

The Graphic Designer's Guide to Futureproofing

**Covid-19
Special!**



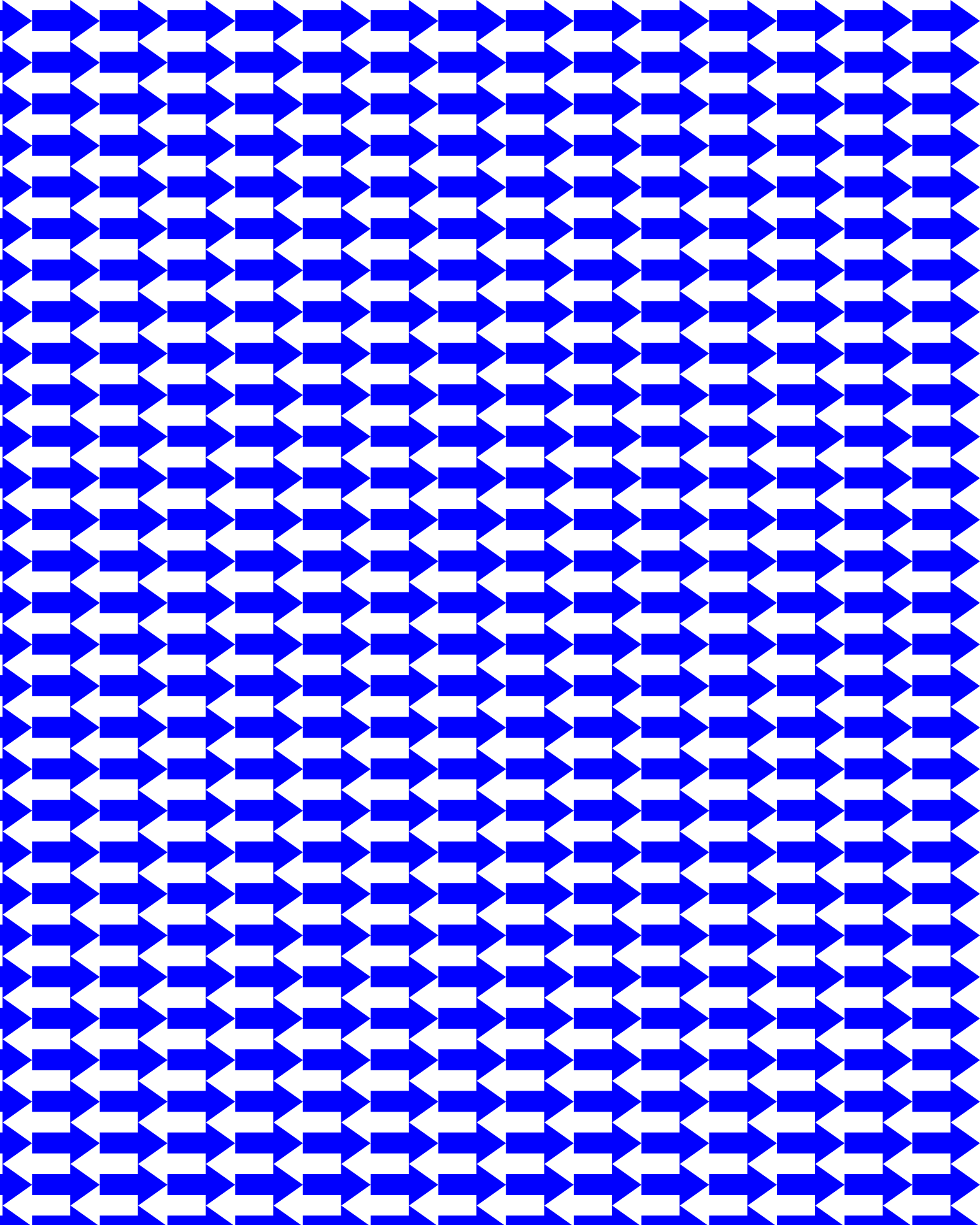
As the global economy and the world in general was struck by the consequences of the global pandemic that is Covid-19, I set out to survey experienced graphic designers to figure out where to go from here and how to orient future downturns as the global economy keeps swaying.

What graphic designers can do to set them up for the best possible situation when the economy takes a downturn. This booklet includes tips, statistics and everything that is to be said about a graphic designer's career in regard to the global economy.

This booklet takes the reader through a journey consisting of tips and data visualisations about what can be done to futureproof oneself as a graphic designer. This would not have been possible without the help and useful tips provided by the surveyed designers.

This booklet was created based on a survey answered by 52 designers that I personally look up to. I decided to create this as my dissertation artefact to have as something I can carry with me throughout my career to remind me of what might be good to keep in mind for a long and healthy career.

With that said, I want to thank all the cool graphic designers that took the survey and gave me so much helpful advice for the future.



Futureproofing

Future-proofing is something all companies strive for. For graphic designers in this context it means to be desirable in the services provided even in economic downturns when demand typically is lower.

Failing to take precaution towards economic downturns could lead to some major set-backs career-wise. As unemployment rates rise during a recession, designers might not only lose their job, but also find it harder to find a job replacement since the competition for those roles are higher with more unemployed people. The risk of experiencing cuts in salary is also higher and negotiating pay rises is increasingly harder. As less sales and clients are to be expected, it could lead to bankruptcy for studios, agencies and other businesses with employed designers. With pay cuts and hence a decreased ability to pay bills, loans and mortgages are becoming increasingly harder to take as the banks and loaning institutes are safeguarding themselves.

**What in particular
can do to future-
What skillsets and
beneficial and what
taken?**

do you think one
proof themselves?
mindsets would be
t action should be

Continually developing new skills based on new technologies, softwares, etc. Design is, at the end of the day, about solving problems. So as designers, we just need to find new ways to help our clients solve their challenges. There's a similar challenge happening with coding/development, as we've experienced in the design field. No-code or low-code tools allow anyone to build apps, websites and complex systems. We've started incorporating those tools into our tool box, which has given us an upper hand as designers that can suddenly also code. If you think this way, you'll always be a step ahead of clients abilities/skill set, which means there will always be things you can help them with.

“Design is, at the end of the day, about solving problems.”

Be able to research, skill of presentation and communication, be able to come up with brand strategy

Never stop learning

Work on a variable skillset and concentrate on disciplines that will still be required throughout a downturn. e.g. Packaging – people always need food and drink.

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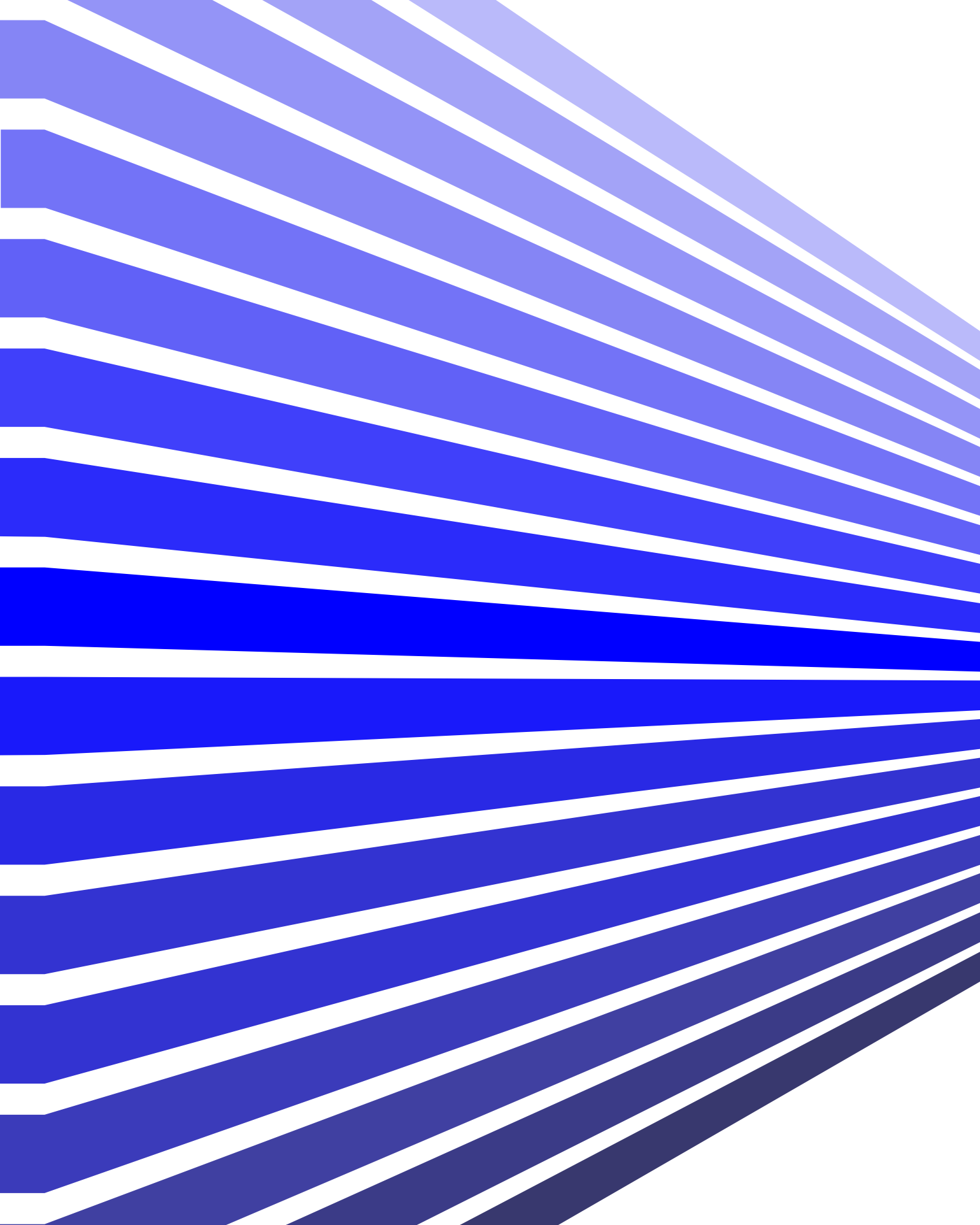
A general positive mindset, flexibility is key - being able to adopt to new circumstances is a plus for almost every part of life, having multiple clients in diverse fields or having a client that is working for diverse main clients > if one industry has a low, there is at least another industry that might be able to cover some of the losses.

Situations like these are also a good reminder to have some savings. Some designers are having really good salaries very fast and get used to that. That is the moment when you should start saving a certain amount of money so you don't get into tense situations when your revenue drops.

Generally: if a certain business volume (demand) is not available in the market (e.g. due to an economic crisis because of a pandemic) on the one hand and if the potential work force stays the same (supply) there will be more challenge amongst suppliers.

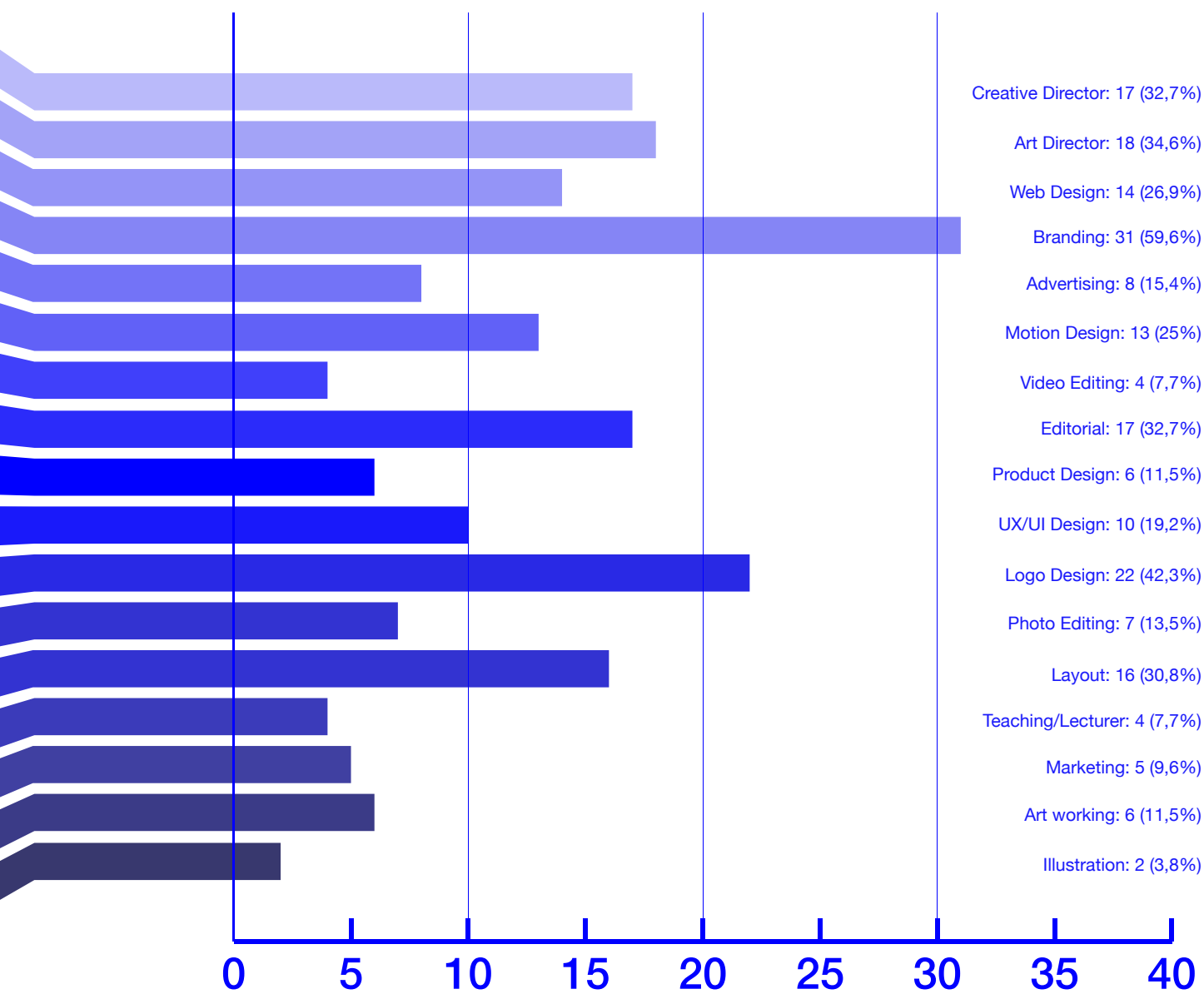
Talk to people. People in the industry, people who work around the industry. Start now, and never stop. Ask questions, ask about their work/life story, find out how and why they do what they do. Listen to and learn from others throughout your career whether they are junior or senior to your role. Create relationships, work collaboratively, be flexible. Make the most of where you are at risk now.

Ensure you are multidisciplinary. Say yes. Up your skill set and ensure you are trained in photoshop, illustrator, video editing. Its the only way i have managed to keep work during these times by being adaptable to different roles and able to be employed as one person that can do the job of a few people. Work for a digital online platform.



Experience

These are the fields in which the designers said that they have experience in. (Participants could choose multiple alternatives).



Tapping into all of your skills and not boxing yourself into a very niche market. You have to be flexible in order to be adaptable. I am a freelancer so knowing I sometimes have to take on clients that aren't necessarily my dream client is part of growing and learning and paying your bills. I would also say that leaving a lasting, positive impression on the people you work with with allow you to be memorable. They will keep coming back to you or keep you in mind when things are changing with the challenges they might face as employers or colleagues. Have a few side hustles. So when there are quiet periods you can work on your passion projects or develop your skills outside of your normal work. That way you have a more interesting portfolio and more skills to offer. It's also good to work on your own things sometimes to keep you inspired!

“Leaving a lasting, positive impression on the people you work with with allow you to be memorable.”

I think staying up to date with the most current design software and technology is the best way to keep from being lost to the future. Being able to accomplish any art style using the current technology at the time is what will keep you afloat in the industry.

Keep learning, be self-employed, don't burn out with bad clients, don't just follow trends (design trends and software trends), be selective about your projects, save 30% of your income, start a pension early

Perfect your portfolio

At the beginning of my professional career, my focus was exclusively on print design. Four or five years ago I started to go more into digital design, like UI+UX for apps and websites as well as interaction design. Now I rarely do anything else than digital design.

This doesn't mean that one shouldn't focus on designing for analog medias anymore or that they won't exist in a few years but it will definitely decrease and the skillset of the average graphic designer might shift towards digital design.

The good thing with design is that it can always contribute and influence something positive. And design thinking is already a mindset that you can apply to a broad range of different fields.

Keep up with the up to date information and technology. Accept the fact that it's easier and easier to create visual outcome for every non-professional and even AI, and try to think about how we can advance beyond that - try to make the design meaningful and helpful to the future world.

(Easy to say, hard to do) Peace of mind for clear thought, and then the courage to change

Seeking business advice from the beginning and learning from more experienced peers. Asking questions to understand overheads etc, in that sense, to future plan on savings and outgoings.

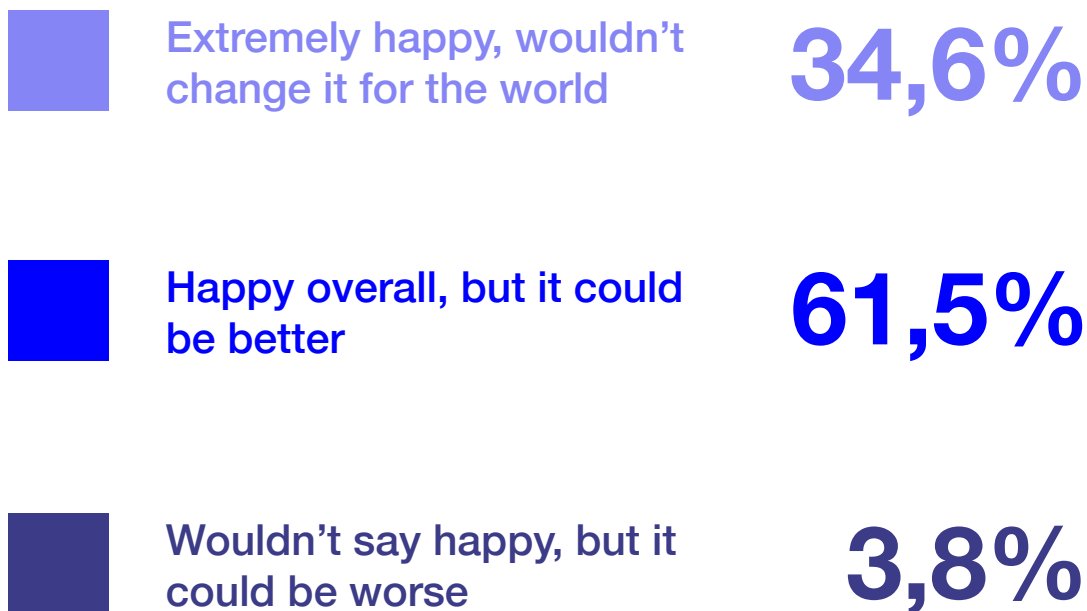
Constant evolvement

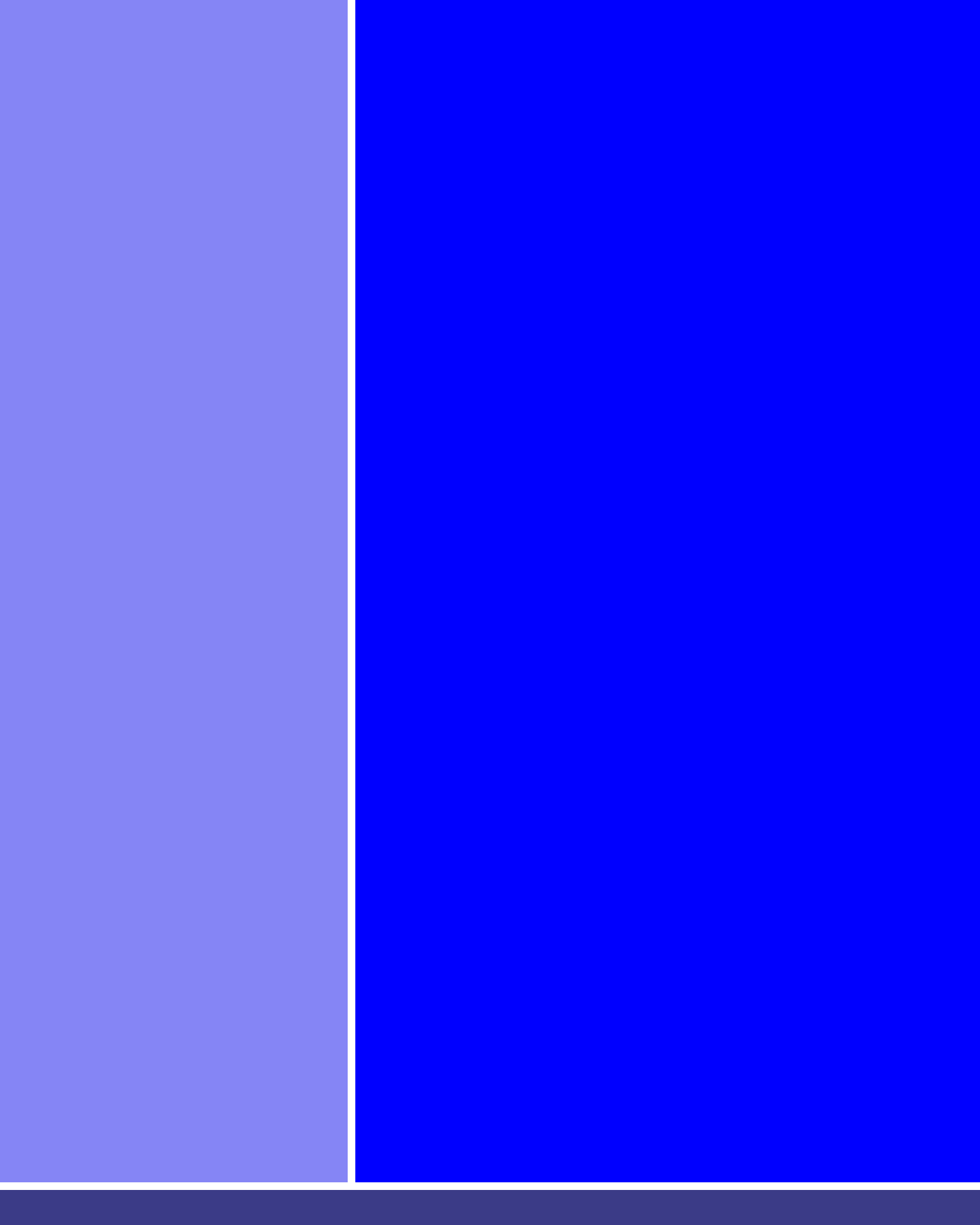
How satisfied are designers?

A big part to futureproofing is making sure that you are satisfied with your current work position, even when the economy takes a downturn. At the time of the survey, the economy was plunged by the ongoing pandemic.

The participating designers were asked how satisfied they are in their current roles. Overall the statistics show that designers in general seem to be happy in their current positions.

This survey had a much more positive outlook in comparison to the Design Census, an annual survey provided by AIGA and google, where 9,429 designers were surveyed, 11% said that they were “Extremely Happy” in their current role, 54% said that they were “Happy overall but there is room for improvement” and 26% said that they are “Not really satisfied”.





I think just be open to explore different / new skillsets like UI / UX, 3D, AR/VR, Motion design in order to stay relevant as the world & technology are changing constantly, without losing the traditional & analog side of graphic design. Also to stay original, to maintain your design ethic and stay curious

“Stay original, to maintain your design ethic and stay curious”

Knowing how to adapt to new ways of communicating and sharing our work effectively

Be open to try a lot of mediums, My practice is not simply graphic design and that helped me getting gigs in different fields. In a world where specification seems to be the norm, I'm a generalist but it helped me so much having a constant flow of work.

“In a world where specification seems to be the norm, I'm a generalist”

I think the natural path for a graphic designer would be the road to art direction and later creative direction. Being informed, meet new people, because later you can make use of this knowledge. Conceptually and technically.

“Being informed, meet new people, because later you can make use of this knowledge.”

■ Easily change and adapt to the present.

■ I think you have to keep on learning new skills otherwise you are done for

■ I don't know if there is anyway to ever future-proof yourself. Being a freelancer I have learnt to adapt to different things along the way. I have found that keeping organised so that the small things stay in check, like book keeping and various jobs like that don't go out of control. Make contact with any one that is of interest to you and keep in touch with the ones you have.

■ It's not going to guarantee security within the industry, but I believe that keep working on new skills and evolving your work definitely helps.

■ The ability to adapt to new technologies

■ Understanding each design project as unique. To carry out a research process always based on a concept. It is necessary to be up to date with the aesthetic trends of the moment but to avoid at all costs gratuitous decoration choices in the design so that it does not become obsolete after a short time. When a work it becomes out-of-date it also becomes your portfolio.

“When a work it becomes out-of-date it also becomes your portfolio.”

Salary

A feeling of being content in your work life is essential to finding longevity within the industry. Feeling content with your job might come from the amount you are being paid. Or at least to find some security.

48%

I think my salary is okay,
but could be better

38,5%

I am very satisfied
with my salary

13,5%

I think I am underpaid
for the work I produce

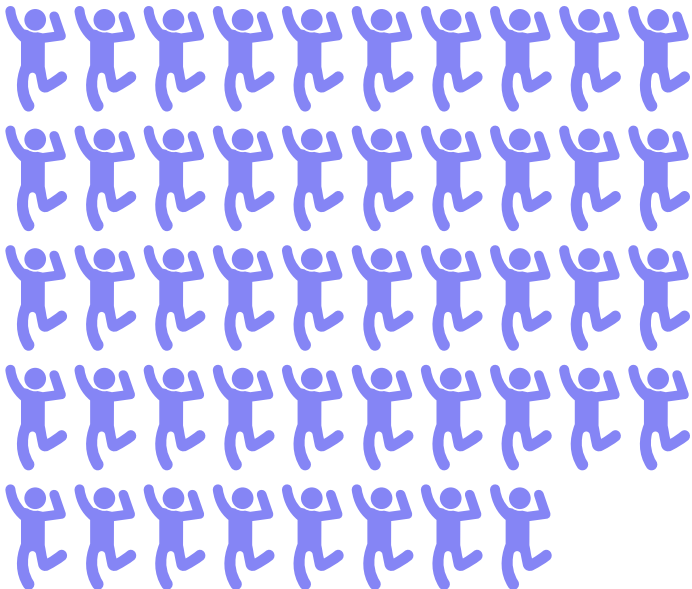


Negative Consequences

Out of the 52 surveyed designers,it was pretty evenly distributed in terms of the amount of people who had experienced any negative consequences from previous economic downturns. This could be getting laid off, cuts in salary or reduced hours of work.

48%

Never experienced any negative consequences



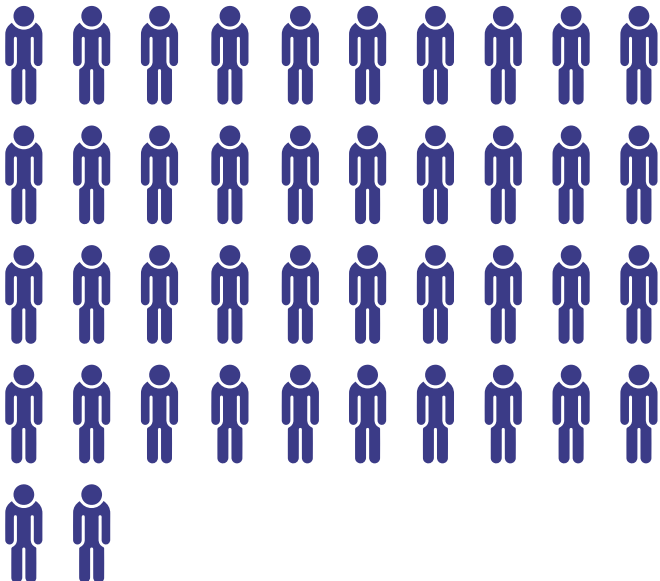
10%

Not sure



42%

Has experienced some negative consequences



* Illustrations from flaticon.com

I think what has helped me during this period of the covid 19 pandemic is are number of things. One is that I am signed with an illustration agent that helps me find work. Also, that I when in my last year of university wrote to a lot of online platforms and magazines that featured my work and that made a lot of people aware of me and my practice. Also, I regularly update my instagram and website with my newest work. I think that helps in a small way because people see I'm active. Also, doing personal work helps. I made a personal project that I uploaded on instagram and a few months later led me to get a big advertising job. Saying all this I also always put away a bit of money every time I get payed to have a safety buffer. And knowing that I have saved makes it easier to be active and enjoy work. and last thing I want to mention is contacts. A lot of people I have studied with at uni has helped me get work. It's really good to help each other out during times like these and know that we are in it together.

“A lot of people I have studied with at uni has helped me get work.”

As long as my customers are younger than me, there is hope. I have during the last few years done more stand-alone pictures and I have been lucky to have them sell well on various design websites. Even if it doesn't accumulate a lot of money, it is a lot of fun and it provides some safety economically. Aside from that it is a good way to accumulate new customers from what I have seen. I also believe that it is a good thing to be diversified but still specialised.

“I also believe that it is a good thing to be diversified but still specialised.”

Outsourcing the boring and less creative workloads. And always stay on top of new tools such as C4D for design.

For me, this currently is very practical in terms of savings and keeping my portfolio up to date. And if you have spare time, try to come up with personal projects to improve yourself in whatever it is that you like. It's also great to strengthen your portfolio, which eventually helps you to get new jobs.

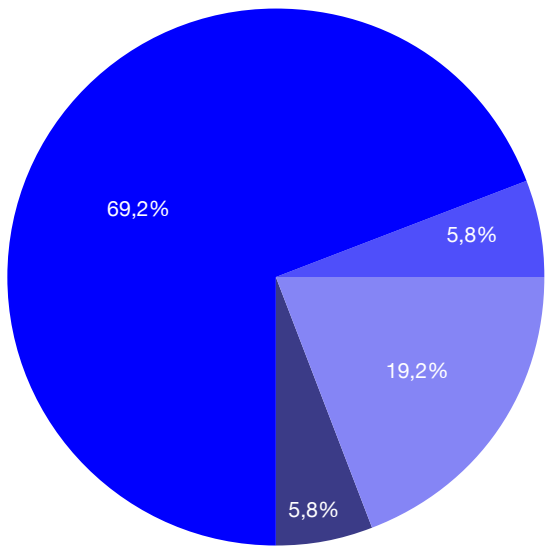
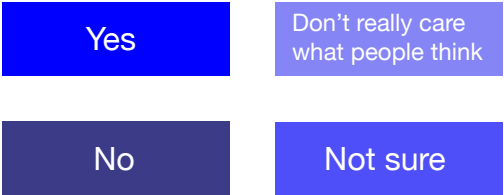
My BA was a digital design. Luckily, I could get a stable job as a designer in Korea. At that time, I thought, designers' should have strong technical skillsets to make something cool stuff.

But what I learned from the design industry was improving presentation/communication skills. Even if you have a really cool visual design, if you don't understand what is the meaning or can't explain it, you can't persuade the message as a designer. Also, I feel like making a specific position to convey more strong sense to audiences would help to develop the skills.

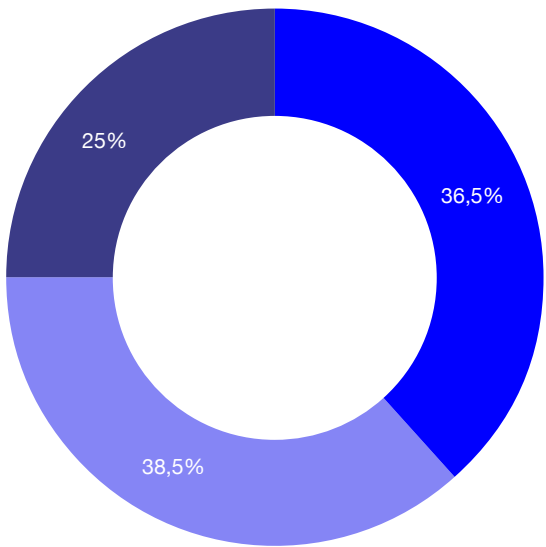
I don't think there is only one way to prepare the future-proof. We have to prepare our own visual skillset + communication skills + strong identity. (It sounds impossible.). Moreover, when I looked around different fields such as science, marketing, arts, and etc, it gave more insight to create new ideas. Probably, designers should have to practise to connect with each different area with design own skills.

“Even if you have a really cool visual design, if you don't understand what is the meaning or can't explain it, you can't persuade the message as a designer.”

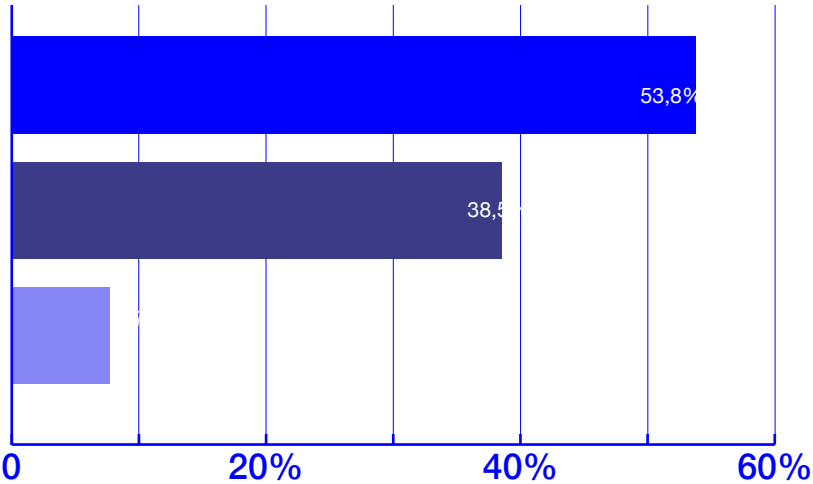
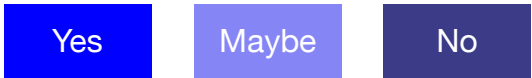
In the public eye, do you feel respected and content when telling people about your job?



In relative to other industries, do you feel secure in the design industry in regards to the global economy?

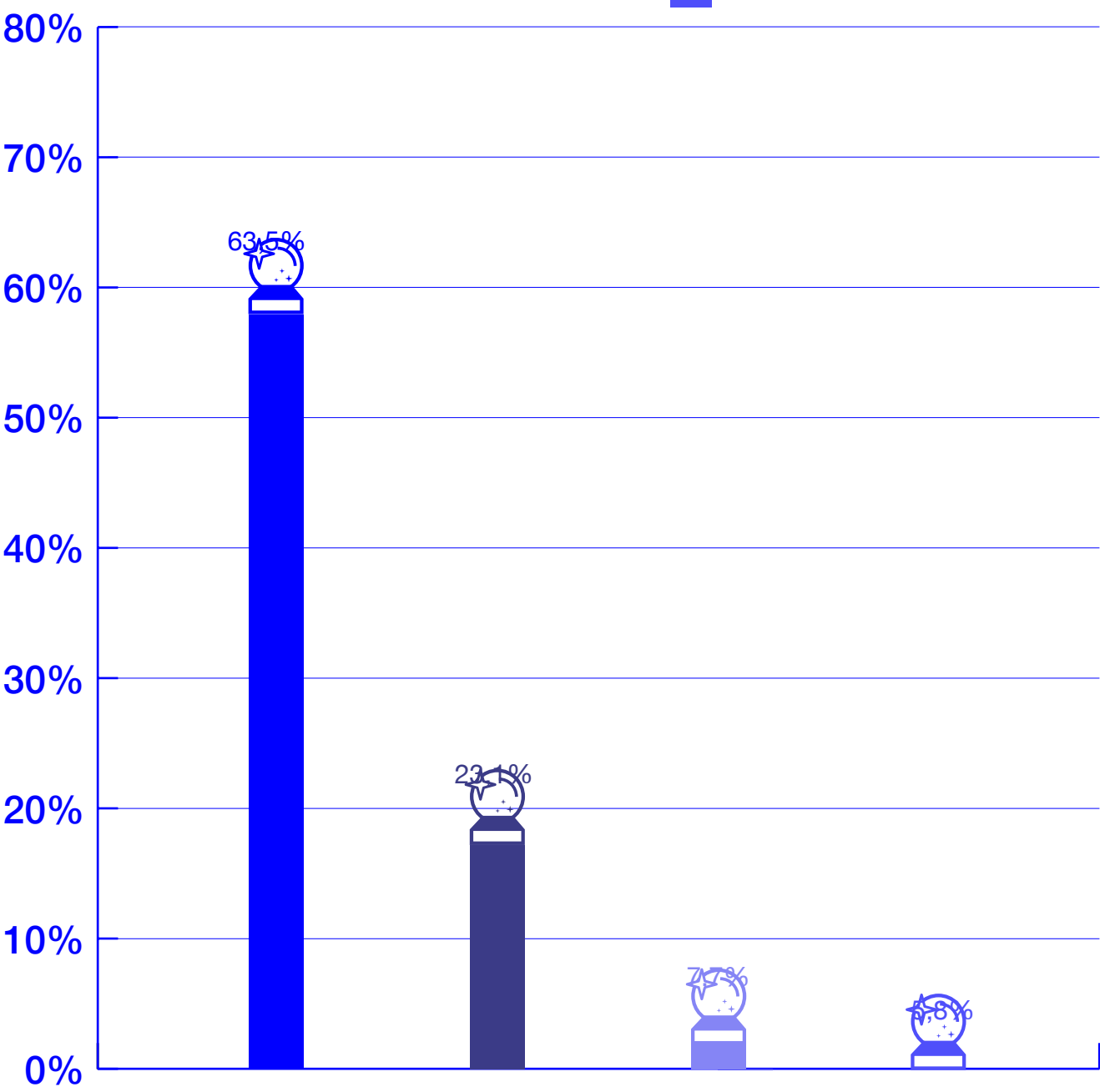


Are you afraid that you could lose your job or a cut in salary when the economy takes a downturn?



Do you think you can futureproof yourself as a graphic designer?

- Maybe not future-"proof" but I think there are ways that one could set themselves up for more success and security within the industry
- Yes
- Not sure
- No



Unionise, organise within the industry and set up collective organisations/cultures.

Coding/programming is an obvious skillset.

Have at least one area outside of design that you are an expert in, and can offer something worthwhile to say.

Embrace new modes of production, circulation and working structure. Take none of these for granted.

Make a 1,2,5 or 10 year plan.

Really consider long term how work integrates with your personal life. Where you live, how cheap, how your work vs leisure time is or should be divided, how/if you compromise. What kind of work or structure you can create with how you live.

“Have at least one area outside of design that you are an expert in, and can offer something worthwhile to say.”

Optimize working processes using effectively the available tools. Acting pedagogically together with clients raising awareness of the importance of Design professionals and long lasting brand strategies and integrated communication.

“Acting pedagogically with clients raising awareness of the importance of Design”

On the client-side, build and establish trust-and-need connections with clients, inviting them to become part of your process so that the outcome doesn't depend strictly on the designer side of projects but becomes a symbiosis. On the economic-side, having two or three year-long projects or monthly fees over a calendar helps establish the ground needs of a studio. Also having a savings account where a percentage of the profit is put is a solid solution to help during periods where work is stabilised, delayed, shut down or cut off.

“Build and establish trust-and-need connections with clients, inviting them to become part of your process so that the outcome doesn't depend strictly on the designer side of projects but becomes a symbiosis.”

Experience. Gain as much experience as possible before deciding to work independently.

Finding your own style and not follow trends too much. But having said that, it's equally important to understand that change is not optionable anymore. Change is fucking inevitable.

“Change is not optionable anymore. Change is fucking inevitable.”

Continue developing new skills

A positive mindset, flexibility is key

Perfect your portfolio

I think you have to keep learning new skills otherwise you are done for

Hone the skill of presentation and communication

Have some savings

Taking on clients that aren't necessarily the dream client is part of growing and learning and paying your bills

Be open to try a lot of media

Never stop learning

Work on a variable skillset

Don't just follow trends

Tapping into all of your skills and not boxing yourself into a very niche market. You have to be flexible to be adaptable.

Concentrate on disciplines that will still be required throughout a downturn

Leaving a lasting, positive impression on the people you work with will allow you to be memorable

Don't burn out

Talk to people in the industry

Work collaboratively

Keep learning

Stay original design

Ensure you are multidisciplinary

Be able to be employed as one person that can do the job of a few people

The good thing with design is that it can always contribute to something positive. And design thinking is already a mindset that you can apply to a broad range of different fields.

I think just being different / new UX, 3D, AR/VR in order to stay relevant & technology constantly, with traditional & a graphic design

Save 30% of your income

Be selective about your projects

Start a pension early

Always keep learning new skills. Technology drives our industry forward. You can't afford to stay still using the same software forever or you'll be left behind.

Keep an open mind, networking

Constant evolution

Peace of mind for clear thought, and then the courage to change

Knowing how to adapt to new ways of communicating and sharing our work effectively

My practice is design and then getting gigs in a world where to be the norm but it helped me a constant flow

Easily change and adapt to the present

Keep up with the up to date information and technology. Accept the fact that it's easier and easier to create visual outcome for every non-professional and even AI, and try to think about how we can advance beyond that - try to make the design meaningful and helpful to the future world.

I think staying up to date with the most current design software and technology is the best way to keep from being lost to the future.

My way of to work hard and try to be and new as More in design kind of creative you see or

Being informed, meet new people, because later you can make use of this knowledge. Conceptually and technically

Seeking business advice from the beginning and learning from more experienced peers.

Being a freelancer I have learnt to adapt to different things along the way. I have found that keeping organised so that the small things stay in check, like book keeping and various jobs like that don't go out of control.

I think the natural path for a graphic designer would be the road to art direction and later creative direction.

On the economic-side, having two or three year-long projects or monthly fees over a calendar helps establish the ground needs of a studio.

I believe that keep working on new skills and evolving your work definitely helps.

Experience. Gain as much experience as possible before deciding to work independently.

Having a savings account where a percentage of the profit is put is a solid solution to help during periods where work is stabilised, delayed, shut down or cut off.

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The ability to adapt to new technologies

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future-proof anything is
rd. Work really hard
be smart about choices
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Build and establish trust-and-need connections with clients, inviting them to become part of your process so that the outcome doesn't depend strictly on the designer side of projects but becomes a symbiosis.

Don't stop designing

Creating several incomes and by learning new skill sets

Less creative jobs,
more money jobs

Always make sure to stay in the know.

I wrote to a lot of online platforms and magazines that featured my work and that made a lot of people aware of me and my practice.

Finding your own style and not follow trends too much. But having said that, it's equally important to understand that change is not optionable anymore. Change is fucking inevitable.

Doing personal work helps. I made a personal project that I uploaded on instagram and a few months later led me to get a big advertising job.

I regularly update my instagram and website with my newest work. I think that helps in a small way because people see I'm active.

The most important is to be open and to try new things. And to look at the younger generations. I am 33, which is not very old I guess, but in design I feel that I could follow up even better. The design is changing very fast and it is crucial to learn from younger designers. To accept the new, controversial ways of designing. Never to close yourself in a "style" bubble.

A lot of people I have studied with at uni has helped me get work. It's really good to help each other out during times like these and know that we are in it together.

I believe that it is a good thing to be diversified but still specialised.

Make a 1,2,5 or 10 year plan

Be self-employed

Coding/programming is an obvious skillset.

Unionise, organise within the industry and set up collective organisations/cultures

For me, this currently is very practical in terms of savings and keeping my portfolio up to date. And if you have spare time, try to come up with personal projects to improve yourself in whatever it is that you like.

Listen to and learn from others throughout your career whether they are junior or senior to your role.

Acting pedagogically together with clients raising awareness of the importance of Design professionals and long lasting brand strategies and integrated communication.

Outsourcing the boring and less creative workloads.

Keep organised

Really consider how work integrates with your personal life

Have at least one area outside of design that you are an expert in, and can offer something worthwhile to say

Embrace new modes of production, circulation and working structure. Take none of these for granted

The CV means nothing. The portfolio means everything. Taking care of my portfolio is my main focus to stay relevant, noticeable and so on. I am really turned off with advertising and design agencies who goes on with the bs-copy-texts. I don't want to read a thing. I just want to look at awesome visuals/stuff.

What I learned from the design industry was improving presentation/communication skills. Even if you have a really cool visual design, if you don't understand what is the meaning or can't explain it, you can't persuade the message as a designer

■ The ability to adapt to new technologies

■ Try and make sure you are providing your clients thoughts and ideas they can't think of themselves, in addition to technical competence of making sure your (or their) ideas get turned into reality

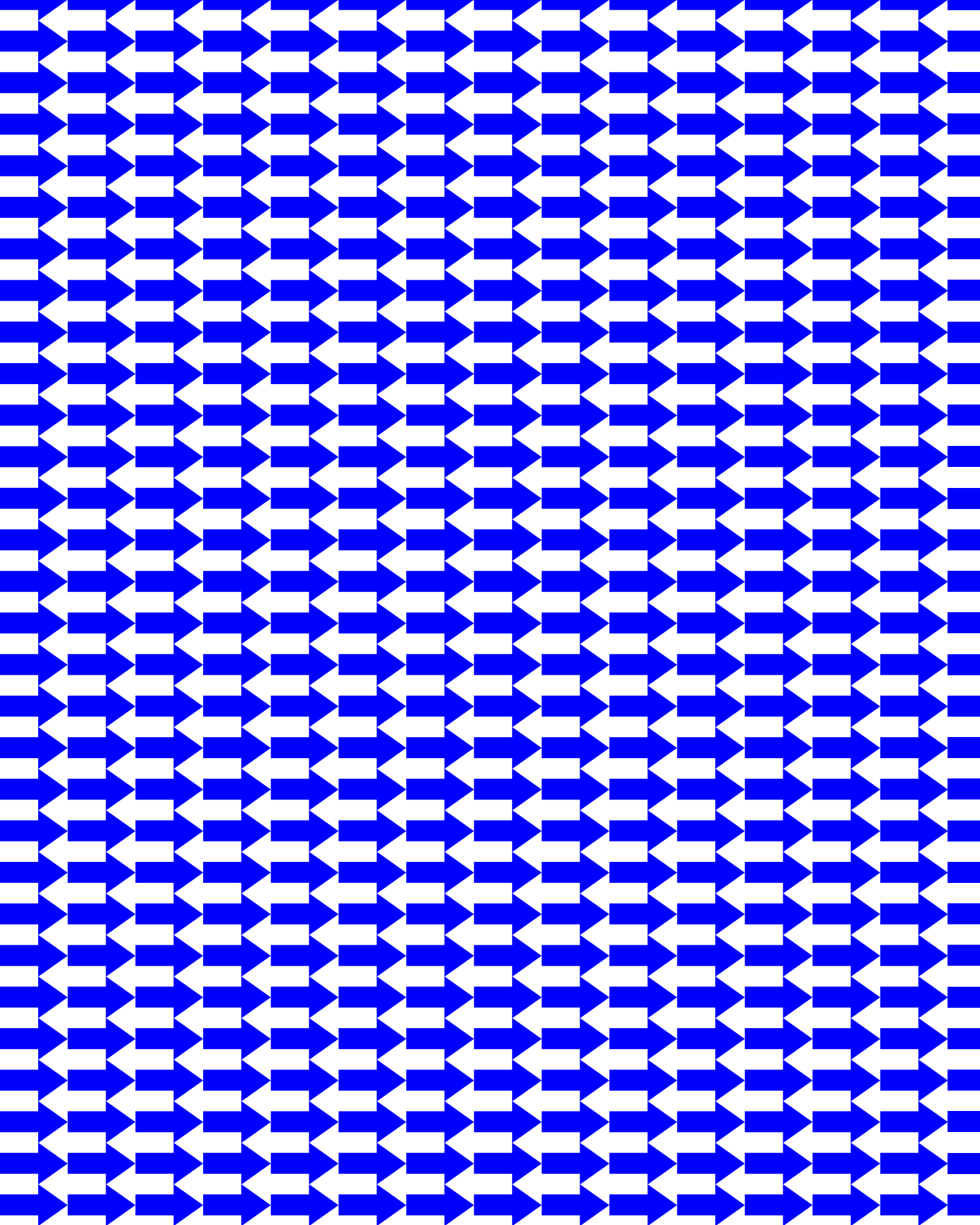
■ By creating several incomes and by leaning new skill sets

■ The question and overall thinking within this survey I think applies to anything in life pretty much: My way of future-proof anything is to work hard. Work really hard and try to be smart about choices and new assignments/positions. More in detail I think that for any kind of creative it is all about what you see or the craft/art itself. The CV means nothing. The portfolio means everything. Taking care of my portfolio is my main focus to stay relevant, noticeable and so on. I am really turned off with advertising and design agencies who goes on with the bs-copy-texts. I don't want to read a thing. I just want to look at awesome visuals/stuff.

“Work really hard and try to be smart about choices and new assignments/positions.”

■ Always make sure to stay in the know.

■ Don't stop designing





Graphic Design Dissertation Artefact

by David Edberg

for Ravensbourne University London