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Looking back on 1998, the big developments affecting the print industry weren't in the traditional graphic arts, but rather on the Web. The Web has become the fastest-growing communications medium in history. It seems impossible that just a few years ago the Web's viability was open to discussion. Now, the questions are how big it will get, how quickly it will grow and how far the Web will go.

What remains anomalous about the Web is the gulf that exists between print and online communication. If you were to ask print producers about the Web, they would probably be familiar with its use, but unfamiliar with what it takes to build or operate a good Web site. Likewise, odds are that Webmasters wouldn't be conversant with print production issues.

As we head into the next century, the Web will become the dominant mode of commercial communication and the primary medium for news and entertainment. The days when print was king are quickly ending, yet large segments of the graphic arts community continue to ignore this development.

Cybershift

The most successful print designers today have moved into Web space. The kind of money that Web design agencies are pulling in dwarfs the revenue and profitability numbers possible in the pre-Web era. This mad rush to the Web is siphoning off some of the best print design talent, while simultaneously making it necessary for today's designers to develop their talents in multiple media.

Successful Web site design is very different than successful print design, and the aesthetic of one cannot be transferred easily to the other. To be a fine designer in multiple media is a rare and great achievement.

At the same time, in-house print designers are turning into a quaint group of neurotic professionals in heavy denial about the effect of the Web. More and more, a company's Web site is controlled by MIS.

Yet print designers continue to make pitches to people in management positions about taking back control of the Web site, arguing that good Web sites are as much about design, words, color and typography as they are about company data flying around the ether. But management has decided that the Web is first and foremost about transactions, not about publishing, and MIS is going to remain firmly in control.

Looking ahead to 1999

At the close of the 20th century, the No. 1 challenge for all print production professionals, particularly in the corporate environment, will be to take back the night. Yes, the Web is stunningly powerful as an engine for transactions, but the best Web sites will always be the best-designed sites, designed for usability and for beauty. We all need to learn more about what it is that makes the Web work now, and what will make it more effective in the future, while discovering how to extend our talents into a paperless environment.

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