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Alanna Mehrtens

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Graphic Designers and Brain Surgeons
Both Highly Trained, Yet Not Interchangeable

The Creation of Promotion Materials for Springfest 2014

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Commonwealth Honors in Art

Bridgewater State University

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Prof. Ivana George, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

Graphic design and brain surgery. What do they have in common? Each person is trained in their profession. Each person is called upon for services that are needed for a specific reason. Common sense tells you to not perform brain surgery without the proper training. Why would that be any different for Graphic Design? Whereas most people would never attempt brain surgery, the average person seems more than willing to attempt creating Graphic Design, usually with poor results. Event branding is an example of where training in this profession is most beneficial. I was the Graphic Designer in charge of creating the branding needs for the week-long 2014 “Springfest” event for my clients, Matt Miller and Gianna Mazzola from the University’s student-run Program Committee. This required the creation of cohesive product design, frequent communication with the client, and a balance between client specifications and personal creative input. The goal was to design a fully realized brand system that would captivate the consumer and evoke the appropriate feel of the 2014 Springfest theme: Lego©.

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You would not want a graphic designer doing brain surgery, so why would you want a brain surgeon doing graphic design? Why is it that when someone needs marketing tools created for an event ranging from posters or menus, to yard sale signs, they feel that they can design something equally as effective as a trained Graphic Designer?

Graphic Design as a profession has become labeled as an art that “anyone can do.” With readily available “design” software and services, anyone with access to the software “Paint” or the Microsoft Office suite can turn a template into a “design” through minor manipulation. Additionally, design has become commonplace in our everyday life. The very room you are sitting in is probably filled with numerous examples such as application forms, fabric patterns, mouse pads, DVD and CD cases, websites, and package design. Due to our daily interactions with these commonplace objects, people may not fully comprehend the amount of labor that is involved in creating successful design. The average person believes that design is “easy” and “fast” because of the preconceived notion that the computer does the work.

Graphic Design manipulates the way the public perceives things, what they like and don’t like, and even what they choose to purchase. These perceptions are often created utilizing a complex visual language that everyone knows, but doesn’t necessarily speak. Graphic Designers are fluent in this language, which is why it takes many hours of labor to make a design look simple, cohesive, appealing and meaningful. Among other qualities, training in this language and the tools necessary to implement it separates trained designers from amateurs.

Event branding is an example of where proficiency in this language as a trained Graphic Designer is most beneficial. Branding plays a crucial role to the reception, memorability, and notoriety of an event. It is essential to the event’s success, as it offers a clear, uniform, distinctive message that ties the event together in a cohesive way. Through working with Program Committee in the spring 2014 semester, I was the Graphic Designer in charge of creating a brand for the week-long “Springfest” event, which required the development of a well thought out product design, frequent communication with the client, and striking a balance between client specifications and personal creative input. The end product was intended to be a fully realized brand system that would communicate the voice of the event to the target audience in an interesting and attractive way through the integration of set typefaces and imagery. My ultimate goal was to promote “Springfest” with visual language and have the attendees of the event see the designs and appreciate the playfulness and creativity of the brand. The following is a brief summary of the process of creating an event brand using visual language and how the client’s

attempt at translating that brand to additional promotional material was ineffective because they did not understand the usage of that language.

Concept Development

“Springfest” is a week-long series of events on the Bridgewater State University campus run yearly by ‘Program Committee’, ‘Student Government Association’, and other student organizations. While the “Carnival”, “Drive-in movie”, and Comedian Acts are traditional events that happen throughout the week, “Springfest” is also noted for yearly themes, which are coordinated with activity titles, decorations, and designs. My past membership in Program Committee, particularly as Director of Marketing in the 2012- 2013 academic year, allowed me the privilege to work as this year’s Graphic Designer for developing all visual branding material for Springfest 2014.

In January, I contacted Matt Miller, the advisor of Program Committee, to set up a meeting to discuss his advertising ideas for the upcoming Springfest event. On Friday, January 31st, I met with Matt Miller and Gianna Mazzola. There, a plan of action was developed and preliminary concepts were discussed. They informed me of this year’s Springfest theme and presented their ideas for the advertising campaign, establishing design criteria. Numerous marketing materials were mentioned which they anticipated to have developed for the event. These included the following:

- Springfest logo (corresponding to the theme)
- Two posters (one outlining the daily list of events, the other advertising the comedian event)
- Two T-Shirts (each with an individual back design and front pocket design)
- Facebook cover photo/other online promotion graphics
- Other additional marketing materials (Table tents, PowerPoint slide template, hand out schedule)

Matt and Gianna explained how they wanted the campaign to incorporate the colors Lego© Corporation uses for their toy bricks. A poster design was suggested, in which they envisioned stacked bricks on one side of the composition. As a Springfest logo, they proposed a parody of the Lego© logo, incorporating “BSU” in the Lego typeface. Jokingly, they asked if I could create a Lego© version of the school’s mascot, Bristaco, or even a Lego© version of the most iconic building on campus: Boyden Hall. I took these suggestions with serious

consideration, and wrote them down in my notes. I even drew a quick sketch of a Lego© Bristaco head, in which they responded with great enthusiasm.

It was now my job to take the client's ideas and suggestions and build them into a strong, compelling visual language.

Conceptual imagery must first be created for client review before moving forward into the design process. This will ensure that the

Graphic Designer will provide the client with appropriate imagery suiting their criteria.

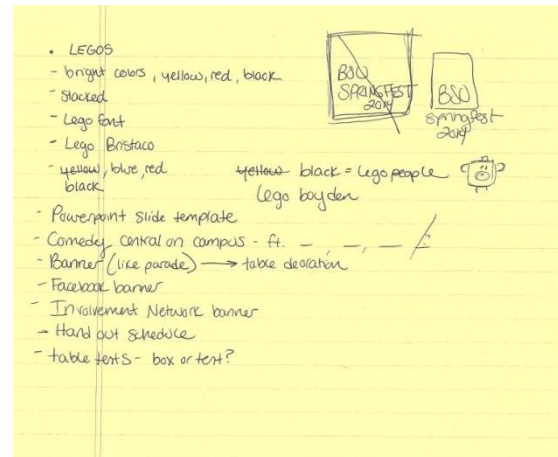


Fig. 1 – Meeting Notes

EVENT LOGO - LETTERING

My job was to translate the collective ideas into designer “comprehensive proofs” (comps). This consists of visual renderings of the proposed promotional material that meet the criteria established by the clients in the preliminary meeting. I decided to design the “BSU” Lego© logo first in order to provide the client with preliminary “comps” offering visual language expressing the broad feel of the anticipated event brand. The logo is one of the most important aspects of event branding, as it binds everything together. It has to be understood quickly, be noticed, and remembered by viewers.

I obtained the Lego© logo (see Fig. 2) in order to examine its unique qualities and visual language for replication in a satirical “copy”. The company’s logo encompasses a red square with a thin black stroke set behind a centered typographical form, which is comprised of tightly “kerned”, white, rounded letterforms spelling out the word “LEGO”. These letterforms are then enclosed by a black stroke that follows the contour of the outer edge of the



Fig. 2 – Lego Logo

characters. Another yellow stroke is set behind the black. Using these basic observations, I began to render a draft of the parodied logo on the computer. Although a Lego© typeface was available online, the letterforms were not consistent with the character of the official Lego© logo. Since utilization of that typeface would not result in a desirable look, I would have to “hand” render each letterform, or character.

A good place to start such a project is to create a digital template from which to build the letters around to ensure the utmost accuracy in the final hand-rendered product. I noticed that the official logo has letterforms built with very specific characteristics. The stem of the L, the vertical bar of the E, and the arms of the E feature a slightly bulbous shape which is wider in the center and tapers into a rounded closure.

The bottom loop inside the G and the counter inside the O feature narrowly curved, upwardly slanted arches. These are all specific characteristics that when put together as the logo for Lego®, has meaning and identity.

These details in the letterforms are all unique to the Lego® logo, not to be confused with the simple action of typing

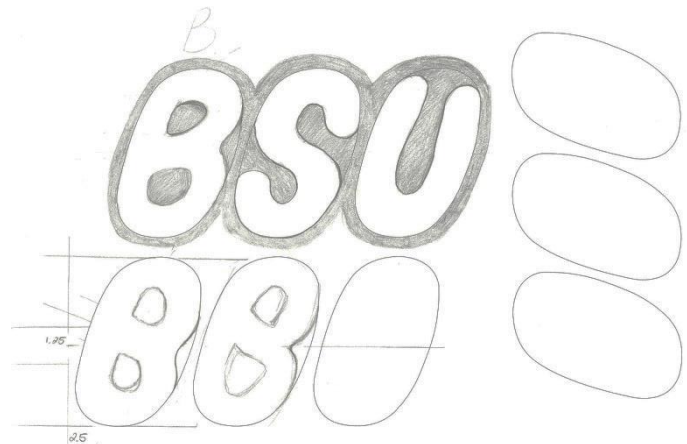


Fig. 3 – Logo: Hand Typography

in a font. I went forward and utilized these typographical characteristics in the hand rendered version of my letterforms for BSV (see Fig. 3). The shapes of the S and U were similar to the letterforms in the Lego® logo, so I was able to base their characteristics off of those forms. For example, the curves of the S were closely based on those of the Lego® G. The B was the most difficult letter to structure, as no letterform in the official Lego® logo consisted of any counters similar to those which appear inside the letter B. I drafted several versions of the B in order to convincingly render the counters. In the final drawing above those forms, I made the counters slope up, to keep a progressive feel to the logo, evident in the official Lego® mark. Even though hand rendering is a time consuming process, it resulted in the desired effect for the end product.

Once satisfied with the pencil sketch, the logo was ready to be rendered electronically. I scanned in the drawing and electronically hand traced the outlines of the letterforms with the pen tool in Adobe Illustrator, made minor corrections to the shapes and contours when necessary, then spaced them closely together to resemble the original Lego® logo. Rendering the black and yellow “strokes” behind the white letterforms was a time consuming digital process of manipulating vector shapes.

To finish off the logo, I added a registered trademark symbol above the upper right hand corner of the yellow vector in order to



Fig. 4 – Springfest Logo

emphasize the logo's satirical feel. The completed logo (see Fig. 4) will be easily recognized by the public, as it emphasizes joy, fun, and playfulness through its twist on a known visual icon. As evident from the lengthy process mentioned above, the resulting, simplistic logo consists of many qualities that may be overlooked.

LEGO© BRISTACO

Because the "BSU" Lego© logo alone would not accurately portray my concepts for the Springfest brand, I created an additional design to present to Matt and Gianna providing more insight into the imaginative possibilities of t-shirt and poster designs. For this additional design, I chose to construct the Lego© Bristaco that was mentioned in the preliminary meeting. Utilizing a character unique to the university would result in a distinctive personality to the event, which would heighten the consumer's willingness to purchase items branded as a way for them to remember their 2014 Springfest.

Unlike the logo, Lego© Bristaco was rendered completely on the computer. To begin, I acquired a "royalty free" template of a Lego© man piece and built upon that character in order to transform it into a bear. I utilized elements of an illustrative version of Bristaco I created previously (see "Flat Bristaco", Figure 5) in order to accurately render the mascot with his most recognizable features. Flat Bristaco's coloring, ears, teeth, fur, muzzle and nose were reused in Lego© Bristaco, and edited accordingly.



Fig. 5 – Flat Bristaco (at left) and Lego© Bristaco (at right)

Some aspects of Flat Bristaco would not transfer as easily, and were used more as inspiration for characteristics of Lego© Bristaco. I minimized his facial features, shirt, and shoes in order to emphasize a Lego© look. Lines were added to his pants, legs, and torso in order to suggest depth.

The completed character expresses a design unique to the university, and the event. Lego© Bristaco adds a recognizable, fun, and lighthearted element to the brand.

I then e-mailed Matt and Gianna the drafts of the “BSU” Lego© logo and the Lego© Bristaco illustration. They responded that same day with great satisfaction and asked me to move forward with the designs.

Design Development

Throughout the design process, I utilized principles of color, texture, graphics, and typestyle to evoke a well-defined, emotional, and psychological response to the Springfest brand. A great amount of time, trial, and error went into the development of these designs all in an effort to meet my client’s expectations.

In totality, the designs for Springfest consisted of four items; two t-shirts and two posters, which all had to be unified and relate to a Lego© theme. I created two t-shirt designs. The first t-shirt design resembles a Lego© piece, while the second shirt design resembles something that can be built from Lego© bricks. One poster resembles a Lego© package, while the second poster resembles the green board that the Lego© corporation includes with some of its toy kits as a base for building Lego© constructions.

T-SHIRTS

Each year, two t-shirt designs are produced to coordinate with the chosen Springfest theme. These are available for purchase throughout the week-long event. Unique designs specific to the university are normally created for the front and back of each garment, with two back designs offered. These shirts serve the function as a memento for students to take home from the event. They reflect the event’s theme and feel, as they will serve as reminders of the event and their college experience as a whole. Because of this, the designs must be appealing to the university audience. A consumer would not buy a shirt that they could not envision themselves wearing. Since t-shirt designs were not discussed in our preliminary meeting, I created two distinctive computer rendered designs for use on the t-shirts.

Lego© Bristaco

My playful Lego© Bristaco character seemed as though it would translate well into a t-shirt design. The design was not only appropriately proportioned for the back of a garment, but its distinctive character seemed to be something that the university audience would find appealing.

My first draft (see Figure 6) consisted of dynamic text conforming to Lego© Bristaco's static pose. I simplified the color choices from the original character design and experimented with alternate typefaces. Although I knew that the number of colors in this design would still be too numerous for printing costs, I wanted to send Matt and Gianna a draft of the design for approval before moving forward to completion.

Matt approved the design, and so my next step was to reduce the number of colors in the design making the t-shirt more affordable. I then created a yellow version of the t-shirt design without brown and grey, and with the addition of hatching lines (see Figure 7) above his shoes to create depth without adding a new color. They agreed that they preferred Lego©

Bristaco to be brown instead of yellow. As a result, I recolored him brown and utilized black for shading instead of dark brown. The design was finalized as a 5 color print.

The Lego© Bristaco t-shirt design has a strong sense of character through its combination of static and dynamic qualities. Since Lego© Bristaco looks straight out to the viewer, he gives off a dominant aura of "Here I am!" that Springfest embodies.

Lego© Boyden

Creating a Lego© version of Boyden Hall was an arduous process that required many



Fig. 7 – First edit (left) and final composition (right)

hours of traditional hand drawing before ever touching the computer. I believed that such a design would be unique, vibrant, and appealing to the university audience and I was enthusiastically determined to see it to completion. Seeing a known building rendered as an object most associate with childhood, would not only instill a sense of nostalgia - but create a “wow factor” which would encourage the university audience to purchase the unique designs.

Since the design process would undoubtedly require small details and numerous edits, I decided to hand draw the image, rather than rendering it solely on the computer. This may seem to be a conflict with the method one might imagine a designer to use, but for my purposes, and with the tools at my disposal, drawing the illustration with a pencil on paper would make for quicker and easier concept development.

I decided that the most efficient way to create the Lego© structure would be to find an image of Boyden, hand trace it, and then hand draw the building as if it were built from Lego©

bricks. Initially, I decided to use a wide angle shot of the building for the drawing but it was not the correct orientation to suit a t-shirt design (see Figure 8). Since the entirety of the building was depicted, the smaller pieces that comprised the structure became indecipherable.



Fig. 8 – Boyden Hall and accompanying sketch



Fig. 9 – From left: Boyden reference photo; Resulting contour sketch; End result

I searched for a narrower, taller, more distinguished image of Boyden Hall, something that I could use to showcase the intricacy of the building’s real architecture while allowing me to create a rendering of the building as if it were built from Lego© bricks. If someone were to view the design, I wanted them to say “If I were to build Boyden out of Lego© pieces, that is exactly how I’d do it!”

I found a more dramatic image that fit my criteria (see Figure 9). This image appealed to me because it featured all of the architectural elements of the building which I could render into an illustration that looks like distinguishable Lego© pieces.

I hand traced the photograph and then re-sketched each section of the building by hand to basically “re-build” the building with the appropriate Lego© pieces. I referenced the Lego© bricks from my personal Lego© set at home (which was very fun to play with during a break) as a visual guide for the individual bricks. I never physically constructed the building with my Legos©, but I did use the bricks as visual guides.

My completed drawing consisted of a detailed rendering of a Lego© version of Boyden Hall. The Lego© tree that would eventually occupy the space in the lower right hand part of the composition was added in later on the computer. I decided to opt toward the classic, nostalgic pine tree that was included in the sets that most of the college students probably possessed during their childhood.

I then inked over my pencil drawing so that it would scan into a digital copy. With a goal of creating design that would be ready for out sourcing to print t-shirts, I used the Adobe Illustrator tool “live trace.” This turns bitmaps into vectors, making my hand rendered drawing a solid outline or “trap” in vector digital language. At this point, I added color throughout the design to create visual sensibilities and excitement.

Throughout the additive coloring process, I referenced the physical Lego© pieces again in order to achieve the closest color. I incorporated yellow and blue bricks into the building’s façade. This alludes to every child’s Lego© dilemma of always running out of the color you need in order to complete a project. Before my drawing was complete, I edited portions of the line drawing itself to clean up harsh edges and mistakes.

The final image consisted of 8 colors. After Matt and Gianna approved the design, I reduced the number of colors by eliminating all of the greys completely and replacing them with hatching lines to emphasize depth. This is the same process I went through when finalizing the Bristaco design. (see Figure 10).

I then sent Matt and Gianna the revised comps of the t-shirt designs. After one quick fix for the removal of a remaining grey vector in the Boyden design, each design was finalized as 5 color prints.

Lego© Boyden was a complex design, which took many hours to create. At times it was very frustrating, but knowing how well received it was going to be made the work enjoyable. My hope was that viewers would appreciate finding the hidden nuances within the design.

Throughout the event, I received positive feedback from fellow students about how much they liked the image. The “wow factor” was met!

POSTERS

My goal was to design two distinctive posters, one that would promote the Springfest event itinerary and another specifically for the comedian event. My goal was to create visual language that would convey a sense of joy, playfulness, and celebration without seeming too

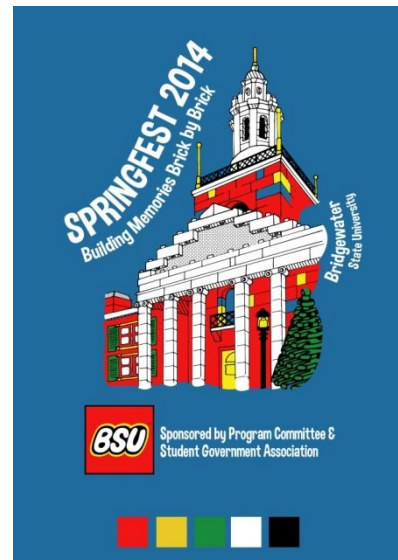


Fig. 10 – Final Draft: Boyden

childish, while motivating students to attend Springfest.

Event Poster

The event poster is utilized to spread the word and excite the public about the upcoming “Springfest” event. My approach was to begin the design development of the 2014 Springfest brand with the creation of several drafts of the event poster. Through those preliminary designs, I was able to establish the feel of the brand. The poster became an initiator for my creative inspiration from which all accompanying designs, such as the t-shirts, would develop. Because Legos® are considered a child’s toy, it took many electronic renderings to arrive at an age appropriate, eye-catching, functional design. This extensive process led to a design that nicely incorporated all aspects of the event brand.

I researched different Lego® package designs on Google in order to get inspiration for the poster. Figure 11 depicts the package that inspired the layout for my poster idea. The area in the middle of the design afforded enough room for the event itinerary and the logos in the lower right corner were effectively placed.

With further visual investigation into the Lego® box design, I realized that most Lego® packaging features a portion of the image of the toy overlapping the peripheral shape. To add a subtle hint in regards to the Lego® packaging in my poster design, I included a digitally hand-drawn vector silhouette of Boyden which projected beyond the upper margin. While the building is subtle in the background, attention is drawn to it through its penetration of the yellow border. The addition of Boyden was also a fitting tie in to the t-shirt designs.

Figure 12 depicts the final draft of the event flyer. This version fits the amount of event information cohesively, and is an appropriate



Fig. 11 – Lego © DC Comics Super Heroes



Fig. 12 – Event Poster: Final Draft

combination of the more modern design aspects of the Lego® Super Heroes box with the nostalgic colors of traditional Lego® packaging. The upward angle of the yellow header adds excitement, while the straight yellow footer at the bottom grounds the composition. I added a few loose Lego® bricks to reiterate the “Lego®” theme, and Lego® Bristaco is placed in the bottom left hand corner, much like the figurines featured on the Lego® Super Heroes box. For an added touch, I included a “Warning” label, which indicated an “Excitement Hazard: Many events. Not for people who do not like fun”.

I chose the typeface “Dimbo” for its playfulness, legibility, and capacity to convey childhood reminiscence without being overtly childish. I also used subtle differences in typography that are used in the official Lego® packaging, expressing the same hierarchal communication of information in the event title and tagline. All the information in the itinerary portion was also arranged in a hierarchal manner through the incorporation of color. This allows the reader the easiest and fastest access to the information.

In order to further heighten the believability of the “box”, I parodied the age range, part number, and product information on the left of the box to suit the event information. The event poster’s theme as a box was comparable as a metaphor to the poster’s literal incorporation of every aspect of the week-long event: from descriptions of the individual happenings to the visual elements included in the design. The entire event was showcased in the poster, packaged into visual shorthand.

Comedian Poster

The second poster that had to be created was an advertisement promoting the comedian event. This poster would serve as a supplement to the event poster, in that the audience should recognize the event brand and connect it to the other marketing materials. I received imagery, fonts, logos, and other marketing materials provided by the Comedians’ agent. In order to ensure complacency with both Program Committee and the Comedians’ agent, I decided to preserve the basic layout of the provided poster from the agent, while adding a few minor design elements in order to

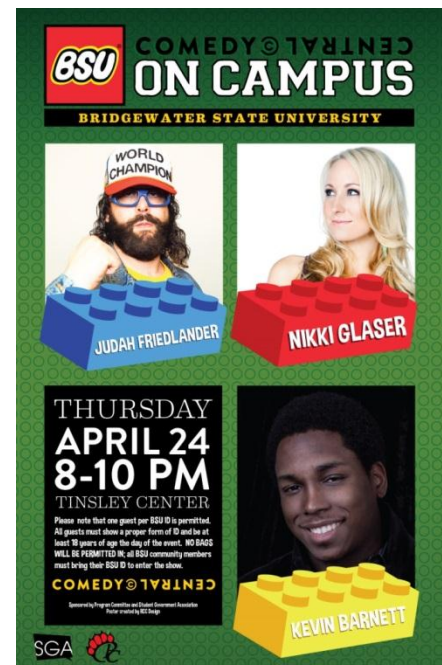


Fig. 13 – Comedian Poster: Final Draft

uphold the event's brand.

The agent's template provided locations for each performer's headshot, so I positioned them accordingly. The "Comedy Central on Campus" logo that was provided was surprisingly not of high quality, so I had to find another image of their logo and re-trace it.

I chose to design the background of the poster to resemble the green Lego® boards from which Lego® buildings and other constructs are typically built on. To add dimension to the image of the board, I positioned a gradient at the top and bottom of the composition. This creates rhythm, making the composition feel balanced.

In the template, a box was provided below each headshot location to allow for a biography of the performer. Since no such biographies were provided (or needed, as Matt reassured) I decided to replace the square areas with Lego® bricks to display the performers' names. The bricks emphasize color and add balance to the piece. The blue Lego® brick below Judah Friedlander's image increased the prominence of his blue glasses. Similarly, the red brick below Nikki Glaser highlights her pink lips. The same yellow and red brick vectors featured below the comedians' images are also utilized in the event poster.

Various colored bricks were placed in particular locations so that they optimized balance and viewer interest in the composition. Careful consideration was given to the balance of the white and black spaces in the squares, equalizing my composition.

I e-mailed Matt the newest drafts of the event poster and the comedian poster. That same day, Matt replied to my message and suggested minor alterations. I made all the changes that same day and e-mailed Matt the native file for each design along with all necessary font files.

A couple days after sending the completed files to Matt, I spoke with Gianna regarding a problem the printing company had experienced with the comedian poster file, in that it was "broken". Upon reading the e-mail from SilverScreen, they had actually said that the links in the file were broken, which is not the same as a broken file. This was a quick problem to solve, and I sent the printing company an e-mail with the native file with all the images embedded rather than linked. I also sent the original JPEGs I that used separately, in case the embedded links malfunctioned.

Amateur Design Manipulation

Now that I have given a brief overview of the design process, the following is an example of what happens when a trained Graphic Designer is not used for a project like promoting

Springfest. A Facebook cover photo and a handout had been discussed with Matt and Gianna in my preliminary meeting. I reached out to them on numerous occasions to discuss their criteria, but received no reply. I assumed that they no longer wanted to pursue those ideas. However, I later discovered that someone else had obviously altered my designs for that purpose.

Figure 14 depicts the image that was created for Program Committee's Facebook page. Because the typeface used in the table is not Dimbo, the brand of the event is lost. The colors used in the table are inappropriate and do not coordinate with the established color scheme. Also, the horizontal placement of the table does not complement the diagonal motion of

the yellow header. Additionally, they did not eliminate the white background behind the SGA logo. All the important information is lost due the scale and placement of the event date. When the image was implemented on the Facebook page, it was cropped because the dimensions of the image were not proportionate to the requirements of a cover photo. The cover photo should have been solely imagery with the title and date of the event.



Fig. 14 –Design edited by Program Committee



Fig. 15 –Handout created by Program Committee: Front (Left) and Back (Right)

Figure 15 is a scanned copy of the handout that was created by Program Committee for distribution before Springfest. The bottom yellow margin was cropped out, eliminating any sense of ground in the composition. The typography on the front of the handout does not fit the

itinerary comfortably, as the lettering is too close to the margins of the design. The white background was not eliminated around the Comedy Central logo on the back of the handout, and a different typeface was again implemented, which does not coordinate with the established brand. The image of the comedian is placed rather statically in the upper right hand corner. A white shape could have been added at the top of the image to make its shape mirror that of the yellow margin.

Feedback

Throughout the event, the university population has enjoyed the subtle anecdotes that I included in the event poster, such as the warning label. Matt said that this year's poster was his favorite event poster to date, and an alumni of the university mentioned that the shirts were one of her favorite designs for Springfest. When I am asked about the design process, I stress the handmade



Fig. 16 –Selling T-Shirts



Fig. 17 –Cutout Lego © Bristaco

quality of the logo and the time it took to make Lego© Boyden. This information was oftentimes followed by surprise, as it is generally assumed that such a logo was created using an established typeface. Program Committee has also utilized a cutout of Lego© Bristaco for promotion of the locations of the upcoming events around campus (see Fig. 17). All designs were met with great enthusiasm, but Lego© Boyden was appreciated most of all.

Closing Thoughts

It takes a great deal of research, time, and trial and error to create an effective, cohesive, visual language to communicate an event brand. This project offered me the learning environment to work with a client in order to create designs for successful promotional materials. It was a rewarding experience that allowed me to apply my training in a real world scenario. I enjoyed the challenge that the Lego© theme presented. Looking forward to my future career as a graphic designer, I hope that more people will be open to the advantages of using a trained professional. Don't let a brain surgeon make your event poster!