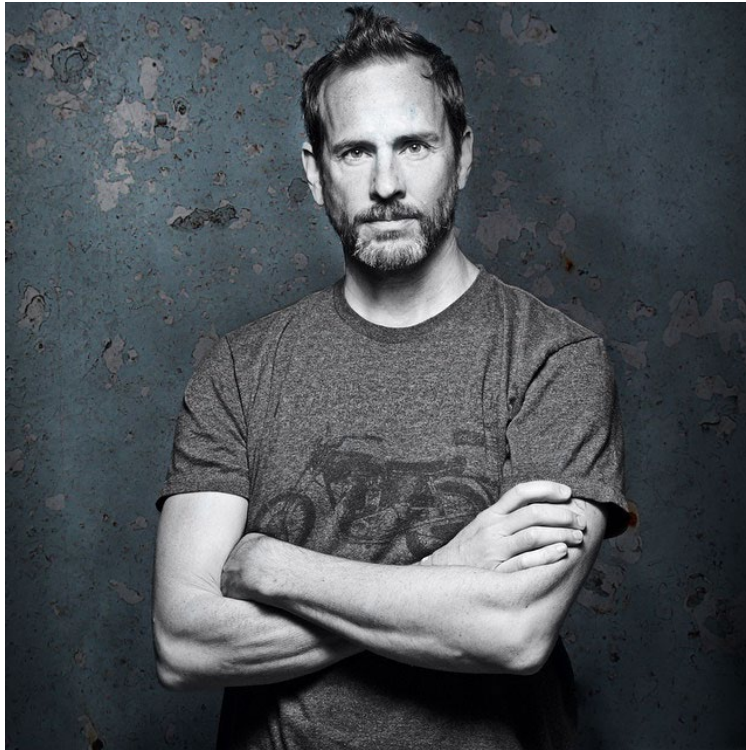


SPOTLIGHT – A Day in the Life of a Graphic Designer

Michael Duff, Owner, Duffweb Online Marketing Agency

Erica Falke, Creative Director & Lead Designer, Duffweb Online Marketing Agency



Michael is the owner of Duffweb, a full-service online marketing agency with clients who do over \$250 million in annual sales, creating high-traffic responsive websites and digital marketing campaigns and take pride in making their clients look like Rock Stars. Duffweb is based in New York City.

Michael started his career with a formal education in Marketing, Economics, and Design, and his constant desire for self-improvement has him constantly striving to surpass his goals as a modern CEO, Co-Founder and Board Member. Here's what we learned from our interview with Michael...

Michael was initially trained as a photographer and developed a knack for using and trusting the visual aspects of color, patterns and other elements of design. After taking some design classes, he found another love and branched from photography into graphic design.

He built his design chops on creating high-end websites for well-known corporate clients and considers design the ultimate in problem solving. He said his success in design has a lot to do with the time he spends with his clients before the work starts, learning about their vision, what they want to accomplish, what "problem" they are trying to solve. From this, Michael and his team can put that vision and those desires into a design – to communicate a solution visually.

He embraces design and truly enjoys every aspect of the design process. For all his clients, he tries to create the "most elegant design that is also the most efficient" – something that is both visually

appealing to the eye, as well as effective in generating the desired action in the observer. “It’s the ultimate goal of a graphic designer,” he says.

Michael has perfected his style by finding what he’s good at, what works for his clients, and is always working to improve his skills.

- Here’s what Michael has learned from his work in graphic design:
 - This is a fast-moving industry. A designer always needs to train and work on his or her skills. You need to always be improving to stay ahead.
 - He, like David Brier, has been surprised to see so much design work that seems to misunderstand the basic goals of design. A designer not only needs to understand and know his skill, but he also needs to know people and what moves them to action.
- Michael’s advice for anyone interesting in pursuing a career in graphic design:
 - If design is what you love, design and don’t let anyone talk you out of it. Be creative, freelance to learn and find your direction, and show off your work!
 - Since you are here reading about pursuing something you love, you are already leaps and bounds above others who aren’t.
 - Design should be exciting to you and make you feel more alive.

Since 2013, Michael’s right hand is his Creative Director, Erica Falke. And though Erica lives in Florida, they have found a synergy in working together, each focusing on what they are best at.

Erica’s story is a little different, of course, as all stories are. Erica studied art in college and found a love in graphic design, honing her craft while working in marketing. She decided to pursue web design on her own, studying [HTML](#), [CSS](#) and Photoshop. When given the chance to leave her “day job” she took advantage of it and made a decision to pursue her true love: graphic design.



Always drawn to logos, advertisements and brand development, Erica started creating posters, billboards, flyers, banners, newsletters, event tickets along with doing the photography, video, website and online marketing work for two companies in Las Vegas. Now, as the Creative Director of Duffweb, she gets to apply all her skills in web design, logos, web and social media marketing and loves what she does every day.

An on-going curiosity for more design knowledge is an exciting aspect of Erica's work and she says, "Every day, I am excited to get up and go to work!"

With a new client, her first action is to take the client's vision and dive into researching that vision. She mentioned a recent client who wanted a "classic and modern" design. So, Erica researched "classic" to find inspiration and design ideas and did the same with "modern". In the end, she said she was able to put all those pieces together to create a design the client loved.

She also regularly seeks out industry trends through web searches, blogs, podcasts – always on the lookout for her next design inspiration.

- Here are a few things Erica told us about her career in graphic design:
 - Immerse yourself in graphic design! Trends are coming and going so fast that you need to love and enjoy the entire process. Adopt and adapt to the newest technology. Many times, just looking is studying. Look at the products around you that incorporate graphics (signs, magazines, books, email marketing, Facebook ads, websites) to find ideas and inspiration. You'll also see what is currently trending (popular).
 - When starting a new project find your vision first. You need a clear idea of where you are going before you start designing. You need to understand fully what elements will make your design perfect (to you and the client) and then work to create that. Research what already exists within in the same subject. If you are doing a cover for a travel magazine, you would look at other travel magazines to see what other designers have been doing in that area, and let your vision inspire you to create your own truly original design. I do sketches before I start designing in software programs like Photoshop, Illustrator or Indesign. I find it easier to work out my ideas on paper first.
 - In order to make money designing, your design needs to be effective for the client. You definitely need to know what the client wants to accomplish with the design and what problem they are trying to solve. Obviously, it needs to be a design that you are 100% proud of. But, knowing the clients wants and needs and finding ways to accomplish those has to be a top priority. For example, if the client wants his business to be seen as "cool and hip" but a look at their website communicates "cold and boring", your job as a designer is to find and use the colors, layouts, fonts, text, and all available graphic elements to create a visual arrangement to change their cold and boring to hip and cool. These are the fun daily challenges of being a graphic designer.
- Erica's advice to you:
 - Be your biggest fan! This is SOOOOO important. When you love what you create, you want to keep doing it because it's fun. All projects are different and have their own challenges. Keep working on your design until you love it. And when the client doesn't love it – which happens all the time – take their criticisms as a challenge to make the needed changes while still loving it yourself in the end.
 - Study, study, study! Keep up with the current design trends. For example, if you are interested in web design, read web design magazines and blogs and listen to podcasts. Subscribe and check out web design channels on YouTube. Be a sponge for everything that's going on in the specific area of design you're into. Do this whether you are interested in web design, [surface pattern design](#), logo design, or any other design specialty. Internet research is free training! Take an online class and work your skills at home. Get your portfolio started and get your first client. Online site www.fiverr.com is

a great place to build your portfolio and hone your skills while you are picking up clients in your chosen specialty.

Michael has built the life and career that is perfect for him, one where he can also pursue his love of music by performing with his rock band **Chalk Farm**. He's happy and obviously thrilled with his career in graphic design. Visit www.duffweb.com to learn more about his work and follow him on social media.

Erica clearly loves her life and her work. You can see her work at www.duffweb.com also. See her personal portfolio at www.iamdrexel.com and find her on social media. You can email her at Erica@duffweb.com.

Erica, you are an inspiration!! Michael, you ROCK!! Thank you both!