

# BRAND NEW THINGS

immerses the person, more than any vector or animation. One of my favorite things to do is to take a photo, say of trees, and in Flash make them sway a bit. That is how you can get someone's attention, not by a bunch of circles jumping around the screen."

This seems to suggest that photography is the new gimmick. Baker concurs: "It's strange that a few years ago we had to convince clients about the benefits of using Flash, and now we are at the point where we are reassessing how it is used and

in what context. So sometimes we tell our clients that we don't have to use Flash all the time."

As of now, WDDG doesn't have someone who is solely responsible for art buying and so the decision lies with the creative working on a particular project. WDDG doesn't assign photography and usually gets images either from stock—The Image Bank and Photodisc are particular favorites—or it partners with photographers who have been hired by the advertising agency. For example, at the moment they are col-

laborating with the still-life photographer David Jacquot on a campaign with American Express, and they are also working with the fashion photographer Chung Li on his own site.

For examples of Web sites that use photography intelligently, Baker and Ernst cite all the Nike sites and the new Lexus site. Speaking of the Nike work, Baker says: "To this day, I don't know how they get such good quality of photography on their sites. It is so crisp and clean." He could easily have been speaking about WDDG's own portfolio.

## FLAT

By Holly Stuart Hughes

**THE INTERNET BUST MAY BE OVER**, according to Tsia Carson, one of the founding partners of Flat. She is basing that bold opinion on the number of requests for proposals received at her agency in the last six months from new clients. As well as attracting new clients, what has kept Flat thriving for the last couple of years is repeat business. Most of these longtime clients are lured back, first, by the hands-on approach to customer service that the five-person agency offers. And second, they appreciate Flat's attention to the message they want to communicate. "When we work with a client, we get pretty absorbed in their material," Carson says. Co-founder Doug Lloyd calls it "getting wrapped up in content."

Communication is at the heart of all of New York agency Flat's work, from print and outdoor advertising to environmental and interactive design. Their clients include magazines like *Metropolis* (for whom Flat recently designed a Web site) and Nordic Reach (for which Flat handles production and some art direction) and arts organizations like the Bronx Museum of the Arts. While working for the Brennan Institute for Justice, Carson, Lloyd and partner Petter Ringbom had to digest mountains of abstract data about campaign spending as part of the institute's efforts to lobby for the McCain-Feingold bill. Having designed its Web site and booklet, Carson says, "We now know more about campaign finance reform than most people should."

Carson notes, "There are some designers who design things to be pretty. I agree with that—things should be pretty. But often there's no depth there. It doesn't communicate anything." Working with an array of nonprofit clients gives Flat the opportunity to work on projects which offer that depth; as Carson explains: "We really enjoy working with nonprofits, because the messages that they need to get out are often complex, they're not necessarily just product driven. That's a great challenge for us."

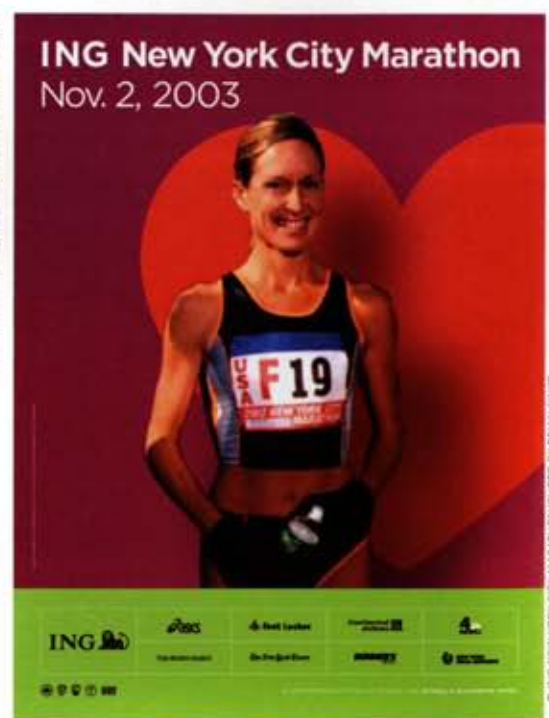
One nonprofit, the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), first approached Flat to design a site for its 2002 conference—a symposium of designers talking to other designers about the issue of sustainability. "That's a hard thing to express visually," says Carson. "Usually when people think of sustainability in design, you see brown paper with dull colored soy inks." Instead, Flat plumbed the archives at Getty, one of the conference sponsors for pieces of archival photos and illustrations.



The designers turned these into photo collages of people and creatures in an imaginary landscape, creating a vision of a utopia in keeping with the conference's high idealism.

More than simply looking cool, the site was also efficient and effective, allowing attendees to register quickly and easily. That was due in no small part to Flat's broad experience with dynamic database systems. While most designers like to ignore the back end of how a site works, Carson and Lloyd agree that understanding these details is essential for designing a customer-friendly site. "You have to understand the structure of back-end functions in order to structure the [user's] experience," says Carson. The usefulness of the conference site is one reason AIGA has tapped Flat again, most recently to design the association's national site.

Another repeat client has been the New York City Marathon. The New York Road Runners Club (NYRR), the organizers of the yearly event, gave Flat and two other competitors a wide-open brief and asked for



three bids from each agency. Flat's winning design used images from the club's photo archives that were digitally manipulated, adding the silhouette of a runner wearing a red heart—reminiscent of Milton Glaser's famous "I Love NY" logo. The images were adapted for the Web site, newspaper ads and bus kiosks, and banners for the race course.

For the 2003 campaign, Flat decided to focus on individual marathoners, rather than return to the generic every-runner. Carson recalls, "We researched how the marathon exists in people's minds, especially for nonprofessional athletes." Working with the NYRR photo editor, Kristine Schueler, they selected images taken by Brian Finke, the photojournalist who was hired on race day to photograph the competitors right after they had crossed the finish line. The portraits of the exultant racers were silhouetted and dropped into a colored background featuring the heart logo.

With only five employees, there is little division of labor, and at any time, any one of the designers could be working on brand positioning, client relations or business development. Though there have at times been as many as 12 people working in Flat's loft in TriBeCa, Carson says, "We like to keep it pretty small here. We prefer to be hands-on, and to actually design."

### FLAT

[www.flat.com](http://www.flat.com)

**FOUNDED:** 1996

**NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:** 5

**CLIENTS:** AIGA, New York City Marathon, *Metropolis Magazine*, Bronx Museum of the Arts, RogueWaves, The Learning Channel

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