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COLUMBUS BUSINESS FIRST

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Human touch to play key role in creative jobs of the future

Business First of Columbus - by [Robert Celaschi](#) For Business First

Five years ago, Facebook was brand new and Twitter didn't even exist. Today social media has become such a big part of marketing that companies are hiring people with creative services backgrounds to manage social interaction on multiple websites.

Five years from now, that same evolution is sure to play out with other technologies that are just starting to enter the mainstream, meaning creative services industry jobs of the future haven't even been dreamt up yet.

Just ask Christopher Ritz. He runs a product packaging company in Columbus that has to stay on the forefront of technology and the green movement. Packaging stuff up these days isn't a matter of a mass production run where, for example, thousands of glass bottles are filled with liquid as they rattle down the conveyor belt. Ritz said packaging now is about small production runs, using hand-made mock-up glass, biodegradable materials and 100 percent digital printing to use exactly the amount of ink needed as opposed to ink-heavy offset lithography. None of this was the norm just a few years ago.

Back to basics

Whichever new arenas open up in creative services, Columbus is well positioned to explore them. According to a 2009 report from the Columbus College of Art & Design, the creative sector – arts, design, performance, media, and marketing – already generates more than \$3 billion in revenue a year in the Columbus area, \$932 million in employee wages, and \$67 million in state and local tax revenue.

Central Ohio's concentration of fashion designers is 3.6 times the national average. For commercial and industrial designers it's 2.3 times.

A report from German media agency MFG Baden-Wurttemberg suggests that 3D Internet and virtual reality may move into the mainstream from the gaming industry. Several providers of serious games have discovered 3D as fertile ground to teach business, languages or political courses, the report said.

People in creative services also will be expected to have better computer skills and some formal education in computer science and information technology.

"All kinds of things are being explored digitally before they are looked at experimentally," said Steve Gordon, interim co-executive director of the Ohio Supercomputer Center in Columbus.

Computer models can show how molecules will interact, or how to redesign a Pringles crisp so it won't flutter off moving conveyor belts, all without the cost of working with physical objects.

"A lot of the auto industry does most of its design virtually. They build very few physical prototypes," Gordon said. "We are starting to do some modeling now that looks at parts of whole cities and how they might expand, and actually calculate what the carbon footprint is, what kinds of travel patterns we might see – whether or not it will get congested, where to put transit."

For all that, the schools teaching the next generation of creatives are putting more emphasis than ever on the basics of design.

"I meet with a lot of companies. The common thread, regardless of what kind of company or what kind of position, is the ability to be conceptual and creative," said Cynthia Gravino, director of career services for the Columbus College of Art & Design. "That is actually becoming more important than the technical acumen."

New directions

Five years ago, an animation company might have focused its hiring on computer science engineers. Today, the pendulum is moving back to people who know what they are doing with pencil and paper. The idea, Gravino said, is that companies can teach a creative person how to use software, but they can't teach a computer tech how to be creative.

Creative jobs still require someone with an eye or an ear for the work, someone who knows how to balance colors and shapes and sounds.

One reason for the shifting preferences is that a lot of the low-level technical work is moving offshore, said Paul Nini, interim chairman of Ohio State University's Department of Design. It's cheaper to send the work to China or India.

MEDIA



"Where we are trying to prepare our students is to work at the much higher strategy level," Nini said. "We teach software as part of what we do, but we embed it into the experience of our studio courses. We don't want students to just think about software."

Students in visual communications, for instance, can take a class in motion graphics. More than static imagery, yet not quite animation, motion graphics deal with presenting computer-based images that change over time. Technical know-how across multiple disciplines is likely to become more taken for granted.

"Two or three years ago we used to be hiring a digital specialist or a print specialist, but now it is rare to hire people who do not have a background in different media," said Phil Deschamps, president of advertising firm GSW Worldwide in Columbus.

The more fundamental changes are coming about not so much in the technology itself as the kind of message delivered through it. The prospect can more easily talk back now. Instead of coming up with a big idea and pushing it out, the job is becoming more about having conversations with the target market.

GSW is focused on health care, so its staff is looking for new ways to use technology to contact people when they are making health-care decisions.

"The iPad now is launching a whole new device to communicate one-on-one with people," Deschamps said. "What are the possibilities of these easier, modifiable, customizable tools?"

GSW has a digital lab team dedicated to scoping out new directions. Team member Sean Cowan recently wrote on his blog: "With the ever increasing use of smart phones and the huge array of mobile tablet devices about to ship, users will expect content to be relevant not only to the type of device they are viewing it on but where they are when they view it."

New creative workers coming out of schools can draw and manipulate computer files, but that's not enough, said Ritz of Planet R. Jobs in the future will demand more people management and project management skills, he said. The creative industries also will need to be bullish on the green movement. "We have to take a careful life cycle approach," Ritz said.

For someone just starting to train for a creative career, the signposts can be confusing. Technology, design basics, personal interaction and environmental stewardship are all very different directions. And there's no crystal ball.

"One thing we know for sure is that it will change a lot," said Nini of Ohio State.

Looking ahead

Future research priorities that will boost the creative industries.

- Visual and interactive experience: 3-D Internet, virtual worlds, simulations and computer-generated imagery will create rich visual experiences.
- Tools of productivity and intelligent automation: Prototypes in 2-D will be converted to 3-D. There also will be demand for intelligent tools to combine Web and database content with greater precision to create attractive information sets.
- Digital distribution: New distribution channels on the Internet and the availability of user-generated content represent a challenge for businesses in creative industries by opening up new markets and revenue streams.
- Mobility and interoperability: Capabilities will continue to grow with users demanding any time, any place access to information.
- New production methods featuring user-generated content: Companies can benefit by involving staff and customers in innovation processes as well as planning and production of content and services. An example is having them add valuable knowledge to a wiki.

Source: MFG Baden-Wurttemberg mbH

Up next

GSW Worldwide team member Leigh Householder has predicted a handful of jobs that creative services companies will start hiring for:

- Content curators: They'll be the daily voice of a company's brand on the social Web.
- Community advocates: These will be the people always asking, "What do we hope people will say about that?" They'll integrate social media into the fabric of the company culture.
- Engagement planners: Instead of just handing out coupons or other incentives and hoping they draw in customers, companies will hire engagement planners to find out what people want. They'll seek out ways to connect people with a brand, to start a multi-way conversation.
- Interaction designer: The millennial generation has a new set of expectations about entertainment and engagement. They grew up on sophisticated, smart, highly-interactive games, Householder said. Interaction designers will develop interactive marketing with game mechanics.

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