

net
MAGAZINE
AWARDS...
2011

**VOTING IS
NOW OPEN**

HAVE YOUR SAY AT
www.thenetawards.com



By Sunni Brown on September 12, 2011 | 3 comments

[Tweet](#) [Like](#) [+](#) [Share](#)

Don't dismiss doodling – in the right hands, it can be a serious and useful tool that should be deployed when problems are most messy and topics most serious, says business owner, author and leader of the doodle revolution Sunni Brown

Many of you may recall the story of the now-infamous 'Davos doodle'. For those who don't, let me summarise. In 1996 in Davos, Switzerland, the world's most pre-eminent leaders gathered at the annual World Economic Forum. They were discussing weighty topics such as the end of easy oil, global pandemics and what was at stake in Iraq. When a press conference came to a close, event workers gathered the remains of the day and found something that turned into a scandal: a doodle left behind by then-prime minister Tony Blair.

Unfortunately for Blair, the scribbling was psychoanalysed by graphologists – people who study handwriting and relate it to psychological states. From their analyses came assertions that Blair was "aggressive" and "unstable", among other unflattering things. But when the dust finally settled, a truth no one anticipated emerged about this doodle. It didn't belong to Blair. It was by the Microsoft founder and billionaire Bill Gates. This discovery led to backtracking about the conclusions drawn, and reignited an old debate about graphology as a pseudoscience.

A rootless stigma

During this rather childish mania, the press missed something important. The rhetoric surrounding the fiasco had a built-in assumption that is negligently off-base: it was inappropriate for Blair to have been doodling in the first place. Time and again I noticed the covert messaging: leaders do not doodle. When solving serious problems, to draw is to trivialise. It's unacceptable to sketch when complex subject matter is being dealt with.

The media arena isn't the only place where the practice is underestimated and vilified. Doodling, at least in the US, is perceived as inappropriate in virtually every learning environment in which we find ourselves – in the classroom, boardroom and Situation Room. But this persistent cultural view works against us. As a cognitive tool, the doodle is incredibly useful.

According to Professor Jackie Andrade at the University of Plymouth, doodling is our mind's way of ensuring that we have enough cognitive stimulation to stay focused and remain engaged in an information exchange. And that's not all. In my work as an information designer and visual thinker, I've learned that doodling, sketching and drawing is our mind's way of

POPULAR THIS WEEK

- 1 A masterclass in CSS animations
- 2 Exclusive preview of the hottest CSS specs
- 3 Code smarter CSS with Sass
- 4 Build a multilingual site with WordPress
- 5 Big question: what do you think of Adobe Edge?

Subscribe and Save up to 40%

BUY NOW



JOIN THE COMMUNITY!

Comment on articles, get the 'Week in Web Design' newsletter and receive exclusive offers!

Continue

In the time designers spend redesigning a beautiful yet faux mock for someone else's existing service for free, they could have been creating something real of their own.



Yaron Schoen on **Don't redesign on spec**

[READ MORE](#)

Hosting Directory

Choose the best host with the .net guide

How to choose the perfect URL

reflecting information back to itself, allowing us to grasp it more efficiently. Until we can see something, in many ways we can't really know it at all. As the 20th-century French artist Henri Matisse said, "To draw is to make an idea precise."

Food for thought

Visual language – something as sophisticated as a wireframe or as simple as a doodle – is native to our brains. To suggest implicitly or openly that learners should rely solely on text or auditory content to understand complexities and solve problems is to deny the brain one of its most fundamental and profound ways of understanding. Leonard Bruce Archer, a mechanical engineer and champion of design research at the Royal College of Art, noted that people working through problems seem to "form images in their mind's eye, manipulating and evaluating ideas before, during and after externalising them."

I'm a serious advocate of the doodle, which I define as "a marking that helps a person think". Doodling should be deployed when problems are most messy and topics most serious. In particular, I encourage what I refer to as "strategic doodling", which is drawing to track auditory content, translate text into visual language or sketch a mental model you need to see to understand. I've seen the transformative power of the doodle, and it's not the nemesis of intellectual thought; it's one of its greatest allies.

This article originally appeared in issue 210 of .net magazine - the world's best-selling magazine for web designers and developers.

55 22 6 21

Tweet Like +1 Share COPY URL

TAGS INSPIRATION

RELATED ARTICLES

- Five killer ways to use a [gallery style](#)
- The One Web: don't write for devices, write for people
- Report: dConstruct 2011
- .net Awards 2011: top 10 designers
- Where ideas for design come from



Sunni Brown

CONTRIBUTOR

sunnibrown.com

Sunni Brown is the leader of The Doodle Revolution, and is attempting to debunk the myth that doodling is a distraction.

3 COMMENTS



[Leaper](#)

September 13, 2011 at 07:55

I've always been a fan of doodling. I think it is an essential part of the design process, it helps to visualise ideas and express the thought processes that would be otherwise impossible to express. Doodling is somewhat discouraged by the education system as it suggests that the person concerned is not concentrating or that their mind is elsewhere, however in the design world this can be exactly what is needed. Sometimes by tuning out the rest of the world and doodling whats in your head can bring about some of the best creative ideas.



[SirRawlins](#)

September 13, 2011 at 10:19

Hoorah!

I couldn't agree more. I'm a huge supporter of doodling and sketching ideas, I feel it transformed the quality of the work that we produced when we started using it in the early stages of the design process.

As children, we all draw, it's a fundamental part of our learning process, and one of the first ways we begin to explore and express our emotions and thoughts, it's something that everyone can do, and that everyone understands.

I think one of the main deterrents for many people is that fear of embarrassment, putting something that they perhaps consider 'artistic' in front of other people makes them feel vulnerable to criticism or ridicule.

What people should bare in mind, and this echos Sunni's ideas about the power of the simplest sketches, is that this is just about exploring simple ideas, you're not painting the Mona Lisa. Don't make the mistake of seeing the sketch as something too important, or a deliverable on the project, the sketch itself isn't even the important part, it's the thought process that you go through 'whilst' sketching that's the real benefit.

Robert



.net magazine on Facebook

5,904 people like .net magazine.

Duy Ćenda Sylvester Pat Ub

Joshua Richard Tom William Alberto

Facebook social plugin



It was due in large part to Sunni's material that influenced my thesis content for my Master in Fine Arts project at the Academy of Art: <http://braindoodles.net> ... Still have more to re-work, but she (along with Dave Gray and a few others) were the reason I wanted to make a site aimed at teaching high school students the art of sketching notes.

You need to login or [register](#) to post a comment

Username: *

Password: *

Log in

[Forgot username/password?](#)

Other .net sections

- [RSS](#)
- [Hosting directory](#)
- [Premium area](#)
- [Advertising enquiries](#)
- [Terms and Conditions](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)

Contact us

We love to get feedback, and we do our very best to answer every email accurately and promptly. If you've got an idea for an article that you'd like us to run, a product you'd like to pimp, or if you simply want to ask a question of the team – nothing kinky, mind – then drop us a line. Just click the link below. It really is that easy.

- [Contact us](#)

About .net

.net is the world's best-selling magazine for web designers and developers, featuring tutorials from leading agencies, interviews with the web's biggest names, and agenda-setting features on the hottest issues affecting the internet today.

- [Read more about us](#)
- [Subscribe to .net magazine](#)
- [Current issue of .net](#)

@netmag

What's everybody's favourite new CSS spec then? <http://t.co/VLP9G6Xh>
4:01PM Sep 20th via TweetDeck

[Retweet](#) [Reply](#) [Follow us](#)

Proud to be a member of the

