

Clients

Chiara Barbieri

Besides self-initiated projects—in which designers work as their own client—most works created by graphic designers have long been a service in response to a brief from a client.¹ Sometimes challenging and conflictual, other times mutually respectful, inspiring, and advantageous, designer-client relations are an often-forgotten and taken-for-granted aspect of the design process. The following voices show different facets of this relationship. Not only do clients provide designers with economic support by employing them, but they also influence design choices by setting the brief and giving feedback. Moreover, they can play a role in the articulation of a designer's own image and in the way designers are perceived by other clients, colleagues, critics, and the wider public.

If we are to take interviewees at their word, networking, personal contacts, and word of mouth are amongst the most effective tools for graphic designers when establishing and expanding a portfolio of clients. According to some of the voices selected here, self-promotional strategies are less effective at finding new clients. At times, self-initiated promotional strategies can in fact result in failure, such as when the studio Hi

sent out hundreds of letters to potential clients without securing a single commission. The effectiveness of websites as tools of self-promotion is also called into question. On the one hand, websites provide a list of current clients and contact details. The former can reassure and arouse the curiosity of potential clients, while the latter allow direct contact as a first step in establishing a client-designer relationship.² On the other hand, they are not self-sufficient: prospective clients are in fact unlikely to come across a designer's website on their own, but will consult it only after a third party has recommended it to them.³ Besides promotional tools, designers can resort to intermediaries to expand their portfolio of clients. This was the case with the agency Reiwald in Basel that acted as an intermediary between E+U Hiestand and some of the studio's major foreign clients, such as Olivetti, Fiat, Ferrero, and Galbani.

The client-designer relationship can create a positive loop: the more and the better clients one has, the easier it is to find new ones. Current clients, especially elite clients like the Swiss department store ABM for the studio E+U Hiestand, can play a key role in a designer's career as they provide an endorsement that reassures prospective clients.⁴ High-status clients offer invaluable exposure to designers, who can then benefit from reflected glory. This was the case with Walter Ballmer, who worked from the mid-1950s to 1971 as an art director for Olivetti. The

company acted as a network enabler, thereby helping Ballmer not only to find new clients, but also to collaborate with printers and typographers who would do their best to work with him in order to get closer to Olivetti. Working in-house for a company such as Olivetti had its perks: an enviable budget and little time pressure, as well as an opportunity to collaborate with international photographers and illustrators at will.

Obviously, clients are not all the same and designers have their own criteria for picking commissions. The cultural sector—e.g. museums and theaters—has attracted many graphic designers as the lack of restrictive, commercial aims is expected to offer designers more space for experimentation than they might have with commercial graphic design.⁵

Once a commission is secured, other issues arise that illustrate the designer-client relationship from a different perspective. A mutually beneficial relationship requires understanding between

the client and the designer. Talking to clients and an ability to listen are key skills for a designer.⁶ The way one presents the idea for a design can be as important as the idea itself. Pitching for a project is a process of negotiation, during which designers might have to compromise and come to terms with clients' expectations. In his interview, Fritz Gottschalk revealed a simple but effective strategy that he has used to pitch ideas to clients. It consists of pitching three graphic solutions featuring different degrees of experimentation in order to test the client's understanding of visual communication and their willingness to trust the designer. NORM, instead, comment upon how their relationship with clients has changed over time. Their experiences have led them to draw a line between commissions and self-initiated works. This distinction has allowed the studio to reach what they consider to be a better balance between anonymity and self-expression.

1 McCarthy 2011.

2 Abbott 1988: 122.

3 Shaughnessy 2010: 79–80.

4 Werner, Fanger & Gomringer
2005.

5 Philizot 2009; Brändle et al.

2014: 324–332; Bovier, Amzalag
& Augustyniak 1998.

6 Shaughnessy 2010: 88–96.

Hi (Megi Zumstein and Claudio Barandun)

Conversation with Jonas Berthod, Zurich, Apr. 6, 2017.

JB And how did it work to find your first clients?

CB I had some clients already, from [my previous studio]. When we split up—my partner and I—he wanted to work as a freelancer. So most of the clients we had, I [took them on].

JB What kind of clients was that? Institutions?

CB Yeah, mostly.

JB Cultural?

CB The biggest client we had was a part of the University of Applied Sciences in Lucerne [Lucerne School of Social Work]. We did most of the stuff for them, brochures and books ... flyers, graphics. Yeah, graphics. Until today, [that was] the thing with the highest print run—100,000 [laughs].

MZ That was once [laughs]. In the beginning, we had ... I mean, no one waits for you. We had some clients of [Claudio's], and then we wrote about 100 letters to clients we wanted to work for.

CB We made a list for whom we would like to work.

MZ Mostly institutions. We made a website, and ... Well, out of these 100, we had five people responding ... Most of them said “we don’t need any graphic designers at the moment.” We

had five people answering and only three interviews. The result was not a single job out of that. Our first new job [together] was Pro Senectute [*laughs*]. Because my mother worked there.

CB Then we got this job for Boagaz.

MZ Boagaz, that was kind of a connection through ... your school? Boagaz makes joints for gas pipes.

CB They had a new system of a tube that ...

MZ ... that you can bend over your knee, you didn't have to make all these difficult joints. And they wanted us to make a logo for them.

JB That's completely different from [the rest of your clients].

MZ Completely different. And I think this was our only heavy industrial client, we didn't have any others. They liked the logo, but they never came back, so I don't know what happened.

CB Maybe they're still using the logo today. I don't know.

Ursula Hiestand

Conversation with Chiara Barbieri and Robert Lzicar,
Zurich, Dec. 4, 2017.

CB Parlez-moi de votre studio: comment avez-vous commencé, quels étaient vos premiers clients?

UH Nach unserem Aufenthalt und der Weiterbildung in Paris arbeiteten wir in der Agentur Halpern in Zürich. Die Neugestaltung der Packung von KAFFEE HAG und deren Werbung, die erste kommerzielle Arbeit von Ernst Hiestand, wurde prämiert und publiziert. Einer unserer ersten eigenen Kunden war die SIA Schweizer Schmirgel- und Schleifindustrie, in der Eugen Gomringer Propagandachef war. Wir arbeiteten aber auch für die Warenhauskette Globus, welche uns auch den Auftrag für die Gestaltungskonzeption für ABM anvertraute. Weitere Kunden waren Blattmann, Fürst, OWG Obst und [die] Weinbaugenossenschaft Wädenswil, Werbeagentur Reiwald in Basel mit Fiat, Olivetti, Ferrero, Galbani. [Fig. 12] Von grosser Bedeutung für uns waren die Aufträge für die Gestaltung der



Fig. 12
E+U Hiestand, "Ausstellung im Vestibül des Kongresshauses Zürich - Gast im Zeichen Olivettis," 1961, 127 x 90 cm, Museum für Gestaltung Zürich.

Schweizerischen Banknoten und für das Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

CB Est-ce-que, selon vous, ABM vous a aidé à trouver d'autres clients?

UH Ja, ABM war das erste Selbstbedienungs-Warenhaus der Schweiz. Wir entwickelten das Gestaltungskonzept und setzten es um. Ein prägnantes Element in der Werbung waren die Texte von Eugen Gomringer. Das ABM Design war epochal, neu, auffällig und sehr erfolgreich. [figs. 13-14]

CB Comment avez-vous trouvé de nouveaux clients?

UH Durch Prämierungen und gewonnene Wettbewerbe. Durch Publikationen unserer Arbeiten und Besprechungen in Fachzeitschriften und Jahrbüchern wie *Graphis Annual*, *Neue Graphik*, usw.



Fig. 13
E+U Hiestand, corporate identity
for Au Bon Marché – ABM, 1961,
shopping bag, 46.7 × 35 cm,
Museum für Gestaltung Zürich.



Fig. 14
 Ursula Hiestand and Barbara Strahm, Atelier Ursula Hiestand, photography by François Trog, "ABM, für die Kleinen ganz gross!," 1985, poster, 128 × 90 cm, Museum für Gestaltung Zürich.

Und alle unsere Arbeiten haben wir dokumentiert und auf Anfragen, vorwiegend von Werbeagenturen, ins In- und Ausland verschickt.

CB What can you tell me about your studio: how did it start, who were your first clients ...?

UH After our stay and further training in Paris, we worked in the Halpern agency in Zurich. The redesign of the packaging of KAFFEE HAG and its advertising, the first commercial work by Ernst Hiestand, was awarded and published. In 1960, we founded the Atelier E+U Hiestand. One of our first clients was SIA Schweizer Schmirgel- und Schleif-Industrie, in which Eugen Gomringer was head of advertising. Further customers were the Globus department store chain, which

also entrusted us with the design concept for ABM. We also worked for Blattmann, Fürst, OWG Obst, and Weinbaugenossenschaft Wädenswil, then the advertising agency Reiwald in Basel with Fiat, Olivetti, Ferrero, and Galbani. [Fig. 12] Of great importance to us were the contracts for the design of the Swiss banknotes and for the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.

CB Do you think that having ABM as one of your first clients helped you to get others?

UH Yes, ABM was the first self-service department store in Switzerland. We developed the design concept and implemented it. The texts by Eugen Gomringer were a distinctive element in the advertising. Our ABM design was epoch-making, new, eye-catching, and very successful. [figs. 13–14]

CB How did you find new clients?

UH By winning awards and competitions. Through publications and reviews of our work in trade journals and yearbooks such as *Graphis Annual*, *Neue Graphik*, etc. And we documented all our work and sent it out when asked, mainly to advertising agencies at home and abroad.

Hi (Megi Zumstein and Claudio Barandun)

Conversation with Jonas Berthod, Zurich, Apr. 6, 2017.

CB In 2008 there was this project [the book *1968 – Zürich steht Kopf*] with Roli Fischbacher. [Fig. 15] He asked us to do it with him [...]. That's how we [met] Thomas Kramer.

MZ Yeah, that's how we met Scheidegger & Spiess's editor-in-chief.



Fig. 15
Hi, *1968 – Zürich steht Kopf* (1968 – Zurich upside down), Fritz Billeter and Peter Killer (eds.), Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2008.

CB Then he gave us the opportunity to do another book, Alex Sadkowsky's *Bio-Foto-Kultografie*, that was the second book we did for Scheidegger & Spiess and that actually became ... I think from 2009, we made more books every year [...].

JB Do people find you through your website?

MZ Not at all. Only if they have already heard of you, then they look at the website, and then ... they start contacting you. But I don't think we have ever found a client through our

website. We have [got] some talks [and] lectures, but not clients. [We] only get clients through old projects. [...] Either the editors or the authors are involved in one project, or they ask “oh do you know someone?” and [we get] suggested through someone.

Urs Glaser

Conversation with Chiara Barbieri, Paris, Feb. 17, 2018.

UG Era il legame tra [Walter] Ballmer e Olivetti a fare la differenza, era una calamita per stampatori e giovani designer.

UG The real deal was the link between [Walter] Ballmer and Olivetti. That was a magnet for both printers and young designers.

Fulvio Ronchi

Conversation with Chiara Barbieri, Milan, Mar. 19, 2017.

FR In Olivetti c’era questa cosa incredibile che superava le tue caratteristiche personali, perché ti venivano permessi illustratori e fotografi bravissimi. Passavano i migliori fotografi e illustratori del mondo a mostrarti i loro lavori e tu glieli potevi far fare la mattina dopo, non c’era uno che ti chiedeva perché. E soprattutto fotografi, grandissimi fotografi: da Ugo Mulas a Ezio Frea, Libis [Serge Libiszewski].

FR There was this special thing at Olivetti: you could go beyond your personal attitudes and could allow yourself the liberty [to work with] great photographers and illustrators. The best photographers and illustrators worldwide would come by to show you their work, and you could use these

straightaway, without anyone questioning you. But the photographers most of all, there were the greatest photographers: from Ugo Mulas, to Ezio Frea and Libis [Serge Libiszewski].

Fritz Gottschalk

Conversation with Chiara Barbieri, Zurich, Mar. 22, 2018.

FG When a client comes in, we still do three proposals [for] a problem: a conservative one, a middle-of-the-road one, and an avant-garde one. We still do that, because that's how we can feel our clients: how far can we push it, or not push it at all? But with the people at EniChem, [...] I had the designs, I put them on the table, I didn't say anything and they said "Bravo Fritz, bravo!" and they have always picked the best one. [Fig. 16]



Fig. 16
Gottschalk+Ash International in partnership with Walter Ballmer, brand identity for EniChem, 1980s, Gottschalk+Ash International archive.

Hi (Megi Zumstein and Claudio Barandun)

Conversation with Jonas Berthod, Zurich, Apr. 6, 2017.

CB I really like it when the clients and we become a team.

Hi (Megi Zumstein and Claudio Barandun)

Conversation with Jonas Berthod, Zurich, Apr. 6, 2017.

Megi Zumstein discusses the work she did at GTF upon winning the 2002 Swiss Design Awards.

JB So what was so different—you mentioned the projects were interesting at GTF, but you also talked about going back to professional life and saying [you were disappointed]—so what was different at GTF?

MZ They asked the proper questions, and they wanted to make the projects interesting also for themselves, not only to serve the client. You can make any project nice or interesting for yourself. Maybe you have to choose or seek these kinds of projects.

NORM

(Dimitri Bruni, Manuel Krebs, and Ludovic Varone)

Conversation with Jonas Berthod, Zurich, Jun. 15, 2017.

MK On n'est vraiment pas compliqués avec les clients. On a compris à un moment donné, en 2002, ou en 2003 peut-être [...]. On a revu des projets qu'on avait faits [...] qui étaient trop spécifiques à cause de ce que nous avons proposé, qui avaient des gestes trop extrêmes. [...] Qu'on avait fait des livres trop [centrés sur] nous, qu'on avait pris trop de place dans ces livres. Et que ce n'était en fait pas bien [...] on veut être moins en avant dans notre travail.

JB Et réserver ça plutôt pour les projets auto-initiés.

DB Exactly. [...] On a plutôt tendance à séparer ces deux choses. On préfère être plus dans l'anonymat en relation avec une commande. Par contre on a besoin – ça a été une question fondamentale pendant les dix-huit ou dix-neuf dernières années – d'avoir une voie parallèle où [...] tu n'es confronté qu'avec toi-même. C'est-à-dire que tu publies des choses, tu réfléchis sur des choses toi-même, tu es ton propre client. Et je pense que [...] c'est une nécessité [...] qui nous a suivis depuis toujours.

MK We are really not complicated with clients. We understood at one point, in 2002 or perhaps in 2003 [...]. We saw things we had done [...] that were too specific because of what we had suggested; they had gestures that were too extreme. We had made books too [focused on] ourselves, we had taken up too much space in these books. And that it wasn't actually good [...] we wanted to be less prominent in the things we do.

JB And save that for self-initiated projects instead.

DB Exactly. [...] We tend to separate these two things. We prefer to be more anonymous in a commission. On the other hand—and this has been a fundamental matter for the last eighteen or nineteen years—we need to have a parallel path where [...] you are only confronted with yourself. That is, you publish things, you think about things yourself, you are your own client. And I think that [...] it is a necessity [...] that has always followed us.

Martin Heller

Conversation with Jonas Berthod, Mar. 22, 2018.

MH The curators [at the Museum für Gestaltung] were free to choose graphic designers, they didn't have to organize

pitches. [...] Within my interests there were different types of subjects, exhibitions, and publications. I worked with a lot of designers, among them Hanna Koller who often worked with Scalo, Käti Durrer and Jean Robert, Trix Wetter, Hans-Rudolf Lutz ... but within this circle, Cornel [Windlin] was a very constant relationship, and I [chose] him especially for the complex and therefore difficult subjects.

Gilles Gavillet

Conversation with Jonas Berthod, Geneva, Apr. 6, 2017.

GG Quand tu observes la scène graphique romande – ou du moins lausannoise – dans les années 1980, ce qui est mon cas ayant grandi à Lausanne, elle est centrée autour de Werner Jeker, qui est toujours présent et aussi consistant, et ... *grosso modo* il s'agit de quelques graphistes qui travaillent pour trois ou quatre institutions culturelles locales. Notre position vis-à-vis de cette situation, avec des essais mal formulés comme *Welcomex* [rires], est de développer des projets de manière indépendante, et de les diffuser par nos propres moyens.

GG When you look at the graphic scene in the 1980s in French-speaking Switzerland—or at least in Lausanne—which is the case with me, having grown up in Lausanne, it is centered around Werner Jeker, who is still present and just as consistent, and ... roughly speaking, there are a few graphic designers who work for three or four local cultural institutions. Our position vis-à-vis this situation, with poorly formulated attempts like *Welcomex* [laughs], is to develop projects independently, and to disseminate them by our own means.