

Research

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the role of research in the visual design process. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

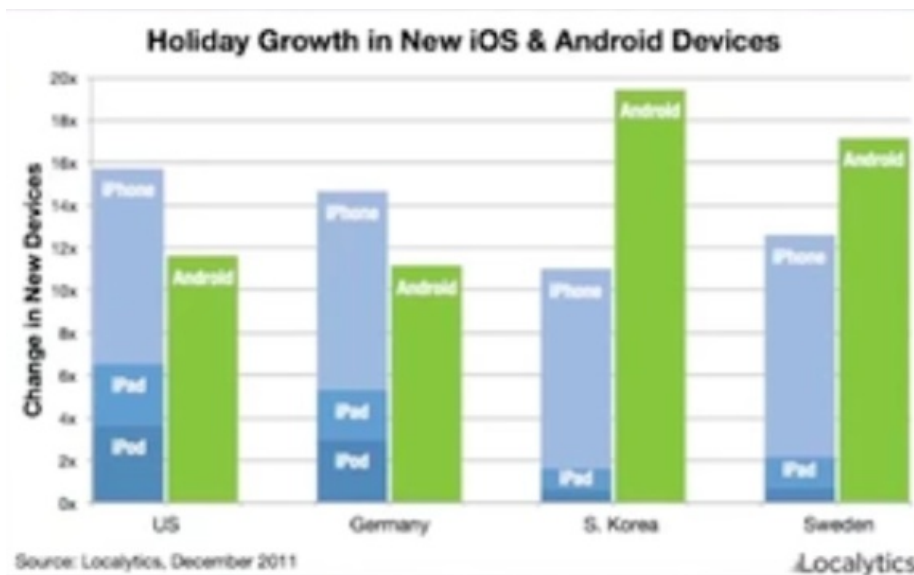
1. Market Research

Market research is a process of gathering information about a company's competition and potential customers.

Market research helps designers plan by figuring out what their competition is offering or doing, what a customer base wants or likes, and where the market trends are heading.

The simple charts below show average app downloads for both iOS (iPhone) and Android phones, as well as device activation and growth on both platforms during the 2011 Christmas holiday.





This is important data to consider because prior to 2011, it would have been easy to assume you could simply design for one platform, given that iPhones were the main market trend at the time. However, market research now shows you otherwise, as both iOS and Android platforms remain competitive and worth pursuing in the eyes of customers.

IN CONTEXT

Your friend Mario was asked to participate in a focus group held for Netflix. He was invited to come into their headquarters and look through various designs for their ads, interface, and even the envelopes received in the mail by DVD subscribers.

As part of this focus group, Mario answered questions such as:

"Which one of these interfaces is easier to navigate and why?"

"Is this ad effective? Why or why not?"

"Is this envelope effective and easy to use, yes or no?"

As a designer, company, or organization, it's valuable to know which types of designs are most effective.



TERM TO KNOW

Market Research

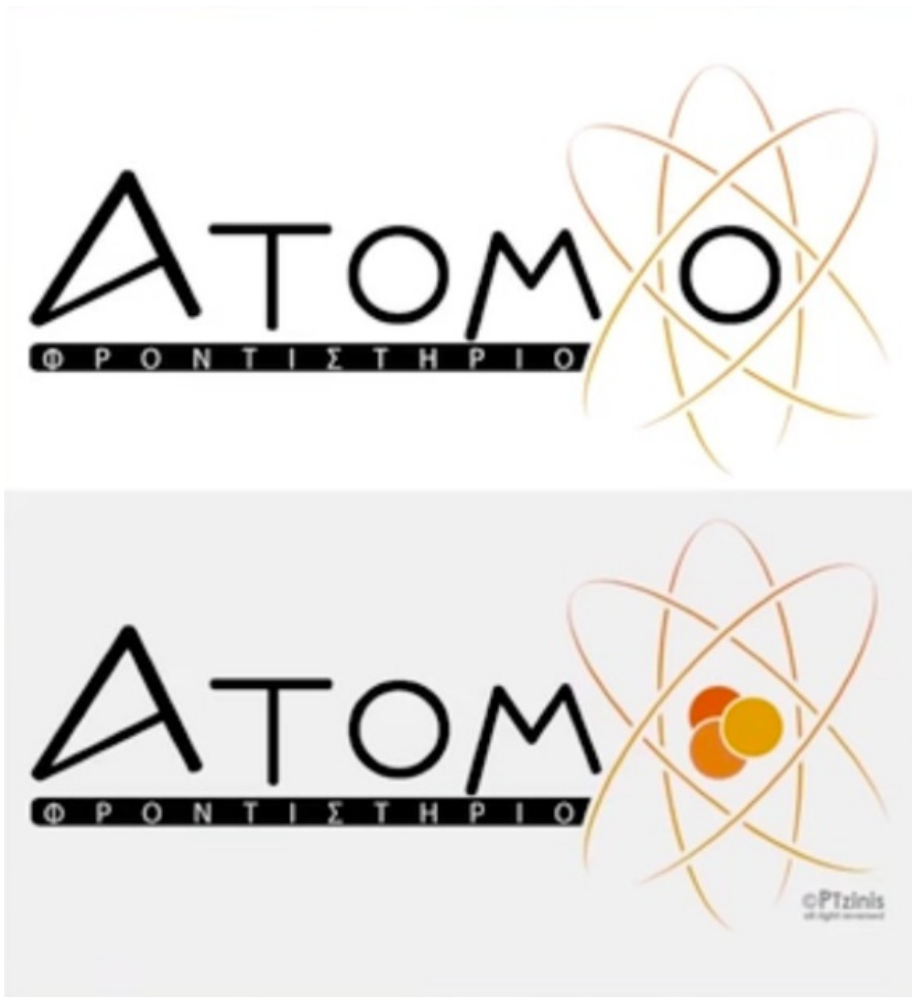
The process of gathering information about a company's competition and potential customers.

2. Visual Audit

A specific process of market research is called a **visual audit**. This is research done through surveys or focus groups to help establish a business' brand value.

Companies and organizations will set up focus groups where people, often members of the general public, can provide feedback about how well a business communicates what it does, and how the brand looks to customers.

Were you part of a focus group, you might view some designs like the one below to determine how well you recognize the brand or what the company does.



TERM TO KNOW

Visual Audit

Research done through survey or focus groups to help establish a business' brand value.

3. Industry

Visual designers will often target research to a particular **industry**, or a specific field of service or product of trade in which their client is involved. They will also consider how other visual designers have approached a similar project.

An interesting example is the design and research done at BMW.



BMW is a well-known car company, recognized for sleek and aggressive cars with futuristic designs. Designers were tasked with designing the car of the future called GINA. The company wanted a car with malleable geometry in mind, so designers came up with the idea of using a skin instead of a metal body that would allow the geometry of the car to morph and shift.

Choosing the right type of skin or fabric required research into the car manufacturing industry. The skin is made from polyurethane-coated spandex.



These materials were already used for things like car covers, foams, seats, armrests, and many other interior and exterior elements of the car. You can see in this case, a researcher was specifically looking into these materials because they were used in past projects. Therefore, the materials have proven their use and directly relate to the client's needs, concept, and project.

**Industry**

A specific field of service or product of trade.

4. Demographics

A visual designer will also consider researching the **demographics**, or given characteristics of the population, which the client tends to target.

This is really important because a visual designer will often research the interest of a particular demographic, and look for creative ways to relate the product or brand visually.

For example, the image below is a product by Cisco called the Umi. It's hardware that allows you to teleconference through your television. Suppose Cisco wants to target a very specific demographic, say single males between the ages of 20 and 35. What kind of things might relate to them?



You, as a designer, must come up with all sorts of different ideas; however, let's say that research shows that males in this age group like video games and competition. In that case, you might choose to go for an ad like the one above in order to appeal to them.

If Cisco instead wanted to target couples between the ages of 30 and 40, or even grandparents, the designer then has to change up the ad to something that looks more like the image below.



This design might be more suitable for a family demographic and makes the purpose of Umi as a teleconference device more obvious. It's thus very important to keep your target audience in mind when designing. This is true for any industry, be it hardware, software, entertainment, etc.



DID YOU KNOW

A visual designer will, oftentimes, find inspiration from an array of sources outside of the client's industry. Sometimes, it's as simple as flipping through magazines of various other industries. Other times, inspiration comes through things like nature—flowers, trees, weather, and the like. There are many ways to draw inspiration that aren't limited to the particular industry that can help a designer with formal design considerations and stylistic approaches towards a project and client.



TERM TO KNOW

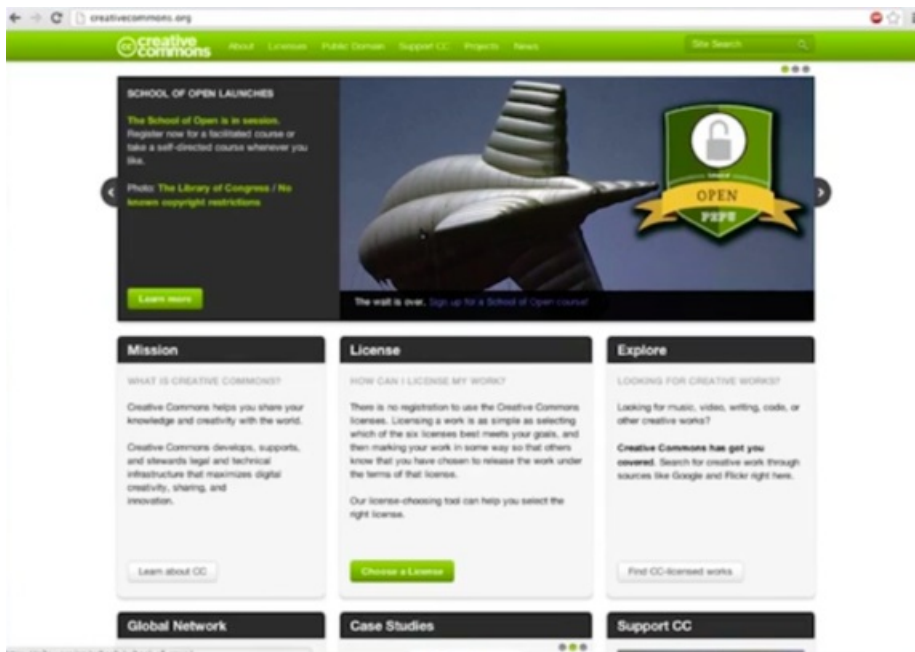
Demographics

The given characteristics of a population.

5. Specs

A visual designer should research according to the client's specifications, or **specs**. Specs are the requirements for the job at hand.

Say a designer is designing a website, and the specs indicate that it cannot use flash. The designer should look at other websites that don't use or require flash. This is considered research to find out what makes those websites so fast. The designer might look through the code to determine how it's optimized.



Or, the job could be to design a car with specs that include a hatchback body style, very low weight, and specific measurements like 14 feet long, 5 feet high, and 6 feet wide. The designer would start by looking at similarly spec'd hatchbacks.



TERM TO KNOW

Specs

Short for "specifications;" the requirements for the job at hand.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the various stages that designers might go through to do **market research** for their work. Specifically, you learned about the use of **visual audit**, focusing on the **industry, demographics, and specs** determined by the client.

Keep up the learning and have a great day!

Source: THIS WORK IS ADAPTED FROM SOPHIA AUTHOR MARIO E. HERNANDEZ



TERMS TO KNOW

Demographics

The given characteristics of a population.

Industry

A specific field of service or product of trade.

Market Research

The process of gathering information about a company's competition and potential customers.

Specs

Short for "specifications;" the requirements for the job at hand.

Visual Audit

Research done through survey or focus groups to help establish a business' brand value.