

EMBRACING DESIGN LIMITATIONS

A Case Study in Designing with Microsoft Office


Can captivating and effective design be created with Microsoft Office alone?

INTRODUCTION

When you mention Microsoft Office to a designer you will most likely be met with disdain. Working in Microsoft Office is a challenge most designers will have to face during their career.

This past spring I had the opportunity to attend a design conference on the east coast. Presenters would reference the horror of working on slide decks or making Microsoft templates for clients. Every creative in the room would give a knowing laugh and feel closer and understood.

It made me think, is Microsoft Office really that bad? Is software that is common place for most office structures and departments evil? These projects are profiting agencies, helping their client's and giving me work as an in-house designer.



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DESIGN CAN STILL BE FOLLOWED
AND RESULT IN PROFESSIONAL,
THOUGHT PROVOKING WORK.

A DESIGN LIMITATION

What if you didn't have access to Adobe Creative Suite? What if you couldn't afford it? What if you only had access to Microsoft Office? I decided I wanted to challenge the idea that Microsoft Office is difficult to use for design and set out to create a project, for a real client, using only Microsoft Office.

I wanted to create an example for other designers and creatives of what can be accomplished when limitations are in place. I find I work best and most creatively when my options are limited. Its easier to work past the 'paralysis of choice' that blocks us from knowing where to start.

Ultimately my goal was for the work, to be the work. The client or anyone looking at the project will have no idea what is was created in or that it was created with Microsoft Office.

“THE OBSTACLE IN THE PATH
BECOMES THE PATH. NEVER
FORGET, WITHIN EVERY
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Ryan Holiday, *The Obstacle Is the Way: The Timeless Art of Turning Adversity to Advantage*

THE CLIENT

I reached out to [Get in Gear](#), a Minneapolis running event that takes place in each April. We partnered to create new marketing materials for the 2019 race. The project followed the standard phases of a design: brainstorming, concepting, revisions, etc. However, I did not inform them of my self imposed creative constraint.

There were four marketing projects that were needed for the 2019 race. This included a print ad for a local running publication, a postcard mailing, a bus advertisement and social media assets. Apart from these marketing materials concepts for the race t-shirt were also created.

RESEARCH

I gathered many resources including Ted Talks, Articles and books to learn more about people who have worked within self imposed creative constraints. Also, got the most current edition of Microsoft which is Microsoft Office 365, and began learning new features.

TED TALKS

Brandon Rodriguez
[The power of creative constraints](#)

Phil Hansen
[Embrace the Shake](#)

John Maeda
[My journey in design](#)

BOOKS

Bruce Mau, *An Incomplete Manifesto for Growth*

Morla Book, *25 Designisms*

Ryan Holiday, *The Obstacle is the Way*

ARTICLES & MORE

Invision's DesignBetter.Co
[Design Thinking Handbook](#)

<https://99u.adobe.com/articles/5993/reel-back-finding-creativity-in-constraints-99u> by Meg Franklin

[Proof That Constraints Can Actually Make You More Creative](#)

Fast Company by Belle Beth Cooper

[For A More Creative Brain, Embrace Constraints \(Limitations Inspire Better Thinking\)](#)

Medium by Thomas Oppong

PROCESS AND TOOLS

MICROSOFT OFFICE: POWERPOINT, WORD, & EXCEL

Since this project is based on a setting a major limitation and design constraint there was one hard rule: no Adobe Creative Suite. I allowed myself to utilize other standard creative tools such as sketching, photography, scanners and hand drawing if applicable. Also, any plug-ins that were available for Microsoft.

PROCESS

For each of the four projects I followed the same process. I would create an initial round of 3-4 concepts, than receive feedback from the client and other resources and than finalize the design.

PROJECT ONE: PRINT AD & SHIRT

OPTION ONE: Gear Themed



Color Palette



PROJECT ONE: PRINT AD & SHIRT

OPTION TWO: Type Themed



Color Palette



PROJECT ONE: PRINT AD & SHIRT

OPTION THREE: 42 Themed



Color Palette



PROJECT ONE: FEEDBACK

Three initial concepts were created for the print ad using Microsoft Word. I decided to use Word for the ad project cause it included the most features for exporting the document to a PDF.

The three initial designs were reviewed by Get in Gear and also a group of four people for outside feedback. The four participants could be broken out into two groups: runners and creative professionals (who also happen to run).

I was hoping to find out how runners most often hear about races. Also, I wanted some design feedback. Through a series of questions I learned that social media is really important for local races. People either see a race on social media or hear by word of mouth.

Get in Gear was most happy with the second option, the type themed design. They liked how it stayed truest to their existing colors and brand but felt updated. Also, they thought it could be easily executed across all projects.

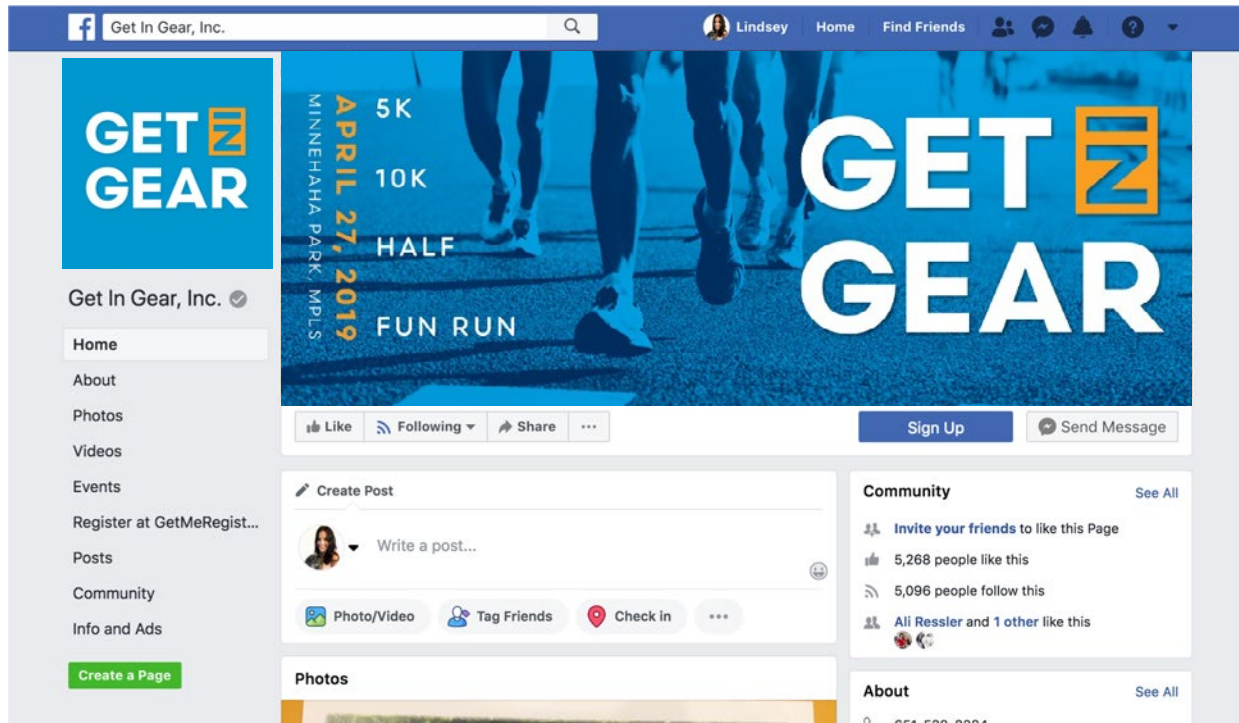
PROJECT ONE: FINAL PRINT AD & SHIRT



Color Palette



PROJECT TWO: SOCIAL MEDIA ASSETS



Revised Facebook Assets

PROJECT TWO: SOCIAL MEDIA ASSETS



Content for Facebook and Instagram posts.

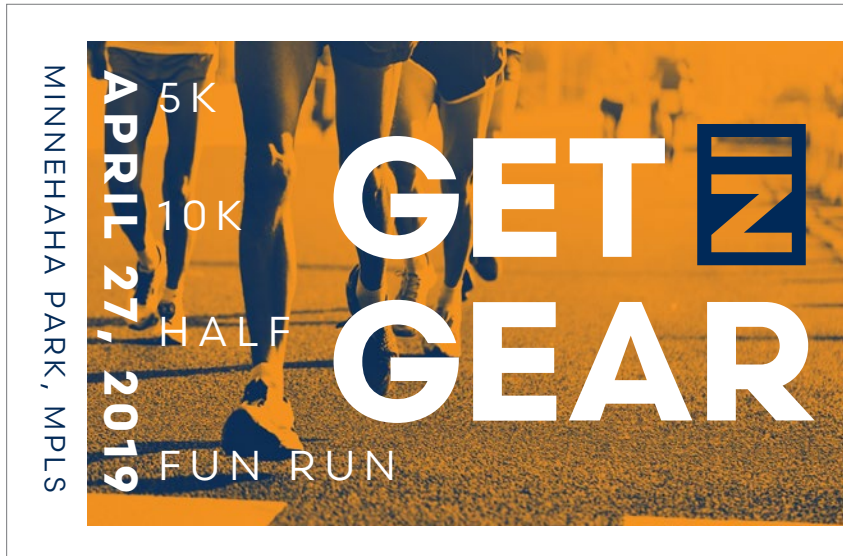
PROJECT TWO: FEEDBACK

Initial concepts for the social media components were created using PowerPoint. PowerPoint has the most options for exporting work to image formats such as jpegs and png files.

Like the first project a round of review took place with the client. Refer to the [Appendix](#) to see all of the social media concepts. Get in Gear liked the bright colors that were used. The new colorful content will grab attention on social media.

Further feedback was received from a marketing resource with an extensive background in running. They felt these new social media pieces felt current and refreshed. Also, the information presented was appropriate and important too the race.

PROJECT THREE: POSTCARD

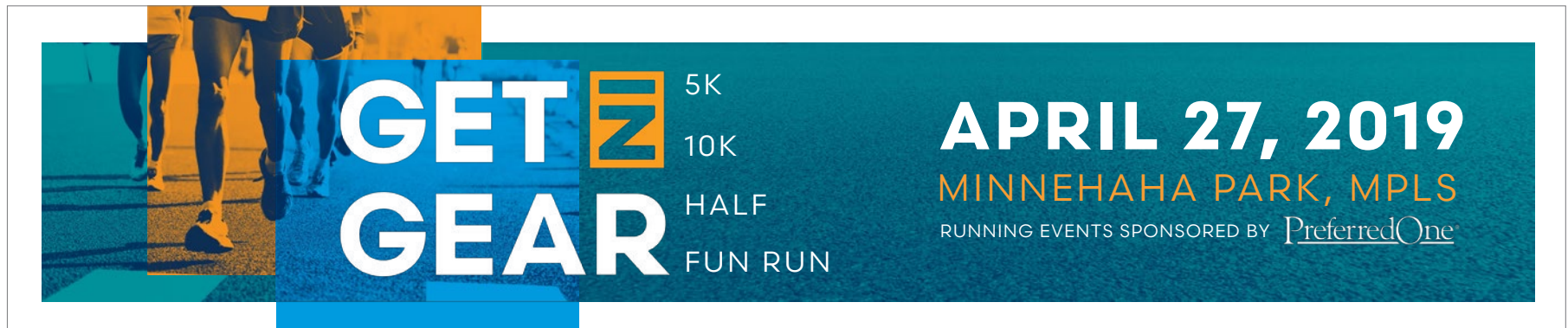


PROJECT THREE: FEEDBACK

Concepts for this part of the project were created in Microsoft Word. Similar to the print ad, Microsoft Word outputs the best PDF.

Three concepts were shown to Get in Gear before arriving on the final postcard design. Refer to the [Appendix](#) to see the three postcard concepts. Get in Gear was drawn to the orange option because it used the new design in a different way. They liked the orange piece because it was bright and connected with their brand. Since this is a simple Save the Date postcard they only repeated the race date on the backside of the card. These postcards will be printed and mailed to anyone who previously has participated in Get in Gear. Its one of their best ways to get past runners to return the next year.

PROJECT FOUR: BUS AD



PROJECT FOUR: FEEDBACK

Concepts for this part of the project were created in PowerPoint. Bus advertisements when scaled are 24" by 5" and must have a resolution of 600 dpi at this size. Microsoft Word has size limitations. The largest a document can be is 22" wide.

Four concepts were shown to Get in Gear before selecting the final bus ad. Refer to the [Appendix](#) to see the four bus ad concepts. Get in Gear realized that bus advertisements need to be brief. Most people see them only for a few seconds. This is why they selected the concept with the date displaying prominently. The bus ad will be placed on Twin Cities area buses in the months before Get in Gear.

WHAT I LEARNED

THINGS LEARNED ABOUT MICROSOFT OFFICE

- Word exports better PDFs than PowerPoint
- Word has size limitations. It can only create documents up to 22" wide
- Word WILL create vector art
Save your PDF in the right format and open it in Illustrator and you will find that shapes/objects are actual vector art, not rendered images
- The drawing tool is tricky. Its easier to draw with shapes. You can't merge them but you can group them. Also, its possible to edit anchor points on those shapes (sort of like Adobe Illustrator)
- You can use the Selection Pane which is similar to working with layers in Adobe
- Moving objects around is frustrating
- PowerPoint exports images in ratios so it is difficult to accurately size things without having to try multiple times.
- Most things are possible to achieve but they not as efficient.

CONCLUSION

Can captivating and effective design be created with Microsoft Office alone? Yes, it can. And yes, at times it is frustrating but it is possible. I was able to execute high quality projects for a client using many of the same methods I would use had I had access to the Adobe products.

Did the client's design suffer? No, while the end result may have been a little different in had I used other design software, the client still received high quality designs.

The greatest takeaway is accessibility. I believe more people have access to Microsoft Office and are less intimidated by it than other design software. Using Office as a design tool could enable those people to create designs. It is also less costly than other design software.

Ultimately, design can be created using any tool and good design will always be a success so long as it is rooted in process and design foundations.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Select a link below to review a PDF. All assets of the Capstone project are also available at dribbble.com/lbemmels.

PROJECT ONE: PRINT AD

[Print Ad Concepts](#)

[Final Print Ad](#)

PROJECT FOUR: BUS AD

[Bus Ad Concepts](#)

[Final Bus Ad](#)

PROJECT TWO: SOCIAL MEDIA ASSETS

[Social Media Concepts](#)

[Final Social Media Assets](#)

EXTERNAL FEEDBACK

[Round One](#)

[Round Two](#)

PROJECT THREE: POSTCARD

[Postcard Concepts](#)

[Final Postcard](#)

RESOURCES

[Other Resources](#)

DIDACTIC

LINDSEY BEMMELS | CAPSTONE DIDACTIC

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