

Studio buddies sharing skills.

Professional development is imperative for all designers but it doesn't always have to come at a cost. It can be ongoing and performed inhouse using the skills and talents available.

Personal skills audit.

One of the roles of a design studio manager is to pro-actively guide the professional development of team members.

One way to start the process is to ask everyone in the studio to complete a personal skills audit (see Factsheet 12).

The audit allows each team member the chance to identify where they are confident and competent and where their skills need upgrading.

Even in a small studio, there's the chance of cross-pollination of skills.

Use the audit sheets to identify the designer with superior skills in an area that another feels they need to upgrade, and buddy the two designers up.

How to use buddies.

Sharing skills can be done in a number of ways:

- » Observation: it can be as simple as identifying the 'expert' buddy and allocating time for another designer to sit alongside them, observing while they perform tasks. It may be for an hour, it may be for a day. This practice works particularly well to upgrade specific skills such as graphing in Illustrator.
- » Tutorials: it could be more structured, where a designer is tasked to present a short tutorial on a specific skill to others needing that skill. The lead designer becomes the buddy. This works particularly well to spread knowledge from one job description to another. For example, the web designer might present a lesson on Wordpress to print designers, helping them understand the design specialties.
- » Unstructured: it may be ad hoc, planting the seed that designer A needs the knowledge and asking designer B to call them over when they are next going to undertake the task. Identifying and pairing the buddies beforehand keeps the need top-of-mind, and less likely to be forgotten.

Why it's of use.

The value to the studio is extensive.

On an economic level, the only cost to the studio is time. There are no external training costs, nor is there lost income because the professional development turns out to be irrelevant to the day to day running of the studio.

Training inhouse demonstrates a studio culture of 'life long learning'. That, while it is the responsibility of individual designers to pro-actively control their own professional development, the studio will spend 'studio time' supporting the practice.

It also helps retain good designers that without the inhouse training may see resignation as the only way to further their skills.

Finally, it fosters a culture of collaboration and co-creation within the studio.

Too often studios are silos of individual designers glued to their computers. It is the responsibility of the design studio manager to foster a studio culture, and encouraging designers to nurture the skills of each other is a great way to start.