

First, do your research...

Interview **Louise Lawton**

From November through to February every year, Portfolio Recruitment is overloaded with requests from hungry and eager design graduates – all looking for that first step into the real world of advertising and design.

But are they coming out with the right stuff? For the direction they want to follow, that is.

Excited young creatives are quick to say that they have great experience in working on creative briefs, have designed a magazine spread, and even 'rebranded Telecom'. Of course, this has all been done via their study curriculum and none of it is relevant in the real world... or is it?

Portfolio Recruitment consultants Sarah Adams (Mac operators) and Debbie Kitson (designers) give their impressions of the education given design graduates targeting the Auckland advertising and commercial design market, in which their agency specialises. It's important for each student to research the creative courses available and align this with personal aims and strengths, they say.

What type of graduates apply to Portfolio?

Sarah \ Wanganui and Natcoll share the majority of applications that I receive on the Mac Op side. Wanganui candidates stand out for their design talent and creativity – although Natcoll stands out for the more hands-on practical knowledge and relevant industry training.

Debbie \ I receive the full gamut of graduates from any number of design schools around the country as well as candidates from overseas – a constant trickle from other countries wishing to start their career in New Zealand.

From looking at a graduate's presentation of their CV and Portfolio, can you tell where they studied?

Sarah \ Generally yes. The Wanganui School of Design really stands out: their creative flair and presentation. Even though the work is not real, you would be fooled into thinking it is. The standard is that high.

Debbie \ I can always tell Natcoll because

their students' portfolios have exactly the same projects, the curriculum covers specific projects – for example a double page spread, a piece of packaging, etc. There is a formula they follow and as the course is condensed into a year the work is often less creative.

I am never surprised when the more creative portfolios demonstrating great talent are the results of students who have studied at Wanganui, Unitec and AUT. Some from Elam can be good but, unsurprisingly, many of these focus on the arts rather than from a more commercial graphics perspective, which is more limiting in our areas of specialty.

Has the flood of private and short courses affected the industry?

Sarah \ So many people can go out now and earn a degree or diploma and this increases the number competing for jobs and lowering the level of overall creative standards.

Debbie \ Some schools are a lot more discretionary than others on their intakes. Often graduates from a diploma course are under the misunderstanding that their training equals that of a degree course and some graduates (in their minds) feel that they are as qualified as those who elected to do a four-year degree. In general this shows in how they would approach a project, often with less research, conceptual depth and thought. They often turn out to be more appropriate for Mac operating roles than true designer roles.

How difficult is it for graduates to get a job?

Sarah \ A good portfolio is really important to help find a job – a good one will always stand out. Presentation of the portfolio is really important, as is good written English. The CV should be laid out using their individual creative flair.

We do have clients who look to employ juniors and would like to be able to mould them into their agency's style, although they still stipulate that they should have at least one year's industry experience.

The best way for graduates to get a job is to door-knock. Be eager and willing to

take on anything, and not to worry about the money. You need to focus on getting the real work experience – this is more valuable than money.

Debbie \ Unfortunately, due to the large number of graduates and small number of jobs in design and advertising agencies, we can only help a few. This is not to say they don't get jobs in the industry, it's a matter of being realistic about what they can go into straight from their course. Anything giving them experience in the industry will stand them in great stead for the future.

When interviewing graduates, does their confidence level show where they studied?

Sarah \ Natcoll students come cross as more confident technically.

Debbie \ They can do, but personality plays a major factor too. Even with senior designers, you have some who are more introverted and others extroverted. Often the quality of the course and tutors can help instil confidence in graduates. Wanganui is very good at turning out polished and together graduates.

To be part of the creative industry you used to have to be creative – is this still the case.

Sarah \ No, I don't think so. On the Mac Op side I think creative flair is a big, big plus but you don't need to be an artist or capable of drawing.

Debbie \ Yes. As a designer, absolutely! You can't learn talent. It can be developed but it can't be taught.

A full range of design courses for the following year is published in the August issue of ProDesign – Ed.

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