

creative currency: design salaries [still] on the rise



If money “talks,” then take a seat and get comfortable. Our sources report more design jobs and more demand, yielding more dough to fatten up your wallet.

Words Erin Prus

If you've ever questioned your career as a designer, we're chock-full of reasons why you made a great decision. For starters, designers are earning more than previous years with salaries on the rise (yet again) in a creative marketplace that's in ever-increasing demand. So what exactly does that mean for you? The average base salary for design professionals has risen 3.8% since 2015 (and higher than the 3.6% projected increase across all creative jobs for 2017). By next year, graphic designers starting out can expect to bring in \$39,750 to \$56,750, while veterans

with five or more years under their belt are looking at \$67,500 to \$93,000—and high-demand skills open the door for six-figure salaries.

► TALKING NUMBERS

How do we mine this data? Our very best resource is you, of course, the designer. We know that you probably aren't knee-deep in the numbers day in and day out—that's not your job. That's why we at HOW take it upon ourselves to sum up what designers are paid and what companies are looking for.

Salary Growth in 2017

Which Creative Specialties Will See the Highest Salary Growth in 2017?



Source: The Creative Group 2017 Salary Guide

Download your free copy of The Creative Group 2017 Salary Guide at creativegroup.com/salary-center.

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We look at data from a range of sources that reflect salary info, bonuses and benefits, and industry trends—to reveal insights that matter to you. By relying on highly credible sources like the staffing pros at Robert Half, The Creative Group, InSource and The BOSS Group, our analysis covers the entire design spectrum, from in-house firms to agencies.

Our findings in a nutshell: If the 2010 and 2012 data suggested a downtrodden landscape, the 2014 numbers kicked off an uptick in pay that continues to rise in 2016, leading up to 2017. Exciting, right? You bet. There's a lot of momentum building within and around the world of design professionals. Industry insiders, across the board, reinforce a similar sentiment: *It's a great time to be a designer.*

► DIGITAL DEMAND

In addition to hearing from design professionals and official surveys, we asked hiring managers to weigh in on the state of affairs in the design community. Their take: Digital design is dominating the demand. "Candidates with digital proficiency are particularly sought-after," says Diane Domeyer, executive director of The Creative Group. "Job seekers looking for interactive positions, like front-end web developers, mobile designers and UX designers, can expect even larger pay gains, with an average increase of 5.3%, as more companies invest in online initiatives."

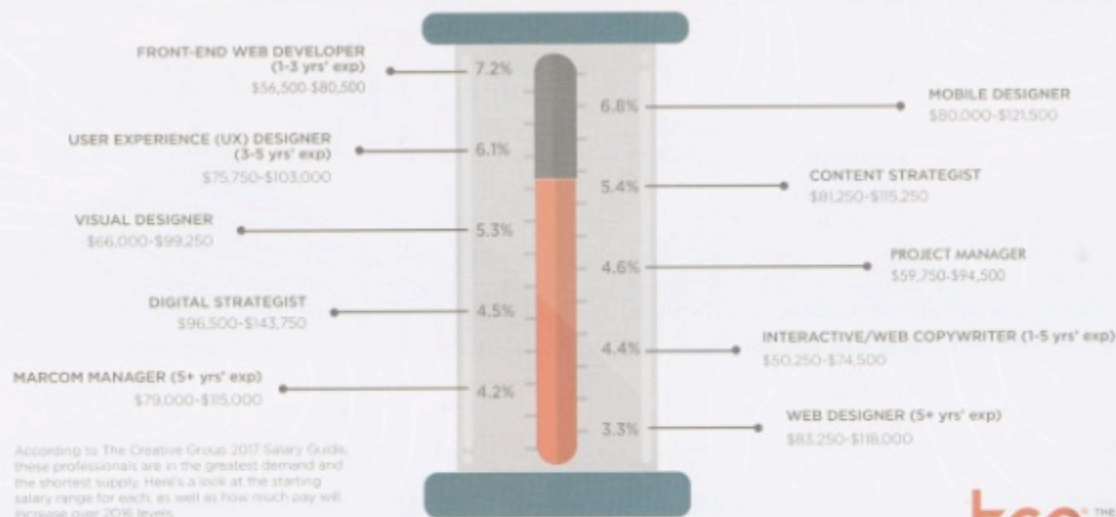
If you're new to the digital design world—or you're looking to break in—there's no time like the present. In-house expert and Director of UMR Marketing Communications (a division of United Health Care) Ann Emmert Abbott reinforces the importance of hiring the *right* digital designers: "Because of the rapid evolution of digital—from desktop to mobile to motion graphics and more—digital designers are often in a position of (re)-educating noncreative colleagues who also happen to be decision-makers." The digital designer takes a seat at the table—and a very critical one.

"I look for creatives who are able to know what works best when and why, what the latest ideas or opportunities are, and be able to articulate both of these, sell in the idea and execute seamlessly," Abbott says. If you bring coding expertise or interactive experience, don't be afraid to ask for more during the hiring process.

► LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The reurbanization trend of the 21st century has produced more cities bustling with creative energy and output than ever before. With telecommuting on the rise as well, you don't necessarily *have* to live in major cities like Washington, DC, San Francisco or Seattle—but according to Robert Half's Career City Index, these three design meccas continue to rank as top career

Top 10 Creative and Marketing Jobs to Watch in 2017



Download your free copy of The Creative Group 2017 Salary Guide at creativegroup.com/salary-center.

Source: The Creative Group 2017 Salary Guide

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destinations within the industry to live *and* work. So if you're the big city type, keep these locales in mind. But if you're set to live in one of the many cities not ranked in the top five, you need not worry. There is plenty of fulfilling design work to go around within the U.S. and beyond. "Today's professionals expect the opportunity to learn new skills and stay challenged at work, as well as the flexibility to work when and where they want," says Domeyer.

It isn't just about your geographic location; it's also about where you sit within the industry. Consider how your design toolbox positions you for your long-term career.

► DIVERSIFY YOUR CRAFT

So you want to make more moolah or sharpen your chops? One surefire way is to diversify your talents and add new skills to your design repertoire. Yes, you've heard it before, but more than ever companies crave nimble, hungry designers looking to evolve. In fact, multidisciplinary designers (or hybrids) for hire are even more sought-after than the traditional graphic designer, as the movement away from "specialists" toward "generalists" illuminates. "Those with complementary skills outside their specialty, are in high demand," Domeyer

says. She cites graphic designers who are familiar with social media or web layouts or copywriters who understand search engine optimization as examples of versatile creative pros.

Our in-house sources report more of the same. Demonstrating a breadth (and depth) of knowledge can give you a leg up when exploring your potential on the job market. For example, the 2016 In-House Creative Services Industry Report shows 98% of in-house designers provide graphic content

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DIANE DOMEYER

for social media. If you aren't in the habit of picking up the latest design accoutrement, it's time to stretch yourself.

► NO RETAIN? NO GAIN

For managers, it's no secret that retaining top talent is a key ingredient to a successful creative team. So if you've ever been a "flight risk," you're not alone. What do the surveys say it takes to keep designers happy? Starting off on the right foot, with proper onboarding and inclusivity, helps newbies feel part of the team right away and encourages loyalty.

On the other hand, failing to integrate creatives can also function as an Achilles' heel. "If managers fail to make new employees feel like part of the team quickly, they risk losing them to another organization within days or weeks of their start date," Domeyer says.

If you're managing designers or other creative talent, keep in mind that the grass could actually be greener. With jobs aplenty in the market and designers developing new skills, hopping around is happening. Counteroffers are on the rise. Sweeten the proverbial pot with perks like additional training and inviting workspaces. Let's face it: Loyalty comes at a premium. "One 'perk'

that's important to top creative talent is having a balanced workload. It's impossible to get the best creative out of someone who is under pressure from too many projects," says Stacy Foster, creative services manager at BBDO/Barefoot Proximity. "Providing designers with a flexible schedule—or ability to work from home—goes a long way."

Peter Leeds, director of Global Creative and Brand Activation at Pitney Bowes, reports sensitivity and empathy as key ingredients to successful creative leaders. He advocates for managers to steer away from the "take-no-prisoners" style and offer teammates a break. Only then will you be able to thoughtfully "mentor, teach and guide people along in their careers."

Designers: With increasing demand and recognition, you are uniquely positioned to ask for what you want. Go ahead—raise your hand. ■■■

Erin Prus is an independent writer and editor living in Cincinnati. Formerly the interactive content director for the HOW+Print brands, she remains engaged in the world of design, contributing to brands like MOO and Shutterstock. Her writing background spans in-house to agency experience, health care to software and tech.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (required by Act of August 12, 1970: Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code). 1. HOW. 2. (ISSN: 0886-0483) 3. Filing date: 10/1/16. 4. Issue frequency: Quarterly. 5. Number of issues published annually: 4. 6. The annual subscription price is 40. 7. Complete mailing address of known office of publication: F+W Media, Inc., 10151 Carver Rd., Suite #200, Blue Ash, OH 45242. 8. Complete mailing address of headquarters or general business office of publisher: F+W Media, Inc., 10151 Carver Rd., Suite #200, Blue Ash, OH 45242. 9. Full names and complete mailing addresses of publisher, editor, and managing editor: Publisher: Allison Dolan, 10151 Carver Road, Suite 200, Blue Ash, OH 45242. Editor: Jessica Farris, 4868 Innovation Drive, Fort Collins, CO 80525. Managing Editor: N/A. 10. Owner: F+W Media, Inc.; Thomas F. X. Beusse, Chairman & CEO, 1140 Broadway, 14th floor, New York, NY 10001. 11. Known bondholders, mortgages, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities: None. 12. Tax status: Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months. 13. Publisher title: HOW. 14. Issue date for circulation data below: Summer 2016. 15. The extent and nature of circulation: A. Total number of copies printed (Net press run). Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 17,645. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 14,838. B. Paid/requested circulation. 1. Mailed outside-county paid subscriptions/requested. Average number of copies each issue during the preceding 12 months: 0. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 5,784. 2. Mailed in-county paid subscriptions/requested. Average number of copies each issue during the preceding 12 months: 0. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 0. 3. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales. Average number of copies each issue during the preceding 12 months: 1,547. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 2,348. 4. Requested copies distribution through other classes mailed through the USPS. Average number of copies each issue during the preceding 12 months: 500. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 466. C. Total paid/requested distribution. Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 8,505. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 8,598. D. Non-requested distribution (by mail and outside mail). 1. Outside-County Non-requested copies. Average number of copies each issue during the preceding 12 months: 1,199. Number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 416. 2. In-county non-requested copies. Average number of copies each issue during the preceding 12 months: 0. Number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 0. 3. Non-requested copies mailed at other Classes through the USPS. Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 18. Number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 5. 4. Non-requested copies distributed outside the mail. Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 0. Number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 0. E. Total Non-requested distribution. Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 1,217. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 421. F. Total distribution (sum of 15c and 15e). Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 9,722. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 9,019. G. Copies not Distributed. Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 7,883. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 5,819. H. Total (sum of 15f and 15g). Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 17,605. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 14,838. I. Percent paid. Average percent of copies paid/requested for the preceding 12 months: 87.5%. Actual percent of copies paid/requested for the preceding 12 months: 95.3%. 16. Electronic Copy Circulation: A. Paid Electronic Copies. Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 1,950. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 1,720. B. Total Paid Print Copies (Line 15c) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a). Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 10,455. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 10,318. C. Total Print Distribution (Line 15f) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a). Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 11,672. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 10,739. D. Percent Paid (Both Print & Electronic Copies) (16b divided by 16c x 100). Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 89.6%. Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 96.1%. I certify that 50% of all distributed copies (electronic and print) are paid above nominal price: Yes. 17. Publication of statement of ownership for a Requester publication will be printed in the Winter 2016 issue of the publication. 18. Signature and title of editor, publisher, business manager, or owner: Allison Dolan, Publisher. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanction and civil actions.