Want to maximize your earning potential as a graphic designer? Be a man with 20-plus years of experience in the field, working as a creative director at a design firm in San Francisco. That’s according to the results of HOW’s 2004 Design Salary Survey. Between June 8 and July 12, we conducted an online survey at HOWdesign.com, asking creatives to give us the scoop on their salaries, bonuses and benefits. The response to our questionnaire was unexpectedly robust: 3,494 people answered the questions. (By contrast, 523 people responded to our 2002 survey, which was printed and bound into an issue of the magazine. The 2004 AIGA/Aquent Survey of Design Salaries drew 3,660 responses, both by mail and online.) The sampling error is plus or minus 2.1%.

HOW’s survey offers a snapshot of designers’ paychecks in the U.S. Here’s what we found:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>National Average Annual Salary</th>
<th>National Average Salary Increase (in the past 12 months)</th>
<th>National Average Cash Bonus (in the past 12 months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>$43,892</td>
<td>$2,477</td>
<td>$1,722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>$40,391</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>$39,521</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>$44,793</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>$51,795</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>$57,071</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Ah, yes … this is what you’ve come for: The national average salary among our nearly 3,500 creatives is $43,329 (not including bonuses). The numbers shown below represent average salary data from our 20th annual survey of the creative job market, conducted during the last six months of 2005 and the first six months of 2006. A survey was completed by 3,458 respondents working as designers, art directors, creative directors, principal/partner/owners, senior designers, entry-level designers, production artists and web designers.

**WHO ARE THEY?**

Of the nearly 3,500 respondents, more than half (59%) are female. A majority (79%) have a design and/or art degree, primarily from a four-year program. The average respondent is 31 years old, and she’s been a practicing professional in graphic design for nearly 7½ years.

The largest segment (27%) of survey participants indicated that their job title is designer. Another 20% told us they’re senior designers, and 15% are art directors. Just 9% called themselves principal/partner/owner; 10% are entry-level designers or production artists. On average, respondents have been employed by their current companies for 3½ years. And most of them do not supervise other staff.

**WHERE DO THEY WORK?**

If you work for an in-house design department—for a corporation, a university or an organization—you’re with the majority of HOW survey respondents. More than half (57%) are inside creatives, primarily working for large companies. Employees of design firms made up 17% of participants; freelancers accounted for 15%. Another 11% work for ad agencies.

Geographically, our sample of designers was fairly evenly balanced. Just under a quarter of respondents live in each of these regions: South, Northeast (excluding New York City), West (excluding San Francisco) and North Central. A small percentage of the group lives in New York City (7%) and San Francisco (4%) metro areas.

**WHAT DO THEY EARN?**

Yes, this is what you’ve come for: The national average salary among our nearly 3,500 creatives is $43,329 (not including bonuses or benefits). Because the number of respondents this year is so much larger than in 2002, we’ll refrain from blanket statements about trends in salaries over the past two years. But we will make a few comparisons.

According to our survey, the older you are and the longer you’ve been in the field, the more you make. Also unsurprising is that the gender gap in salary that exists in most professions holds true in design, as well: Men in our survey earn an average $45,988 and women earn $41,471.

The safest strategy to follow whenever you’re being interviewed for a job is to play it conservatively and to be careful not to do anything that might create concern in the mind of the person making the hiring decision that if the strategy is sound as it seems, it isn’t getting the results you want, here are 10 steps to take that your competition won’t be taking. (Bear in mind that none of these tactics will work if you try to implement them in a forced, unnatural way.)

Take your time when you enter. Make a conscious effort when you first walk into the interviewer’s office not to rush things. Pause at the door to make sure that the interviewee is ready for you. Take 5 seconds to look around and acclimate yourself when you enter the office. After you and the interviewer greet one another and shake hands, take your time when settling yourself into the chair. By taking things a little slower, you appear more poised and professional.

Ask the first question. It’s usually the interviewer’s place to ask the first question during a job interview, but there’s no law forbidding you to take the initiative. A simple question, such as, “What’s been the reaction to your new ad campaign?” establishes right from the start that you know something about the company, and it can get the interviewer to reveal needs and concerns that you can capitalize on later in the interview.

Don’t be afraid to be yourself. Assuming for the moment that you have no blatant personality flaws that would knock you out of contention for a job, be careful not to do anything that might create concern in the mind of the person making the hiring decision that if the strategy is sound as it seems, it isn’t getting the results you want, here are 10 steps to take that your competition won’t be taking. (Bear in mind that none of these tactics will work if you try to implement them in a forced, unnatural way.)

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In-house designers have more retirement benefits—includ- ing pension plans, employer-matching 401(k) programs and employee stock-ownership plans. Their health-insurance coverage is better: 91% of in-house respondents have fully or partially paid health insurance, while 78% of design firms in the survey offer the same. By a wide margin, more in-housers reported additional benefits like life insurance; short- and long-term disability policies; prescription drug, vision and dental plans; tuition assistance and family-leave programs. What’s more, in-house creatives were more likely to have received a raise in the previous 12 months than their peers in design shops. But the agency folks can take heart: Their rais- es were about $1800 fatter than on the corporate side. And de- sign firms were more likely to award bonuses to their staffers. Freelancers, not surprisingly, miss out on benefits almost entirely: 84% reported no retirement benefits, 78% reported no paid health insurance of any kind, and 46% reported no additional perks.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOU?
If the results of our 2004 Design Salary Survey are any indica- tion, life is good on the inside—in corporate design depart- ments, that is. While organizations typically offer lower base salaries than independent design shops, they seem to make up for the difference in better raises and a broader array of benefits. If you’re not that man with 20-plus years of experience in the field, working as a creative director at a design firm in San Francisco, you may feel your salary isn’t up to par. In that case, familiarize yourself with the trends reported here (keeping in mind that this, like all salary surveys, is a repre- sentative picture; you need to consider your own unique job situation). And brush up on your negotiation skills. That San Francisco guy had to work just as hard to get where he is. now

Bryn Mooth is HOW’s editor; www.howdesign.com. The Creative Group is a specialized staffing service placing creative professionals. TC&G is HOW’s official career resource; www.creativegroup.com.

In addition to evaluating your own value, take into account the standing of current salaries for your position. What are others with your skills and expertise being paid? Talk to colleagues and industry group members to get an idea of what people are earning in your field. Keep in mind that salaries will vary significantly based on factors such as geographic area and company size, so try to locate information that addresses these considerations.

Research, research, research. Be sure you have a solid under- standing of current salaries for your position. What are others with your skills and expertise being paid? Talk to colleagues and recruiters, and review compensation surveys, government data and design-industry reports for insights on pay levels in your field. Adequate preparation and the right mindset can go a long way in achieving a fair deal. Research your marketability, evaluate the organization’s financial record and enter the discussions willing to compromise. You’ll increase your chances for successful salary negotiations in any economic environment.

WHERE DO YOU WORK?

WHICH TYPES OF RETIREMENT PLANS AND BENEFITS DOES YOUR COMPANY OFFER?

In-house or corporate design department 57%
Design firm 15%
Full-time freelancer, independent designer or solo practitioner 17%
Advertising agency 11%

SALARY NEGOTIATION

TIPS FOR TODAY’S MARKET

BY THE CREATIVE GROUP

Salary negotiation is a process few people look forward to. Even the most confident creative professionals can feel a little uncomfortable bringing up the subject with a manager when a job offer doesn’t meet expectations or current compensation isn’t competitive. They often fear that a supervisor will be of- fended and that career prospects can be harmed as a result of asking for more money.

Salary negotiation may seem like a risky proposition, but you owe it to yourself to try if you feel you’re being offered less than you’re worth. Your salary is often used to determine other benefits that may be negotiable (when money isn’t). Be active. Always remain professional throughout your dis- cussions with a manager. If you’re told there’s no room for ne- gotiation due to budget considerations, you might ask if the subject of compensation could be addressed again in three to six months. If the manager does concede to new terms when you first join a company, be sure the details of the arrangement are confirmed in your letter of agreement.

Adequate preparation and the right mindset can go a long way in achieving a fair deal. Research your marketability, evaluate the organization’s financial record and enter the discussions willing to compromise. You’ll increase your chances for suc- cessful salary negotiations in any economic environment.

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WHICH TYPES OF RETIREMENT PLANS AND BENEFITS DOES YOUR COMPANY OFFER?

In-house Design Firm

Pension plan
20% 7%
401(k)
27% 22%
401(k) w/employer match
58% 25%
Profit-sharing
14% 16%
ESOP
16% 7%
Fully paid health premiums
29% 33%
Partially paid health premiums
62% 45%
Life insurance
76% 34%
Short-term disability
66% 25%
Long-term disability
57% 19%
Vision insurance
61% 26%
Dental insurance
83% 47%
Prescription drug coverage
72% 44%
Education/tuition assistance
50% 16%
Family/medical leave
64% 29%
Section 125 flex benefit plan
32% 7%
Other
5% 11%
What’s the difference between a career coach and a career counselor? Counselors offer objective assessments to determine ... the life you want, and developing a strategy to get there,” says Cheryl Sinclair, principal of Dancing Star Coaching (life coach in Breckenridge, CO, suggests areas to ask about: fees, guarantees, your coach’s availability outside sessions, and any “homework” required. Fees generally range from $250 to $500 a month, but you might buy two 30-minute sessions at the low end and up to four one-hour sessions at the high end. Clients typically meet with coaches for three to six months.

While a career coach can help professionals overcome a variety of hurdles, working with one also requires a monetary investment. As with any investment, you’ll want to research all the options before making a commitment. If you decide to seek the assistance of a coach, be sure that he or she is highly qualified and you have a strong rapport. By working with someone supportive and knowledgeable, you may be able to make your next career play one of your best yet.

### WHAT TO EXPECT

*Your career coach will be your ‘success partner’, the one person who cares as much as you do about your agenda for achieving your career goals,” Montford says. “It is the responsibility of the coach to hold your agenda safe and hold you accountable to it. A skilled coach will be able to flex their communication style to meet that of their client. While your executive clients appreciate my aggressiveness, I can also take a gentler approach if they prefer. In coaching, it’s all about the client.”

The changes Anita Martin encountered come from a new way of thinking brought about by the coach’s probing and challenging questions. This method is so much a part of the arsenal of coaching that “Powerful Questioning,” defined as “questions that evoke discovery, insight, commitment or action,” is one of the 11 core competencies required for certification by the ICF.

Larry Hillman (Larry@coachinginc.com) of Coaching Inc. in San Francisco, an advisory board member for The Webby Awards and an adjunct instructor with The Graduate School of Coaching (www.graduateschoolofcoaching.com), uses a variation called the “Five Questions” to teach his creative clients how to communicate their skills and differentiate themselves.

FINDING COMPATIBILITY

Of course, the training or experience of your coach isn’t going to matter if you just don’t “click” with a person. That’s why most coaches offer a 30- to 60-minute free consultation to see how well you work together.

Larry might respond with the following questions:

- **What are you best at?**
- **Why is that your strength?**
- **Who is that important to in the marketplace?**
- **How are you different from other designers approaching the same clients?**

The answers can reveal how the creative should position himself or herself to attract the type of clients he or she wants.