Often [with this knowledge he] can take a project that just doesn't click, and turn it into one that feels right.” The skills he learned in these courses, in other words, gave him the tools to replace “gut instincts” with applied theory.

### ***An Example Project***

I asked Baker to describe an example of his work. Though he feels his work is not as “exciting” as other possible multimedia projects, it does give him a chance to use his learned skills and apply solid theory and a little creative freedom to an otherwise “business as usual” project. The example project we discussed was a presentation he created for the Board of Directors at Lockheed-Martin. He says, “It was intended to explain the strategy of the business area in a way that anyone could understand, as the board members are not all well versed in the technology.” Quite often visual designers are called upon to take broad ideas or highly technical ones and turn them into something a layperson can understand.

## THE PROCESS

The following figure depicts the high-level process used by Baker for each project.



In Baker's case, the development team is small, comprised mostly of Baker, his manager, and "to some extent and our Business Development VP," the latter two of whom are the clients in his development cycle. Once an assignment is made, Baker assesses the rhetorical strategy of the assignment. Who is his audience? What is the purpose of the design? What do his clients hope to gain from this design? "Obviously my audience is a corporate audience, and I must keep within some bounds," Baker says. "[But] at times I have had an audience such as younger children and adjust accordingly."

Though this presentation was designed for an internal, domestic audience, Baker sometimes must create presentations for an international audience. In that case, “The only real difference is in the content; it must be sent through export control experts to be certain we are legally allowed to send the data out of the USA.”

Often he starts a presentation design without the use of style guides or templates. In creating the example project, he designed it from the ground up. “I am pushed to be creative in this area and use good judgment,” Baker says. He does acknowledge that Lockheed-Martin has a style guide that dictates the usage of the logo, etc., but that it is not very useful to the work he does. “[For] some presentations I am required to follow a corporate template which is fairly bland and boring,” he says.

He has been at his job for awhile now, so his judgment is usually trusted and “spot on.” In the beginning, however, he says, “There might have been some complete overhauls based on feedback that might have been too 'creative' for the intended audience.”

After he has a better understanding of the rhetorical strategy and overall design, he selects tools from his multimedia toolkit. In addition to using Microsoft Office PowerPoint, Baker uses a variety of open source tools that give him the freedom to adjust the software to meet his needs. In the example project, he used Blender 3D ([www.blender3d.com](http://www.blender3d.com)). The software enabled him to create the “fairly simple 3D representation” for the directors. Another open source tool he uses is called GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Program), which is a tool that allows you to edit images, similar to Adobe Photoshop ([www.gimp.org](http://www.gimp.org)). GNU is a free operating system (OS) that is multi-platform ([www.gnu.org](http://www.gnu.org)).

During the design and review phase, Baker is trusted to ensure that his design meets the needs of the audience, and is given a great deal of creative freedom. “I use my training whenever I can,” he says, “always trying to incorporate new ideas and techniques I have learned. Adding 3D animation is a goal of mine.” However, his client sometimes likes to be directly involved. “I do a lot of building on the fly,” Baker says. “My boss likes to have a direct hand in the creation to some extent and so I have had to become accustomed to off-the-cuff changes and quick turnaround of changes.” It can be challenging to have one's client so close at hand, but review cycles are kept tight. Reviews, which are described as “hands-on,” are in fact the centerpiece of the testing done for Baker's presentations. He generally owns the master copy of the design, and all changes go through him. Baker keeps backups of everything. “That way I can recover old ideas if need be,” he says.

He states that what we think of as traditional testing occurs only “when I have either video files or if I might be displaying the presentation on an outside computer. I have to make certain that the computer has the required PowerPoint version and video codecs.” Video files are sometimes problematic, “not playing at all, playing without sound, or playing only with sound.” Both the review and testing phases are described as recursive and iterative as Baker goes through ensuring that the presentation is sound, and that any embedded videos work before the material is used, although he acknowledges that even with adequate testing, problems may still not show up in a presentation “until it goes live.”

Once the presentation is done, it is done. No surveys are conducted, and no feedback channel – other than word-of-mouth feedback from attendees or his managers – is available. Each project tends to be standalone and finite.

## **SUMMARY**

Using multimedia skills in a rather static presentation can still be useful and challenging. For the example project, Baker “went through many iterations ... almost 40. A large part of it was the design of a visual to represent our strategy.” The output was a presentation that contained “a fairly simple 3D representation of the layers that build our strategy.” Though the end result was “fairly simple,” note that nearly forty iterations were behind that “simple” output.

The best lesson he has learned throughout the many review cycles he has been part of is that accepting constructive criticism is crucial. Rather than taking criticism personally, he has learned that “At times the aesthetic of your client might clash with yours, and you must be willing to cede the point to the client in order to produce something they like. The ultimate goal is to reach the audience and make the client happy with your work.”

Although issues may crop up during a presentation, despite reviews and testing, Baker's work is appreciated and liked by the company. “Most people ... compliment me about my work.” Because he is a one-man show, he has no resources to do follow-on satisfaction surveys or to get feedback except directly from his client – the employer.

Baker enjoys his work, but his ultimate goal is to be his own boss, “creating small independent computer games” or to find a way to better use his programming knowledge and training with his current employer. Possibilities within his organization include working on “user interface design and [virtual reality] VR/Simulators.”

## **Works Cited**

Baker, J. Personal interview. September 5, 2011.

Visual identity design. (n.d.). Sustainable Design. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at <http://rps.gn.apc.org/design/visual.htm>.