

**Can Graphic Design really save
your life?**

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In this essay I am going to be answering the question 'Can Graphic Design really save your life?'. My personal opinion is that Graphic Design can definitely be used in ways to potentially save someone's life. Even if it's only a small change, or a few people that it helps it can make a big impact.

One of the first ways in which I think Graphic Design can save your life is by using visuals to put off customers buying certain products. Even though the main idea behind graphic design is to help entice people into buying products, sometimes it is used in the opposite way. An example of this would be cigarette packaging. In 2017, the UK followed Australia in fully implementing standardised packaging. (*Countering Industry*, 2021) Standardised packaging is basically the same, very plain and boring visuals that are used for cigarettes. The colours used are the same for each and every packet, and there's also the use of quite disturbing images. Standardised packaging seems to be especially effective on adolescents and other youths.

There was a study done in Canada and the US of school children, which showed that the majority of them thought that the plain packets were boring and ugly. They also asked 10-17 year olds what they thought, and they had pretty similar views saying, "A pack you would not like to be seen with". (Mitchell, Moodie and Critchlow 2021)

They reviewed the evidence and came to the conclusion that standardised packaging would help reduce the rate of youths taking up smoking. (Mitchell, Moodie and Critchlow, 2021) I personally agree with this statement. And I also think that even if it's not a huge reduction in numbers, I think that as long as you can help turn a few young people away from smoking then you are potentially saving their lives.

The standardised packaging is definitely a huge change visually compared to what the packaging used to look like. Back in WW1 smoking was a way to boost morale, and was popular during past times. Apparently only 4 months in, already 96% of soldiers had started smoking. (Reeve, 2021) Since smoking was so popular back then amongst soldiers, brands made sure that the packaging was attractive and eye-catching, as a way to entice people into buying the product. This shows the effect that Graphic Design can have on people and what they choose to purchase.

Since you can't force people to stop smoking in my opinion, I think that standardised packaging would at least be a good way to maybe help try and change people's mind about it and encourage them not to. Again, even if it's the smallest reduction in numbers, at least they're making a small change.

Another way I think Graphic Design can help to save your life is through the relationship it has with health. Graphic Design can really help to visually communicate ideas to people around the world. One example would be healthcare

messages. Graphic Design can deliver very powerful messages in the healthcare industry. (Caposino, 2017) We have all probably seen some kind of healthcare inspired graphic design, without even realising it. Such as the cigarette packaging I was talking about previously. (Harris, 2017). Graphic Design can help people to really understand problems and take in information that they usually wouldn't otherwise. An example of graphic design helping to educate people on certain health topics would be the aids posters from the 'Wellcome Collection'. They have made a collection of over 200 different posters and different items, for an exhibition, trying to educate people on the topic of aids. They also explore how Graphic Design has the power to inform and educate people on the more recent outbreaks like ebola. They also teach people about safe sex. (Harris, 2017) Covering topics like this and helping to educate everyone about them is an extremely important thing to do, since otherwise a lot of these people would never learn about topics like this. Having a visual form of education can also help to simplify information for certain people who find it harder to read and take in information that way.

Another area of Graphic Design and healthcare would be in hospitals. An artist named 'Morag Myerscough' creates designs for children's hospitals that are very colourful and vibrant. He designed four different wall designs and put them across forty six different rooms in the hospital. (Dawood, 2017) The four different designs are aimed at different children with different conditions, for example children with autism who may be sensitive to certain colours (Dawood, 2017) It turns out that 98% of the patients feedback was positive, saying that they prefer the rooms to be joyous (Dawood, 2017) I think an idea like this can create a much nicer environment for these children and also the staff that work there. Evidence has shown that a more aesthetically pleasing atmosphere can improve the patients conditions faster (Dawood, 2017)

Another Graphic Designer that has helped to make more comfortable and child friendly environments, is called Dani Rubio Arauna. He invented signage for a hospital in Barcelona, of over 100 different animals playing hide and seek. The designs are placed around the hospital and separate rooms, with some of them even coming out from the walls. (*Hospital Sant Déu*, 2015) His work makes the environment of the hospital a lot more playful and less scary. Since for many people going to the hospital can be a very scary thing, especially for young children I feel that his work will really help the kids to feel more comfortable when they are there. I've looked at his work and I can see how this would really help to make people feel more at ease, not only the children but also the people that work there.

As shown by what I've just talked about, Graphic Design can help to comfort people and especially children in this case. But it can also be used to help educate children. An example of this would be a poster made by the artist called Dick Bruna. This artist has created a colouring book that helps to educate young children on the topic of Haemophilia, a blood condition (Harris, 2017). Dick Bruna creates happy and

colourful illustrations to help and ease the patients to stop them from worrying (Baker 2017)

As I said previously, Graphic Design can be used to make certain messages, or information easier to understand for certain people. For example, the ISOTYPE. This is where both designers Marie Reidmeister and Gerd Arntz wanted to create a new form of visual communication to explain complex data. (Müller, 2017) The ISOTYPE design enabled viewers to quickly understand the relationship between symbols and data. (Müller, 2017) This shows that Graphic Design can even work well together with science, to help people understand information more clearly.

Design can also be a great way to help people with disabilities, or learning difficulties. One of the most common learning disabilities in the UK is Dyslexia. (*Thewonderland*, 2017) The Designer Christian Boer, created a typeface to help people with dyslexia read the words easier. He did this by making some of the letters more slanted than others which would make it easier to differentiate certain letters that dyslexic people easily confuse.

Another designer called Daniel Britton created a typeface which is supposed to make people empathise with people who have dyslexia. When you try to read the typeface it's supposed to mimic how difficult it can be for dyslexic people to read. (*Thewonderland*, 2017) I think this is a great idea since it's raising awareness for people who have this visual disability.

Not only have Graphic Designers tried to help people with Visual Disabilities, but also people with learning difficulties and Dementia. For many parents with children that have learning difficulties or autism, graphic design can be a very useful tool in making it easier to communicate with their children.

Also, in some hospitals Alzheimer friendly signs are used to help those people find their way around. Some of the most common symptoms of Alzheimers are becoming easily confused and forgetting to use everyday appliances. (*Dementia friendly signage*, 2019) So this is another very important use for Graphic Design to help people who may get easily confused or lost in big places like hospitals. Things like this can also prevent injuries and improve people's safety which is very important (*Dementia friendly signage*, 2019) Shrewsbury Hospital have installed over 200 different signs for the toilets and showers. These have already reduced the risk of falls and agitation amongst patients. (*Dementia friendly signage*, 2019) These wouldn't only be useful to people with Alzheimers, but anyone else who enters the hospital. And not only are they useful in hospitals, but also places like care homes and similar facilities. Alzheimers can affect people in different ways that makes it harder for them to understand the world (Geyersbach, 2020) Since they have problems with certain things like depth perception and colour discrimination, it's important that Graphic Designers take care of things like signage for them. (Geyersbach 2020) Researchers found that by creating signage for people it makes it easier to communicate to people and direct them properly (Geyersbach, 2020)

In 2013 studio PearsonLloyd created panels to give patients information on what they should do when entering the hospital. (Gorvett, 2017). They designed these panels because there has been a problem with violence towards hospital staff in the UK. It is also to do with the waiting times that patients have to go through which leads them to feeling anxious and confused. (Gorvett, 2017) This then led them to designing the panels to make the experience much simpler and easier to understand. They are supposed to supply all of the required information on how everything works, also include a forum for the staff on how to work with aggravated patients. According to these statistics I found, 88% of the patients felt the panels improved the overall A&E experience (PearsonLloyd n.d) Clearly, after seeing these statistics it shows that these panels are very effective for everyone involved in the A&E process. For this reason I think that these would be very beneficial to include in the A&E department.

Kelli Anderson is a Designer that created many illustrations for the app called TinyBop. This is an app that helps to teach kids about the human body and all of its functions. When looking through her work I was very impressed by all of the very detailed illustrations of the human body. Each illustration shows each part of the body, how they function and also where they are located. From the respiratory system, to all of the nerves in the body. The illustrations on this app allows the kids to learn about the human body, and one of the main messages of the app is supposed to be that learning can be fun. (*Illustrating Tinybop's*, 2013) The app also follows a non-linear timeline, where the children can choose to look at whichever part they like at any time. Kelli Anderson said this is so it doesn't seem like a job and there isn't a specific goal that they have to achieve. (*Illustrating Tinybop's*, 2013) This way helps them to have more fun when learning, instead of just trying to focus on a goal. This whole app is another example of how Graphic Design can be very beneficial to young people and helping them learn about important topics.

Graphic Design, for many years, has also been used in protests and acts of activism. One example of this would be the raised fist, which represents solidarity. This was used by the industrial workers in 1917. (Steveson, 2020) It's supposed to represent solidarity with oppressed people, and has been used through many campaigns ever since. (Steveson, 2020) Many people would be able to recognise this piece of graphic design as soon as they saw it which shows the impact graphic design can have on people and how symbols can be used to unite people. This same symbol has also been used for other things, one of them being in the feminist movement.

Another great example of graphic design being used for activism and protests would be in the Black Lives Matter movement. Many people throughout the movement, and ever since the movement have created murals on the streets which spell out the words 'Black Lives Matter', and 'End racism'. (Steveson, 2020) These

are very important messages that can be shown for the world to see, and have become very important in the movement.

The Silence = Death is also another iconic piece of graphic design used for a movement. This design was a pink triangle which is supposed to represent the gay and bisexual men who were in the nazi concentration camps. Every gay, bisexual and transgender woman that were in the camps had an upside triangle placed onto their uniforms.

This triangle has now become a symbol for AIDS activism. It has been used on posters which were placed around different locations in cities in the 80's, which was supposed to act as a form of communication (Zwirner, 2018).

This design has inspired other activist groups to keep fighting for equality and the iconic triangle has continued to be used in exhibitions and museums.

I think that by just this movement alone, you can see how Graphic Design can empower people and inspire them to keep fighting. For example, the activist group called Gran Fury was founded by Avram Finkelstein. (Zwirner 2018). They went on to make an exhibition in New York. They placed the iconic pink triangle on the front of the museum as a neon sign for everyone to see. (Zwirner, 2018)

All of the different examples of Graphic Designers I have listed, have all helped people in some way or another. For some of them, individually, it might have only helped out a few people. But I believe that by Designers coming together and working together, it will help to make a bigger impact in the world. All of these different points have shown how Graphic Design can not only be used to help educate people on certain topics, but also comfort, and empower them in different situations. And I think that especially with younger generations, Graphic Design can be very beneficial in this way. By helping to educate younger people on important topics could help make a better future for, not only them, but everyone else as well. I have personally found that one of the biggest effects graphic design has had on people has been the pink triangle, which is now being used as a symbol for AIDS. Just this small symbol alone has really inspired many to keep fighting on. It has created a domino effect of people now going off to create their own campaigns, exhibitions and museums to help inspire other people as well.

I also think that a lot of people don't realise how much graphic design can actually help someone with their daily lives as well. Previously I spoke about people with disabilities, either physical or mental, who can benefit from the use of graphic design tremendously. This is why I think graphic design can help to save someone's life.

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