

Do Good Design

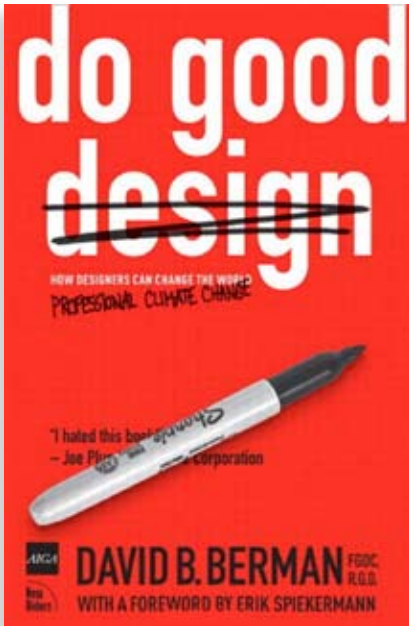
Donna Kamper

Subtitled “How Designers Can Change the World,” this is a very interesting book on several levels.

It most definitely isn't a “how to design” book. What it is is a plea to layout and graphic designers to use their design skills to change the world for the better.

It's a small book (192 pages). Frankly, from a designer's viewpoint it isn't that well laid out. For a book about design it was decidedly difficult to read. I persevered because I believe the message is a good one, and I wanted to see how it was presented.

The message is that design has power. Designers wield that power. And



for what? To get people to change their toothpaste brand. Branded by the author as the “weapons of mass deception,” in the modern world design skills affect everything from the food we eat to the people we elect as president.

If you doubt that last statement, take a look at “How Design Failed Democracy” in the Florida election. The design of the ballots directly affected how people voted, and that, my friends, is the real story of how Bush came to office.

This recognition isn't new. The book builds on the principles set forth in *First Things First* (1964, updated and republished as *First Things First 2000*). Many

would agree with the idea that design should be used more for the good of society than selling us things we don't really need. The problem – how to go about this noble idea (without starving)?

After reading this book, it seems it has two purposes: First, convince the reader of the problem. In this it succeeds admirably. The facts cited and examples shown prove incontrovertibly how ubiquitous design is and how it's essentially changed everything we do.

Second, provide a solution. Here the success isn't quite so solid. The reason is that designers must satisfy the requirements of those who hire us. Try telling someone you won't *Photoshop* their half-nude model (who's appearing in a house paint ad) and the only change there'll be is who's doing the *Photoshopping*.

That said, did I sign the author's “Do Good Pledge?” I did. Do I feel it's a futile effort? No. Awareness influences action. This reminded me to bring a critical eye to my design. I not only look for balance and flow within the design but to what its actual influence will be. This helps me shape my design to do what good I can within those commercial constraints.

Everything in the book was interesting, to the point and on point. Why, then, did I have to keep forcing myself to pick it up and read it? Well, it's all about design, isn't it? The pages are crowded, it's totally black and white/grayscale, margins are miniscule to non-existent.

The advertising shots and tags the author uses are excellent examples to make his point. But no matter how much you agree, you really have to make a concerted effort to understand the point they're making.

About: *Do Good Design*

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