IMAGES

A CREATIVE DIGITAL WORKFLOW FOR GRAPHIC DESIGNERS

Dedicated to Jack Seddon, who taught me that there are no problems, only solutions.

IMAGES
A CREATIVE DIGITAL WORKFLOW FOR GRAPHIC DESIGNERS

Tony Seddon

with contributions
by Robert Clymo

A word about software

This book isn't intended to be seen as a missing manual, and isn't attempting to recommend any one product over another. Therefore, if you don't own the application that's used to illustrate a point, it's highly probable that you'll be able to achieve the same thing using another comparable application. This also applies to the operating system of your choice, and every effort has been made to ensure that the methods discussed can be implemented using software available for both Mac OSX and Windows.

Contents

1479_Book artwork
15 items, 17.51 GB available
Name
1479-Image.0_001–007.indd
1479-Image.1_008–015.indd
1479-Image.2_016–027.indd
1479-Image.3_028–047.indd
1479-Image.4_048–079.indd
1479-Image.4_080–099.indd
1479-Image.4_100–119.indd
1479-Image.4_120–135.indd
1479-Image.5_136–157.indd
1479-Image.6_158–167.indd
1479-Image.7_168–179.indd
1479-Image.7_180–191.indd
1479-Image.8_192–203.indd
1479-Image.9_204–215.indd
1479-Image.end_216–224.indd

Introduction

So—about this "creative digital workflow for graphic designers." Deep down we all know that it's something we should try to think about, but more often than not we manage to find something that *appears* to be more interesting, or more rewarding or, the worst excuse of all, more urgent.

Graphic designers in particular are vulnerable to the temptations of ignoring the importance of the thoughtful preparation and planning of complex projects. We get excited about the creative process we are going to embark upon and forget to think about that part of the project which comprises editing, naming, preparing, distributing, and finally storing the building blocks of graphic design—the vital images.

You may already have a method that seems to work pretty well, but on analysis does it really work as well as it should? Was the working method you follow designed, or did it evolve around a series of projects and the various problems they presented at the time? There are many different ways to get the job done, and people will invariably approach each project differently, but there are underlying principles which can help you to avoid problems.

The aim of this book is to provide you with the information you need to form a *method* and a *philosophy* for building your own creative digital workflow, improving image management and therefore freeing up more time for creativity. It also takes you through typical design and artwork preparation stages for both print and online projects, with an emphasis on how images are handled. If you routinely struggle to focus

on the aspects of running or collaborating on creative projects (and we all do), this book may be just what you need.

Observing a creative digital workflow doesn't have to be a chore, despite what some people will tell you. Jonathan Kenyon of Vault 49 (www.vault49.com) says:

"We consider our *business* as being image management, it being a broader term for art direction fused with original creations. This applies whether the image is created entirely by our own hands, or whether the design involves the collaborative talents of many of our contributors."

I think he's right. If seen as an integral part of the design process, and indeed if approached with a creative spirit, managing your project successfully can be almost as rewarding an experience as the design process itself.

Tony Seddon

➔ Which image is the right one for the job? How much will the image cost? Where did the images come from and who shot them? Whose permission do I need? How do I make sure the image will reproduce perfectly? All will be revealed.
Photography: Jason Keith

Establishing an image-preparation workflow

What's so important about an image workflow, and why do you need to have one at all? Well, it's obviously up to you to decide if establishing an image workflow can be of benefit to you, but I'm going to stick my neck out here and say that I'm certain it will be. If you've ever got to the end of a design project only to discover that you can't find all the images, or that some of your images aren't the correct resolution for high-quality reproduction (even though you thought they were), or indeed that your carefully planned schedule has unravelled and half of your high-resolution images haven't even arrived, read on. This book is for you.

What is a workflow & why have one?

Put simply, a workflow is the management and movement of specific project-related tasks through a work process. It's about how the tasks are structured, how they're completed, who completes them, how they are prioritized, what time frame they need to be completed in, and ultimately how they are synchronized to create a single product at a specific time.

More specifically, a workflow can represent the creation and management of a creative project's content. In the context of this book I'll be discussing workflows as visual representations of the tasks and actions outlined in that short introductory paragraph, paying particular attention to how images are created, managed, and used in print and web projects.

When asked, "Why do you need a workflow?" my usual answer is, "Why would you not want to have a workflow?" Whenever I embark on a new project I get nervous if I don't have a good understanding of how the individual strands of the project will come together. For example, I always want to know what I should expect to receive from a photographer or illustrator, the format in which the material will be provided, and when I can realistically expect it to arrive. I take a similar approach with text. Will it indicate where images are supposed to go? Will it be complete? Has it been edited?

The benefits of a workflow

Creating a workflow has two main benefits. The first is that it enables progress of a project to be tracked against an overall schedule. The second is that a workflow enables a designer to "optimize" every stage of a project, so ensuring the project as a whole receives a consistent and considered approach. For example, establishing a workflow will allow you to be consistent in the way you prepare images for each of your concurrently running projects. There's a good chance that over time you'll find certain key elements of a workflow work well for all your projects and can be used as the starting points for each new workflow that you create. The most important thing to remember is that once you've established a workflow for a project, you must follow it closely, just as you would if you were following a recipe in a cookery book. But "closely" is not the same as "slavishly"—there will still be times when you need to be flexible.

This combination of quality control through established rules, and consistency gained through tried and tested procedures, creates an environment where you can quickly and easily deal with the process of preparing large numbers of images for print or web projects. In turn this means you don't have to spend time thinking about what needs to be done every time you try to find and open an image on your computer. The result— increased efficiency, and therefore more time for creativity and experimentation. So that's the theory, but how is it achieved?

↗ A workflow can be composed of several threads which may start at different points in the schedule. Each thread will involve periods of intense activity along with periods of inactivity while waiting for another thread to catch up. The most important thing is to make sure they all hit the end point of the workflow together.
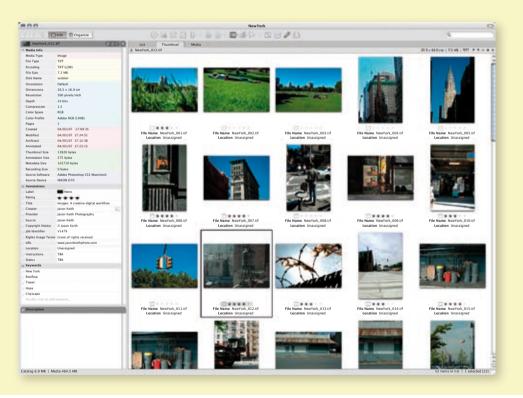
Establishing your image workflow

A good place to start when establishing your image workflow is to think carefully about not just the individual tasks that must be completed, but also how you would like to complete those tasks.

This may sound obvious, but in my experience designers often back themselves into a corner in order to please clients or ensure deadlines are met. This is partly due to the fact that designers are generally among the last people to work intensively on a project before it goes off to be printed or published online. For this reason, when mapping out a workflow make sure it takes into account how you prefer to approach the all-important final stages (without being too self-serving, of course), and if the workflow is working well for others but not for you, put pressure on the team to make the necessary changes to ensure you're given a chance to do your job properly.

Identify the key stages

When establishing your workflow, think carefully about the key stages of the project you are planning. These will differ from project to project, but it's likely that there'll be some stages that are common to many of your projects. Keep records of your earlier workflows and refer back to your notes so that you can identify and therefore avoid problems experienced on previous projects. Analyze the schedule carefully and allot periods of time to each task that is required. Some examples of what to consider in an image-management workflow for a typical design project could be:

↪ Commissioning and briefing a specialist picture researcher.

↪ Preparing a photo shoot and commissioning and briefing the photographer.

↪ Art-directing the photo shoot.

↪ Editing and selecting all images.

↪ Cross-checking the selected images against a text manuscript or flatplan.

↪ Assessing whether there are sufficient images, and ensuring budgets are adhered to.

↪ Arranging any necessary additional photography or picture research, or carrying out your own additional picture research through online image libraries.

↪ Briefing an illustrator and ensuring that fully annotated artwork reference is available if required.

↪ Creating a secure system of project-specific folders in which to store images.

↪ Ensuring all the images are filed in the correct folders.

↪ Naming all the images using a system that helps to identify them and that indicates which project they belong to.

↪ Creating a digital catalog of all the images relating to the project.

↪ Ensuring that any necessary adjustment work on the images prior to commencing the design process is completed.

↪ Preparing sample layouts to ensure design issues are finalized well in advance of the layout work commencing.

↪ Briefing the designer, if work is to be outsourced. ↪

⬆ A digital catalog like the one above, made with Microsoft Expression Media (formerly iView MediaPro), will help you track the progress of all images within any given workflow.
Photography: Jason Keith

Prioritizing

When planning a workflow, I always advise people to concentrate on those stages of the job that they think are most likely to cause the biggest problems. It could be insufficient time or budget, or it could be something more specific to the project such as images that have to be sourced from non-professional suppliers and which will therefore need a lot of work to ensure they are of publishable quality. Once these potential problem areas are resolved, the workflow should become progressively easier to plan.
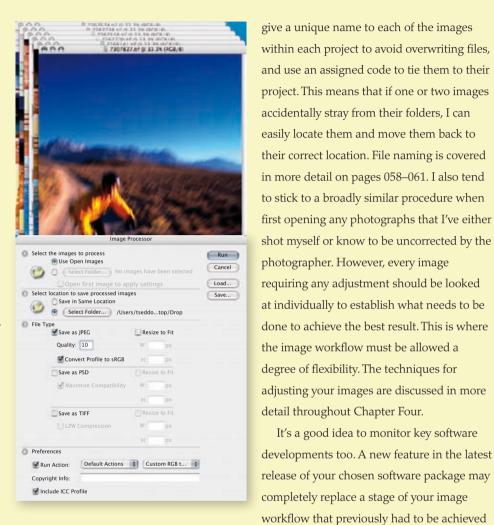
Establishing your image workflow

Identify your goal

You may have come up with a great image-management workflow, but ultimately if the end result isn't up to scratch the workflow has effectively failed. Identify the goals clearly and focus on them throughout the planning stage. It goes without saying that one of your aims will be to ensure that the reproduction of the images, be it in print or on screen, is technically of the highest possible quality. However, also give some thought to how each stage of the job can achieve the *creative* result that you want, and think about how you can use the tools at your disposal to achieve that result—whether they be a comprehensive database of images or the latest version of a software package. For example, Adobe Photoshop is undoubtedly the industry standard for use in the preparation and manipulation of images, but it is also one of the most workflow-friendly applications, through its use of actions and scripts.

Adapt to each project's needs

You can't assume that the efficient image workflow you established for one project is going to work for another, so it's important to consider a project's individual requirements. In fact, you can't even assume that every image in any one project will

proceed through the workflow in the same way—and the stage that will generally need to remain the most flexible is the image-processing stage. There will, however, be a number of processes that you nearly always include and can build your workflow around. For example, one of the first things I do is

give a unique name to each of the images within each project to avoid overwriting files, and use an assigned code to tie them to their project. This means that if one or two images accidentally stray from their folders, I can easily locate them and move them back to their correct location. File naming is covered in more detail on pages 058–061. I also tend to stick to a broadly similar procedure when first opening any photographs that I've either shot myself or know to be uncorrected by the photographer. However, every image requiring any adjustment should be looked at individually to establish what needs to be done to achieve the best result. This is where the image workflow must be allowed a degree of flexibility. The techniques for adjusting your images are discussed in more detail throughout Chapter Four.

It's a good idea to monitor key software developments too. A new feature in the latest release of your chosen software package may completely replace a stage of your image workflow that previously had to be achieved using a more complex procedure.

↑ An example of how workflow-friendly Photoshop is can be found in the Image Processor script [*File > Scripts > Image Processor*]. This script is supplied as part of the installed package and is very useful for simple batch conversions.

↗ An image workflow may vary from project to project, but the stages represented here are typical of the average design project involving sourced or specially commissioned imagery.

An image workflow overview

Commission image research	Carry out personal image research	Commission a photographer	Commission an illustrator
either from a specialist freelance researcher or through an image-library account handler	*using an online resource such as an image library, or from accumulated reference material*	*ensuring that their particular specialism or personal style is suitable for the project*	*ensuring that their illustrative style is suitable for the project*

Attend photo shoot

Collate all images and review them using Adobe Bridge to gain an initial overview of the available choices

Edit and select images based on quality and suitability

Check images against a shot list or plan

Attend reshoot

Recommission or re-source images that are unsatisfactory

Organize and file all images within a structured system of folders
(see pages 058–061)

Rename all images using a standardized convention and convert them to your preferred format
(see pages 058–061)

Review final image selection using Adobe Bridge
adding a standardized set of basic, organizational metadata (see pages 062–065)

Create a catalog of all images that are part of the final selection, and add metadata as appropriate
using Expression Media, Extensis Portfolio, or an alternative application of your choice (see pages 072–079)

Process and adjust any images that require further attention
(see pages 100–123)

Begin design and layout

Planning & scheduling projects

When you sit down to begin work on a new design project, what's the first thing that normally happens? Do you get stuck into the creative thinking (the fun part) and hope for the best, or do you give some thought to the objectives, logistics, schedule, and budget for the project? As designers we all like to work on the ideas most of all. That's what we're trained to do, and it's why we do this job in the first place. However, if you're not organized, and are therefore difficult to work with, it doesn't matter how great your ideas are—your clients will eventually look elsewhere. This chapter provides an insight into getting the planning stage right.

Considerations

The solutions to most design problems are rarely arrived at immediately; they usually come about through a series of processes assembled by a designer or a creative team. When I sit down at the beginning of a new project to draw up the workflow, I begin by asking myself a series of standard questions.

What are the main objectives?

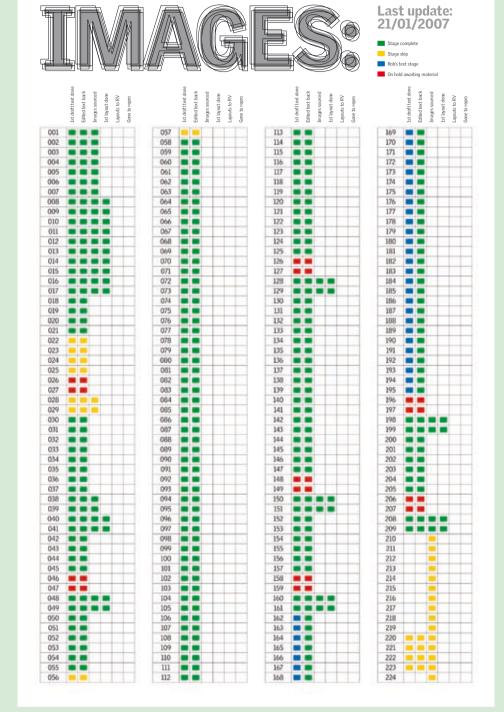If you haven't worked with your client before, find out as much as you can about their business and what they want to achieve. They may have a particular market position or strategy that they wish to rigidly maintain, or they may want a complete change of direction. Either way, focus on the objectives of the project as early as you can, as this gives you both the starting point and the goal to your plan. This also applies if you are working on a brief for your own company or for yourself. Remember that the completion or delivery date is in itself a specific objective.

How will you get the job done?

Look at every possible stage of the project that you can realistically predict, and build each stage into the workflow. The image workflow itself will be one of these stages, and will run either concurrently with other stages of the project or on its own. An analysis of the completed workflow will tell you what equipment you will need, how many people you must involve, and what specific skills each team member should possess. Remember to build in as much leeway as possible to allow for the stages that you couldn't predict but which more often than not will occur.

What are the deadlines?

Ensure that a realistic schedule is established as early as possible, and be certain that you can achieve the deadlines before you sign up to them. Unless you're on extremely good terms, a client will not forgive a missed deadline that all parties had earlier agreed. However, in my experience honesty about achievable deadlines is generally respected. If you think something can't be done in two weeks but can be done in three, ask for the extra week at the planning stage and back up your request with a reasoned explanation of why you need that time. Unless there's a very compelling reason for the deadline to

remain, the extra few days are usually given without major issue. With reference to a point I made earlier, pay particular attention to those stages of a schedule that involve external suppliers, particularly if their contribution is vital to the ongoing progress of the project.

What's in the budget?

As well as time, all projects need to be financed. Make sure every key stage of the project is costed and adheres to the budget. Agree in advance all costs for external suppliers such as photographers or illustrators, and try to establish a flat fee for their part of the project rather than a flexible day rate. This provides much more control over the budget and ensures there won't be any nasty surprises on completion of the project. There's nothing wrong with a little negotiation at this stage, but do be realistic about paying appropriately for the skills of the suppliers. If you want to maintain a good working relationship with a trusted photographer, for example, don't expect them to continually accept budgetary cuts from one project to the next. ⊞

⤒ When there is no leeway in a schedule, as is the case with these production posters for the Almeida Theatre, images must be sourced well in advance to meet the strict deadlines. Note also the strict adherence to layout style, providing a form of "brand recognition" for the theater's publicity.
Design: With Relish

⤒ The chart above represents the progress of each page of this book during the writing, editing, image sourcing and/or creation, and layout stages of this book. It's created in InDesign for ease of use; no specialist software was needed. As you can see, I'm just about to complete this spread.

IMAGES:

Last update: 21/01/2007

- ■ Stage complete
- ■ Stage skip
- ■ Rob's text stage
- ■ On hold awaiting material
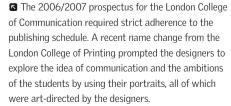
⊕ Considerations

What have I forgotten?

With ever-greater experience, you're increasingly less likely to overlook key stages. However, it's always worth asking, "Are there any differences between this project and those that I've worked on in the past?" If so, what? It may be a specific type of illustration, or a print job using materials you're not familiar with. The panels opposite contain lists of possible points that you should consider when planning and scheduling a project. Use them as a prompt when planning your own workflow.
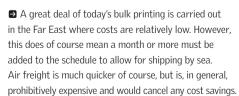

WITH THOUGHT AND CREATIVITY

USING WORDS AND PICTURES

IN THREE DIMENSIONS

IN CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW AND BLACK

◨ The 2006/2007 prospectus for the London College of Communication required strict adherence to the publishing schedule. A recent name change from the London College of Printing prompted the designers to explore the idea of communication and the ambitions of the students by using their portraits, all of which were art-directed by the designers.
Design: +Plus with photography by Joe Duggan

↘ Generic planning considerations

➔ Have project-specific key stages been established?
➔ Has the client agreed in writing to the project's objectives?
➔ Are all the members of your team in possession of the appropriate skills for the project?
➔ Are there enough people allocated to the project?
➔ Are the work allocations appropriate, or have any team members been overloaded?
➔ Is there a proper network in place for communicating and recording project-specific information?
➔ Have all costs been placed against the budget?
➔ Are there any special requirements for specialist hardware or software that should be costed against the project?
➔ Have all the stages been built into the available schedule?
➔ Is there enough contingency built into the schedule?
➔ Has all the necessary photography and/or illustration been commissioned or sourced?
➔ Have all external suppliers agreed to, and committed to, the proposed schedule in writing?

↘ Print-specific considerations

➔ Has someone placed repro and print?
➔ Has your printer agreed in writing to the delivery schedule?
➔ Have you allowed enough time for checking proofs and possible corrections?
➔ Does your client need time to check and approve proofs?
➔ Are you providing an extra set of proofs for your client, or should the printer deliver them directly?
➔ Will your printer organize the delivery of the printed project, or should that be organized separately?
➔ Will your printer store material and archive files in order to facilitate subsequent reprints, or will that be your responsibility?

◨ A great deal of today's bulk printing is carried out in the Far East where costs are relatively low. However, this does of course mean a month or more must be added to the schedule to allow for shipping by sea. Air freight is much quicker of course, but is, in general, prohibitively expensive and would cancel any cost savings.

↘ Web-specific considerations

➔ Have the site structure and design style been approved by the client?
➔ Are you in possession of all the content needed to complete the project?
➔ Have web hosting and a domain been set up, and has the responsibility for actioning this key stage been agreed?
➔ Have the marketing and promotion of the new site been addressed and factored into the price?
➔ Has ultimate responsibility for the ongoing management of online content been agreed with the client?
➔ Is there provision in the budget for troubleshooting added content?

A typical print project workflow

This is based on the typical workflow required to design and produce a publication such as a brochure, an annual report, or an illustrated book. However, most print-based design projects will follow a broadly similar sequence to this example.

Establish the specific priorities and key stages of the project
based on the fullest possible brief from your client or creative director

Establish the schedule
keeping a close eye on all overlapping stages that may create bottlenecks

Establish the budget
keeping the image budget separate from other key areas such as freelance design fees or print and repro

Seek client approval of the project outline
if this was an agreed stage when you were commissioned for the project

Appoint your project team
who may be in-house or freelance depending on the project's needs

Establish clear lines of communication between team members
such as contact telephone numbers and e-mail addresses

Provide a clear brief for all team members
which may differ for those that are dealing with different areas of the project (e.g. designer and photographer)

Confirm the budget for all team members
splitting it down into its constituent parts as relevant

Confirm the schedule for all team members
ensuring that it's clear where areas overlap, and highlighting all interim deadlines

Commission all images and illustrations
or confirm their availablility if they are being supplied by a client

Begin design work

Appoint the printer
confirming all costs in writing as specified in the original budget

Obtain client's approval
of all design work

Send the project out for repro and print
after prepress checks of all design work and all images used

Check color proofs
and make all necessary corrections

Check corrected color proofs
and seek client's approval if required as part of your commission

Approve for press

A typical online project workflow

This is based on the usual workflow required to produce an online presence such as a website, web content management system or intranet project. Most web-related projects will generally follow a similar sequence of events.

Establish the client's key objectives for the project
and gather any relevant information from the team involved with development

Prepare a timeline and agree a schedule for development
ensuring that deadlines are set for the supply of specific content

Prepare costings and ensure there is sufficient budget
for any overrun in technical areas and for content and sourced images

Appoint the project team,
deciding who will be team leader and who will work on each section of the project

Create a site map,
working with your client and the design team to agree on the content needed for the entire project

Outsource any areas which you'd prefer not to handle
such as complex web development/ programming needed for database- driven projects

Set up the backend details,
allocating budget and staff to ensure that web hosting, domains and technical requirements are in place

Create the draft site
as a mock-up of the overall design and functionality, seeking approval from the client before proceeding further

Start producing pages and content
while testing at regular intervals

Liaise with the client
ensuring the site is on schedule, with enough time for the editing and optimization of images and other external content

Liaise with any external team members
and set up regular meetings to ensure work matches the original brief

Match content to the design
adapting material where necessary

Troubleshoot the website
prior to the site going live, both locally and on a testing server

Confirm a marketing strategy
deciding how the site will be promoted when it goes live

Put the site live
and carry out additional testing on a variety of platforms using an assortment of web browsers

Submit site to search engines
optimizing website visibility, and fine-tune any aspects of site functionality

Confirm ongoing maintenance
as websites aren't static and need regular updates

The professionals' view

Throughout this chapter we've discussed how to plan and schedule projects in order to avoid coming unstuck with your clients and your collaborators or colleagues. You've read my take on it, but how do other graphics professionals approach this important area of project and image management?

To find out, I asked a number of designers what, apart from ultimately meeting an agreed deadline, they considered to be the most important aspect of planning and scheduling a new project. It was clear from the answers given that a major priority for many designers lies in allowing enough time to analyze the brief properly.

"A number of criteria need to be met, but a key element in our planning process is to allow enough *creative time* in the schedule to ensure that we're able to properly consider the client's brief in order to produce the appropriate creative solution," says Peter Dawson of Grade. He adds, "Deadlines must be realistic in the first place, and they must be married to a budget that's appropriate for the

client's expectations and requirements." Russell Hrachovec of compoundEye agrees with this view when he says, "We always try to give ourselves time to gestate the project properly, developing the ideas we have in order to bounce them off the client and make changes if necessary." David Johnston of Accept and Proceed also endorses this viewpoint, stating, "I always try to ensure that the schedule allows for client buy-in and sign-off—it's no use hitting the deadline in time, only to find out that the client has changed their mind or doesn't like the solution."

Setting the available budget against chargeable studio time is also of paramount importance when planning a schedule. Ian Pape of Fonda puts this into perspective,

saying, "The best creative solution and how to achieve it is always at the forefront of our planning, along with keeping the client happy of course, but making a profit is also up there as a necessarily important consideration."

Unforeseeable circumstances also figure largely in designers' responses to scheduling issues. "If you're efficient when planning a project, the less stressful a project will be, and more time will be created along the way to help deal with those inevitable unforeseen circumstances," says Michel Vrána of Black Eye Design. It's not just unknown occurrences that can throw schedules out either—clients will often fail to take into account vital stages that they're not familiar with when looking toward their own perceived deadlines.

"The final artwork stage is sometimes overlooked by clients," say Sara and Patrick Morrissey of Forever Studio. "They tend to think that everything is *ready to go* as soon as they've approved a visual, without considering the time it takes to get a job ready for press or online publishing, so this should be allowed for."

Efficiency isn't the only thing that figures as an important consideration for designers. "Quality of life!" says Jonathan Kenyon of Vault 49. "Oppressive deadlines and too many late nights sap creativity and dull the senses. We owe it to ourselves and our clients to allow breathing space in and around projects, so we have time to experiment rather than just churning out tried and tested

formulas." Ultimately, of course, schedules are often at the mercy of the client's requirements, which can't be finitely predicted. Stefan Bucher of 344 Design sums it up perfectly when he says, "My fondest wish is to avoid colliding deadlines, but most of my clients move at their own speeds, regardless of any advance planning. All one can do is build in as much flexibility as possible. What makes my clients wonderful partners in crime also makes them ill suited to strict timetables."