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Jonathan Ive

Design has long been a key aspect of communication. In particular, graphic design has proven to be an incredibly important asset in conveying messages and grabbing attention. Graphic design, however, is not the only important form of communication design. Web design and industrial design are directly connected to communication as well. Despite this, industrial design is often overlooked in the field of communication. According to the Industrial Designers Society of America, “industrial design (ID) is the professional service of creating products and systems that optimize function, value and appearance for the mutual benefit of user and manufacturer” (“What is Industrial Design”). In other words, rather than designing media, industrial designers specialize in creating devices. Industrial design, in this sense, actually connects to graphic design. Without industrial design advancements, graphic design would be distinctly more complicated.

In this sense, industrial design displays its versatility in the field of communication. Graphic design and industrial design are both important components in the areas of marketing, advertising, public relations, management, and manufacturing. The relationship maintained by graphic design and industrial design is best demonstrated through the notable designers who constitute these fields. Of these designers, one of the most notable is the current Chief Design Officer of Apple, Sir Jonathan “Jony” Ive. This legendary designer advanced from a household product designer to the Senior Vice President of Industrial Design. Jonathan Ive’s accomplishments are vast and versatile. As such, it is crucial to observe his designs and history in detail.

Jonathan Ive had quite the reputation during his time with Apple. In fact, the late Steve Jobs “often referred to Ive as his spiritual partner at Apple” (Leonard 27). This praise was very notable considering that Steve Jobs was the first to recognize his talent and promote him. Prior to his time with Apple, Jonathan Ive actually worked to design appliances such as microwaves. As such, his transition to designing such popular products was a major accomplishment. According to BBC News, It's a long way from a toilet laboratory in Chigwell, north London to the heart of Silicon Valley, California. But in eight years, Jonathan Ive has covered this distance to establish himself as one of the world's most celebrated and sought after designers (“Jonathan Ive: Apple of the iMac”). In other words, Jonathan Ive’s humble beginnings are often overlooked due to his contributions to the iPad, iPhone, and Apple Watch. Furthermore, Ive’s success within the company even took time to develop. Jony went from being a consultant, to a full-time employee, and finally, Senior Vice President of Industrial Design. Perhaps what is even more impressive, is the fact that these career advancements had been made in a very short period of time.

Additionally, Jonathan Ive’s time as Senior Vice President of Design at Apple was exemplary of his leadership and design skills. As BBC News discusses, he has been responsible for a whirlwind of innovation, including the original iMac computer and, more recently, its portable cousin, the iBook (“Jonathan Ive: Apple of the iMac”). To put it simply, Ive has clearly grown alongside the company. The first iMac had a very distinctive box design and many color options. However, the design of the new iMac is vastly superior. For example, the monitor is incredibly thin and much wider than before. Its design is far more integrated as well. The retina display and overall screen quality/ visibility have been improved vastly. Furthermore, the iBook now provides a small and portable form of the original desktop. This design is even thinner and more versatile. A lot has changed during Jonathan Ive’s command of the Apple design team. The company has grown alongside Ive, and as such, so have the products.

Today, Jonathan Ive is the Chief Design Officer at Apple. As discussed by Victor Luckinson, “Ive is already responsible for overseeing the physical look of Apple products as well as the design of the company’s software. In his expanded role, he’ll have more time to focus his design expertise on other parts of Apple’s empire, such as its Apple Stores, the physical packaging of its products and even the design of its massive new spaceship-shaped headquarters, which is set to open by 2017” (Luckerson). In summary, this new promotion expands upon Ive’s already large job description. In addition to product and software work, Ive will begin focusing on architectural design for the company. This broadened position truly shows the design versatility Jonathan Ive possesses.

In conjunction with Jonathan Ive’s design versatility and advancement, Ive also possesses a large quantity of designs. As stated in a Macworld article, “Ive has long held a pivotal role within Apple, and Cook (in his employee memo) said Ive’s new title is a reflection of the scope of work he has been doing at Apple for some time. Ive now holds close to 5,000 patents on designs he has created at the company” (McGarry). This vast number of patents displays dedication to the company. As the current CEO stated, Ive definitely earned his new position. The argument for “quality over quantity” could be made, but Ive has won awards that support his success in the industry. As such, Ive’s accreditation also grows alongside his vast number of design patents.

Jonathan Ive has been internationally honored for his design skills. Aside from being knighted, Ive has notably received honors such as being named a Royal Designer for Industry and Fellow of the Royal Academy. Ive’s design team has also won several International Design Excellence Awards. However, not even these impressive accomplishments capture Ive’s true success. The public has generally been very pleased with the designs Ive’s team has provided. For instance, the Apple Watch received very positive reviews upon release. Consumer Reports detailed that “our top-rated smartwatch is the stainless-steel Apple Watch. Its performance on the scratch-resistance test and excellent scores for ease of pairing and ease of interaction make it our top choice” (Derene). Essentially, awards mean a lot, but the consumers’ opinions matter the most when it comes to industrial design. It is important to design a product that fits the target audience. The same concept applies to all types of design.

This concept also brings the industrial design and graphic design relationship full circle. As previously mentioned, it is important for one to consider the many types of design. Graphic design, for example, is not Jonathan Ive’s preferred field, but as a key member of Apple, he is often exposed to graphic design. After all, the graphic designers head campaigns used to advertise for the industrial designers’ products. In other words, the relationship between two very different fields can be maintained through a mutual dependence on basic design. However, the field of design is broad and many designers go unrecognized. Despite this, Jonathan Ive did not fade into obscurity.

Jonathan Ive is definitely well-recognized, but he is also known for being incredibly shy. In fact, Ive chooses not to speak at most presentations of his products. The conventions and regular product announcements typically lack his presence. As stated in the Macworld article, however, “without designer Jony Ive, Apple as the world knows it wouldn’t exist” (McGarry). In the design world, Jonathan Ive is a household name, but due to a lack of presence at conventions/ media platforms, his work is not as well recognized as Steve Jobs and other Apple executives. Meanwhile, Ive is responsible for the Apple brand that is so popular today.

In addition to the grand impact Sir Jonathan Ive has on Apple, he has had a substantial impact on the design world as well. Ive is known for coming to work in a t-shirt and worn sneakers (Jonathan Ive: Apple of the iMac). This casual appearance, however, masks a genius in the field of design. Jonathan Ive is very outspoken on the changes that he believes are necessary to make within the field of design and design education. Ive has been quoted saying that “fewer designers seem to be interested in how something is actually made” (“Fewer Designers Seem to be Interested in How Something is Actually Made”). The passion and interest Jonathan Ive maintains for the field is what keeps him so successful. It is Ive’s belief that more designers need to engage with the mechanics of the overall design.

As such, Ive places the blame on poor design education. In fact, Jony claims that design education is tragic (“Design Education is Tragic”). This analysis is focused on the concept of schools using computers to teach students how to design things. Meanwhile, Jony believes that hands-on work is far more beneficial. Schools, however, choose to avoid the more expensive workshops, and instead, supplement students with inexpensive computers. (Computers are more useful for graphic design or basic planning of industrial design.) In the end, Ive’s opinions on design education could help improve the current means of educating design majors.

These passionate opinions on design provided Ive with a strong connection to the late Apple CEO Steve Jobs. Steve and Jonathan worked very closely. Ive’s reserved nature, however, allowed Jobs to maintain dominance over the designer. The two were still very close friends, but this aspect of their relationship complicated things. According to an article in the New Yorker, “this habit of rhetorical modesty has lately been complicated by an immodest business truth: more than ever, Ive is the company” (Parker). In summary, Steve Jobs was in a powerful position of leadership. Jobs’ outspoken tendencies and persuasive nature overshadowed the meek personality of Ive. Concurrently, however, Ive was the real backbone of the company. Steve Jobs definitely provided the motivation necessary to complete products, but the “mastermind” was Ive all along.

Additionally, Jonathan Ive has been incredibly well-liked in the studio. Ive said that, “in fifteen years, only two designers have left the studio—one of them because of ill health. He regards this as a clinching argument about harmoniousness” (Parker). Jony’s calm and reserved personality has been welcoming to coworkers at Apple. The amount of dedication these workers possess to Ive and the studio is astounding. After all, not many leaders can claim that so few workers have left his/ her service. All in all, the harmony between workers at Ive’s studio surely lends to the extreme success of Apple and its design team.

In conclusion, Jonathan Ive is a monumental figure in the world of design. His prominence in the field of industrial design is unmatched, and although industrial design is hardly graphic design, the fields frequently connect. Jonathan Ive’s dominance of design can be represented through his popularity with coworkers, dedication to design and education, many awards and honors, and vast experience. It is truly remarkable how a shy man who used to design appliances could come so far. The current Chief Design Officer, Sir Jonathan Ive, is an inspiration to the world of design.

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