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PRAISE FOR

BURN YOUR PORTFOLIO

“The straightforward and funny advice in Janda’s book is what most people learn only after toiling in the corporate trenches for years. (Um, how dare he share ALL our secrets?!) I hope he’s charging at least a year’s worth of school tuition for this book. Seriously, take copious notes on the practical suggestions offered here to help steer your own career, whether it’s your first job or your 75th freelance gig. The drama-free work approach and leadership style outlined in *Burn Your Portfolio* is what makes working with Mike and all the folks at his company, Riser, FUN and worthy of the cupcakes we send to celebrate each of our successes together.”

—Michelle Sullivan

*VP Digital, Kids & Family Publishing and Media,
National Geographic (aka 800-pound Gorilla Client)*

“This book should be a mandatory course at art schools...no, at *all* schools! The message transcends occupation; it’s about maneuvering through the unspoken rules and dynamics of various personalities in your workplace. Mike is a perfect person to deliver this message; his long-term relationships and success of his business are the true testimony of his skills on managing up, down, and sideways. Your talent alone will take you nowhere if your character doesn’t support it. If you want longevity in your field, this book is a must-read.”

—Jane Bhang

Consulting Art Director, Sony Pictures Entertainment

“I wish I could take every designer I’ve ever worked with and smack them over the head with this book...which would hurt, because it’s big! After that, I’d tell them to read it cover to cover, because Michael Janda will show them how to stop making the business mistakes nearly everyone in design is making.”

—Dave Crenshaw

Author of The Myth of Multitasking and The Focused Business

“*Burn Your Portfolio* is an enjoyable, substantive gallop through an inventive guidebook for designers and programmers who envision themselves with a thriving business. It should be on every designer’s must-read list. Michael draws in the reader by “showing” rather than merely “telling.” He gives the book a human, personal touch by sprinkling the text with his own adventures. And though he is primarily speaking to designers, his message about honing interpersonal skills is imperative for ANY enterprise. As a client, that, more than anything, keeps me coming back.”

—Cheryl Saban, Ph.D.

Author of What Is Your Self-Worth? A Woman’s Guide to Validation and founder of the Self Worth Foundation

“I went to school to learn to be a designer. I went to Mike Janda to learn to run a design business. He is incredible. I’ve never met anyone who literally understands everything that I’ve ever struggled with since the day I graduated from school. From freelancing, contracts, and proposals to making the best business decisions and standing up to any kind of client, Janda tells you everything you need to know. His life lessons are quick, in layman’s terms, and so amazingly valuable you will use something he teaches you every single day.”

—Lorilee Rager

Owner, Thrive Creative Group, LLC

“Do you want to supercharge your design career? Drop that Wacom pen and immediately pick up *Burn Your Portfolio*, and read it cover to cover. Michael Janda clearly outlines practical, actionable advice that will make your design business better, your clients happier, and your teams more productive. Even if you’re a freelancer just striking out on your own—no, especially if you are—the insights, truisms, and humor in this book will prove to be valuable tools in your design arsenal.”

—**Marc Siry**
SVP, Media Products, NBC Universal

“This one’s on fire! *Burn Your Portfolio* is hands-down the most entertaining, helpful, and hilarious insider’s guide for creative professionals out there. Janda is an absolute genius when it comes to managing client expectations, creating production processes that actually work, and running a thriving and vibrant design business. He and I used to work together at Fox—I owe much of my own success to his brilliant and zany methods.”

—**Allison Ellis**
Owner, Hopscotch Consulting

“Michael Janda is the one person you want to listen to when it comes to advice about succeeding in a creative field! He has more creative talent, street smarts, and people skills than anyone I have ever met. What this book presents the reader with is an inside-track to those secrets in an appetizing collection of goodness!”

—**Jeff Jolley**
President, Riser

“The starving artist cliché has never been in greater danger. *Burn Your Portfolio* gives creative professionals the tools they need to succeed in today’s competitive marketplace, a marketplace where many relying on talent alone have failed. Creatives...READ THIS BOOK!”

—**Mark Long**
Founder, RetouchUp/Hollywood FotoFix Studios

“I’ve worked with Michael and Riser for many years, and the thing that differentiates Michael and his team from other agencies is their ability to speak my language versus design speak! Michael and his company Riser are not only super-creative, they are total professionals. Communication is a big reason why Michael and his team are so successful at what they do. They are good at not only listening to a client who is not a designer and is trying to convey the details of a project, but also on working with the client to get the job done well, on time, and also on budget. I can’t think of a better person to give advice to designers who need to work with clients in the real world.”

—**Melissa Van Meter**
VP, Marketing & Advertising, TV Guide Network

“Wow! Mike Janda has delivered truly invaluable insight and real-world tips on how to be a rock star in the creative industry. He describes genuine experiences and conveys practical know-how—beyond what any web browser or art school could offer. With memorable detail and a sassy tone, this book will continue to inspire you for a lifetime.”

—**Lynda Hodge**
Freelance Graphic Designer

“Mike Janda knows that a successful career isn’t built on talent alone; that it takes certain skills to actually stay in business. With this book he shares the fruit of his experience in a fun, concise, and memorable way.”

—**Lawrence Terenzi**
Director, Product Development, Crackle

“It takes more than just mad skills and skinny jeans to thrive in this industry. Finally, a book for creatives with tangible and proven ways to be a successful designer. After 13 years of professional design, this book makes me feel like a newb; I am recommending it to all of my designers and developers.”

—**Josh Child**
Vice President, Creative, Riser

“As a design professional with over 16 years of experience in the industry, I can speak to the importance and wisdom of the principles addressed in this book. Not only do they help designers early in their careers but they also apply to those who have been in the industry for many years.

There is a lot more to being a creative professional than simply having talent. This book will help you make an honest assessment of your abilities and discover areas that need improvement. As you implement the things Michael talks about in the book, you will find that your creativity and problem solving will strengthen a lot just by improving some of your non-design-based skills such as client communication, business strategy, and work ethic. All of these things are connected. I learned a lot about myself during this process and have been able to create a game plan that has helped me connect better with my clients and employees.

I have always had a great deal of respect for Mike Janda as a seasoned creative, strategic thinker, and successful business owner. After reading this book and hearing him speak about the things he’s learned throughout his career, my respect and admiration have only increased. I recommend this book to any creative professional regardless of medium of expertise or level of experience.”

—**John Thomas**

Principal/Creative Director, Blue Tractor Design Company

“This is much more than a book; it is a survival kit for creative professionals. In its pages you will learn how to create and run a successful creative business that is both creative and a business. Each chapter is replete with practical, hands-on advice that anyone, in any business, can apply to make their business more successful.”

—**Kris Kristensen**

Senior Director, Global Learning, Alexion Pharmaceuticals

“I’ve known Mike Janda for over 13 years. I’ve seen his company grow from a small mom-and-pop web agency to a full-fledged industry-leading agency. I can still remember the first time I met Mike when he was our creative director, and I was a fresh-out-of-college intern. My boss at the time sent me to retrieve a booklet from Mike. To this day, I can still remember my conversation with him. He treated me with the utmost respect and sincerity. He didn’t have to be nice to me, but he was. And he most certainly didn’t treat me well based on my job title. And that is why I believe Mike has all the qualities that all bosses should emulate. He is honest, smart, responsible, and most importantly, conducts business with a smile. In such a fast moving industry, it’s hard to find people you trust—but I’ve always trusted that Mike has had my best interest in mind. It’s not a trade secret to be nice, and you can’t buy or download that in an app!”

—**Thuy (Twee) Tran**
Senior Content Producer, ABC Family

“My introduction to Mike occurred as he interviewed me for a job. He immediately proceeded to deconstruct my portfolio and find the nuggets of talent contained in it (small), and then on the fly proceeded to help me formulate my pitch to him. Somehow I still got the job. From Mike I learned everything I know about beating the procrastination monster, along with so many other useful things, all skills I use to this day. And fortunately for the rest of the design world, Mike has put all of these tips into a designer’s guide to getting along in the real world, with all his humor and insight intact.”

—**Ray Woods II**
Director, User Experience, NBC Universal



BURN YOUR PORTFOLIO

STUFF THEY DON'T TEACH YOU IN DESIGN SCHOOL, BUT SHOULD

MICHAEL JANDA

Burn Your Portfolio: Stuff they don't teach you in design school, but should
Michael Janda

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This book is dedicated to my family,

Jodi, Max, Mason, and Miles.

*Thank you for your amazing support
and allowing me to chase my dreams.*

*I love you more than my Jeep
and the Chicago Bears, combined.*



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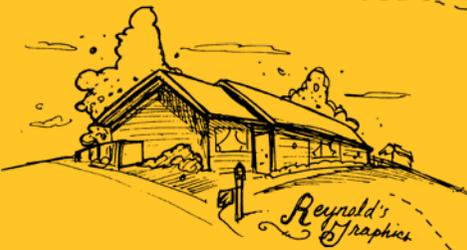
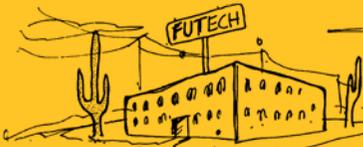
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BURN YOUR PORTFOLIO...REALLY?

With my diploma still warm from Indiana University, I grabbed my enormous, faux-leather student portfolio and hit the streets. I knew my destiny would land me at a hoity-toity agency where I would be a star designer, dazzling clients on high-profile campaigns for the most recognized brands in the world.

One tearful month later, after the humbling task of job hunting—applying to agencies, getting a few interviews, and landing nowhere—I accepted my first job in the industry: prepress coordinator for the local AlphaGraphics copy center. At nine dollars per hour, I was the star designer all right. Nobody could center text on a perforated sheet of business cards and feed them into a photocopier better than me.

With a Midwest work ethic and a motto of “OCD Is an Attribute,” it took me four short years to progress from my illustrious copy center job to a senior creative director position at Fox Studios. At Fox, I managed the design, development, and editorial elements of the Fox Kids and Fox Family websites.

The dot bomb and the dismantling of our division at Fox launched me into a four-year freelance stint that would provide me with an income level well beyond any expectations I had upon finishing my college degree and that afforded me all of my “wants” as well as my “needs.” When the freelance load became too much to handle on my own, my wife forced me to hire people. Seventeen salaried employees later and over a decade of history, my acclaimed agency, Riser, boasts clients like Google, Disney, NBC, National Geographic, and Warner Bros.

I have been privileged to interview, manage, and hire hundreds of designers and programmers throughout the course of my career. One thing I know for certain is that your graphic design portfolio is a critical element to get you in the door of prospective employers and clients. Design schools know it and spend 90 percent of their efforts teaching students the skills they need to put together an awesome portfolio prior to graduation.

The other thing I know for certain is that, while a design school spends 90 percent of their effort making students capable of creating a killer portfolio, once you're in the door your portfolio is not 90 percent of what will make you actually successful in a creative career. In fact, it isn't even close to the only thing that will lead you to success.

Teamwork, client skills, communication, social aptitude, production speed, and business savvy all play a GIGANTIC part in what will make you successful as a graphic designer, whether your aspirations include freelancing, working for an agency, or managing your own firm. This book is dedicated to teaching those types of skills...the stuff they don't teach you in design school, but should.

Burn your portfolio? OK, so maybe that statement is a tad extreme. However, the lessons I've learned that are contained in this book are every bit as critical as your ability to create award-winning design. Learn them. Apply them. Couple these techniques with your killer portfolio, and find a new level of success in the real business of graphic design.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I walk down the memory lane of experiences that led to the creation of this book, I see faces attached to moments in time. A few of these require mentioning here.

First and foremost to my wife, Jodi, your undying support of my addiction to ambition has not gone unnoticed. In the brief moments that you have not been consulting with me on every aspect of my professional life, you have been managing our family, allowing me the freedom to achieve my successes in life. I would not be who I am without you. “Thank you” is an understatement. I love you.

To my parents, Dennis and Nancy, thank you for teaching me good principles, instilling in me an expectation of success, and encouraging me to do something I love for a living.

My in-laws, Gary and Connie Allen, you both have taught me life lessons that are referenced in the book. Thank you for supporting me as “one of your own.”

Alan Rogers, in my early twenties I learned to be a leader, teacher, and manager under your great example and tutelage. Much of my success has come from the foundation you helped me establish.

Sara Robbins, my high school art teacher, you made art so much fun I chose it as a career.

Several coworkers (past and present), family members, and forever friends require mention. Jeff Jolley, Rachel Allen, Kris Kristensen, Marc Siry, Ray Woods, Thuy Tran, Grandpa Zwick, Eric Lee, Darrell Goff, Derek Ellis, John Thomas, Josh Child, and Mark Long: You drive me and inspire me to much greater heights.

And to all the Janda Design Company, Jandaco, Riser Media, and Riser employees past, present, and future: Thank you for enduring the rough times when we had yet to solve all the challenges that faced our growing company. Sorry for the times we weren’t perfect...I was always striving with good intentions.

Nick Jarvis, thank you for the wicked illustrations and collaboration on the design of the book. You are a rare talent.

Jannah Mitchell, thank you for the first round of edits. You drove this book in a better direction.

Jan Seymour, the development and copy editor on this book, you are amazing. You epitomize the “OCD Is an Attribute” principle.

Finally, to the rest of the team at Peachpit Press and Nikki McDonald, thank you for believing in this book and convincing me not to name it “Polishing Turds.” :-)

4 YOU ARE NOT YOUR WORK

Graphic designers can be a sensitive lot. Or perhaps it is artists in general who have thin skin. Either way, there is something about right-brained people that reads like a prescription drug bottle: “Caution: Do not mix with sleeplessness, constructive criticism, subpar coffee, or well-meaning advice.” In order to succeed in the design industry, however, it is imperative that you remember that you are not merely the sum of your work. If you interpret design critique as a character critique, you are setting yourself up in a defensive position that will impede your ability to improve your design skills and adapt to different creative environments.

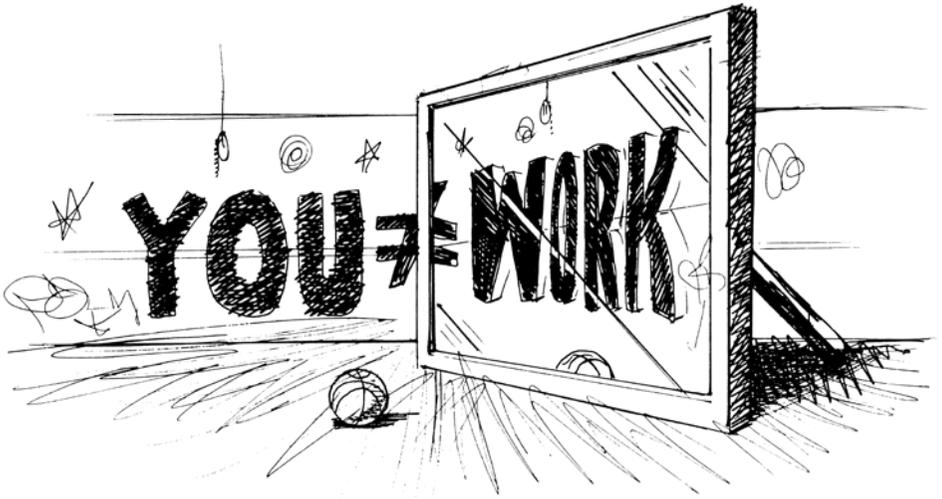
Some time ago I walked past one of our designer’s desks and glanced at the design she was working on. It was pretty rough and headed down the wrong path. I knew this designer was a little sensitive, so I tried to choose my words carefully. “So, you’re getting started on X project? Be sure to review the example designs the client sent over that illustrate what they are hoping to achieve.” That was all I said. I walked away, confident that I had handled the exchange tastefully. Later that day, a few of my employees who sat near her told me that after I left she went into the restroom and sobbed. She didn’t just “cry,” she “sobbed.”

I wish that she had taken what I meant as a gentle nudge in a better direction as a good thing rather than a bad thing. If I did not know without a doubt that she was a skilled and capable designer, I would not have hired her in the first place!

In order to grow in your design skills, you have to hunger for critique and advice from wherever you can get it. Feedback is critical when it comes to being able to push your design to higher levels. If a colleague were to say to you, “Why don’t you try reducing the size of the logo a little bit,” you shouldn’t interpret it as them saying to you, “You call yourself a designer? You suck, you’re ugly, you smell like the back of a 747, and your momma wears combat boots!” You have to

realize that your work does not define you as a person and find it inside yourself to say, “Thank you. That is a great suggestion. I’ll give it a try and see how it looks.” Then you must work to truly feel grateful that your design is being pushed and that your colleague felt comfortable enough with you to be able to offer caring, professional advice to help you look better in the long run.

Give the feedback you receive a try; if the new work looks better, keep it. If it doesn’t, then go back to what you had. One of the keys to growing in your skills is to learn not only to welcome feedback but to desire it from anyone who will give it to you. The greatest designers surround themselves with people whom they trust both as individuals and as creative advisors.



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He is the founder and owner of the acclaimed design agency, Riser. Since its inception in 2002, Riser has provided design and programming services to its A-list clients including Disney, Google, NBC, ABC, Warner Bros., Sony, National Geographic, Fox, TV Guide, and many others.

Michael enjoys time with his wife, Jodi, and their three sons, Max, Mason, and Miles.

For more information, please visit: www.michaeljanda.com.

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