



JESS SAND

Roughstock Studios

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Roughstock Studios is a San Francisco-based communications studio serving independently-minded organizations. The studio, a San Francisco-certified Green Business, is the solo practice of writer/designer Jess Sand. Sand helps organizations communicate more effectively with audiences by developing messages that engage on the individual level and inspire measurable action. Services include communications planning, copywriting, graphic design, and general problem-solving.

Why did your firm become interested in environmentally friendly graphic design? One of my very first jobs included ad layout for a magazine, and in the midst of churning out these quarter-page ads for local businesses, I found myself laying out an ad for a liposuction clinic. I had a visceral reaction to this. My personal values lean toward the anti-establishment, the feminist, the progressive. I immediately knew I would have to find a balance between the commercial side of design and my own personal values if I was going to sleep at night. I don't separate environmental responsibility from social responsibility, since people and our systems are as much a part of nature as forests or climate issues; this kind of integrated approach to design really just became a survival tactic for me.

Has there been a client or internal project or initiative of which you are especially proud?

I'm extremely excited about my current collaboration with designers Eric Benson and Yvette Perullo. We recently launched Re-nourish.com, a practical, accessible sustainable design resource created for designers by designers. As far as I know, Re-nourish is the only site of its kind available to print designers — our goal is nothing short of changing the industry. The site breaks down these complex issues around sustainability, the environment and social impact, and translates them into practical, science-based tools designers can use in their daily work. I'm also writing a book about responsible green marketing, based on a short introductory guide I designed for San Francisco's Small Business Week. It started out as an audience handout, and the interest was strong enough that I converted it into a PDF e-guide. Readers can download it for free here: <http://www.keepingitrealgreenguide.com>

Does 'Green' help you in your sales and marketing efforts to keep or gain new clients?

Even as simple-minded crowdsourcing is driving the base of the design pyramid, there are more and more companies that recognize the value of a systemic approach to business communications, and are seeking out service providers with a background in sustainable

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design processes. So the fact that I can provide that kind of expertise and access to both theory and practical application is definitely important to my client base. But the key is to find a way to talk about it in a way that draws people in. I use a pretty irrelevant approach on my website to describe the steps I take operationally, as well as what I can offer clients (www.roughstockstudios.com/sustainability.html). I try to act as a guide or host, rather than to get up on a soapbox and demand that everyone change their ways "or else." Clients seem to appreciate this, because most of them are just trying to wrap their heads around the issue.

As a practical matter, is the recession making it harder for you or your clients to be green? If we treat environmental issues as separate from the design itself, then it can be more expensive to essentially "tack on" green decisions after the fact. And while that might be perfectly acceptable to some clients, when cash flow is an issue this approach obviously no longer works. However, if you begin a project with the understanding that environmental responsibility is a design component as important as, say, usability, then it's really not difficult or costly to integrate greener decision making into the process.

Design for a Change.

