



HÖGSKOLAN
DALARNA

The Graphic Designer as (a) Digital Nomad

A qualitative study

Grafiska Designern som Digital Nomad

En kvalitativ studie

Author Karin Larsson

Date 2 October 2015

Examensarbete för kandidatexamen i Grafisk teknologi

Titel Grafiska Designern som Digital Nomad – En kvalitativ studie	
Nyckelord grafisk design, digital nomad, design process	
Författare Karin Larsson	Datum 2 Oktober 2015
Publicering fulltext Open Access Jag/vi medger publicering i DiVA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> JA <input type="checkbox"/> NEJ
Kurs Examensarbete för kandidatexamen i Grafisk teknologi (GT2031), 15 hp	
Utbildningsprogram Grafisk design – kandidatprogram, 180 hp	
Företag/Institution –	Handledare vid företag/inst. –
Handledare Petter Kolseth, pkl@du.se	Examinator Gustav Boklund, gbk@du.se
Sammanfattning Syftet med denna studie var att undersöka hur digitala nomader utövar sitt yrke som grafiska designers, varför de valde att bli digitala nomader samt vilka fördelar och nackdelar som finns. Totalt intervjuades 10 före detta och nuvarande digitala nomader via email och svaren sammanställdes och analyserades för att finna teman och sammanhang. Resultatet visar att deltagarna valde en digital nomadisk livsstil främst på grund av den frihet det innebär. De är även helt beroende av internet, då det är den grundläggande teknologin som möjliggör distansarbete. Att vara digital nomad verkar inte ha en negativ inverkan på den grafiska designprocessen och alla verktyg som behövs anser de finns tillgängliga digitalt. Den del av det traditionella designyrket på en byrå som deltagarna i studien saknade mest var kreativa diskussioner med kollegor.	
Högskolan Dalarna Postadress Högskolan Dalarna, 791 88 Falun Telefon 023-77 80 00 Hemsida www.du.se	

Thesis for Bachelor Degree in Graphic Arts Technology

Title The Graphic Designer as (a) Digital Nomad – A qualitative study	
Keywords graphic design, digital nomad, design process	
Author(s) Karin Larsson	Date 2 October 2015
Course Thesis for Bachelor Degree in Graphic Arts Technology (GT2031), 15 ECTS credits	
Degree programme Graphic Design, 180 ECTS credits	
Company/Institution –	Supervisor at company/inst. –
Thesis supervisor Petter Kolseth, pkl@du.se	Examiner Gustav Boklund, gbk@du.se
<p>Abstract</p> <p>The purpose of this thesis was to examine how digital nomads carry out their work tasks as graphic designers, why they chose to become digital nomads and what benefits and limitations there are. 10 graphic designers who are or had been digital nomads were interviewed via email and the answers were analyzed to find themes and contexts.</p> <p>The result of the study showed that the participants chose to become digital nomads mainly due to the freedom associated with the lifestyle. They are entirely dependent on the internet due to it being the main piece of technology that allows them to perform work independently of where they are located. Being a digital nomad does not have a negative impact on the work process of a graphic designer, and all of the tools deemed needed are available digitally. The main part of the graphic design occupation that they miss is the creative discussions and interactions with colleagues.</p>	
<p>Dalarna University</p> <p>Postal address Dalarna University, SE-791 88 Falun, Sweden</p> <p>Telephone +46 (0)23-77 80 00</p> <p>Website www.du.se</p>	

Table of contents

- 1 Introduction..... 5
 - 1.1 Globalization and Labor market 5
 - 1.2 Free Agency 5
 - 1.3 Digital Technology..... 5
 - 1.4 Digital Nomads 6
 - 1.5 Graphic design firms and freelancing 7
 - 1.6 Project objectives and constraints 9
- 2 Methods..... 10
 - 2.1 The questions 10
 - 2.2 The interviews..... 11
 - 2.3 Analysis..... 11
 - 2.4 Information retrieval 11
 - 2.4.1 Search terms used 11
 - 2.5 Limitations 11
- 3 Findings and discussion 12
 - 3.1 The term digital nomad and what it means 12
 - 3.2 The limitations of being a digital nomad as a graphic designer.... 13
 - 3.2.1 Communicating with other creatives 14
 - 3.2.2 Communicating with clients 15
 - 3.3 Technology – the essential tools 16
 - 3.3.1 Social media..... 17
 - 3.4 The Inspiration process 18
 - 3.5 Personality traits and requirements 19
 - 3.5.1 Creator’s block..... 20
- 4 Conclusion 22
 - 4.1 Suggestions for further research 23
- References 24
- Appendices 26
 - 1. Interview questions..... 26

1 Introduction

1.1 Globalization and Labor Market

The flow of goods, services, finance, people and ideas across international borders are steadily increasing (Globalization, 2015). The option to sell your products and/or services independent of where you are located has opened up new markets all over the globe (The Swedish Institute for Growth Policy Studies, 2008).

Self employment may be seen partially as an effect of globalization. The number of self-employed workers in the United Kingdom has, between 2008 and 2014, risen by 2% which means that 15% of the entire workforce in the UK is self-employed (Office for National Statistics, 2014). This can be compared to Greece where the number of self-employed workers is 32%. This is believed to be due to the decrease in work-options as an employee due to the economic downturn in 2008 (Office for National Statistics, 2014). This has resulted in fewer workers leaving self-employment rather than new workers entering it.

1.2 Free Agency

The term “free agent” is an established term within sports and refers to any athlete who is not under contract and can move between teams depending on the amount of money offered (“Free Agent”, 2015). In business, a free agent is someone who works independently and is not permanently employed by a company. A free agent can be, for example, a freelancer, someone self-employed and/or a temporary worker.

Pink (2001) writes that free agency is a phenomenon that occurs due to four factors within the labor market:

- 1) the social contract of work – in which employees traded loyalty for security – crumbled;
- 2) individuals needed a large company less, because the means of production – that is, the tools necessary to create wealth – went from expensive, huge, and difficult for one person to operate, to cheap, housable, and easy for one person to operate;
- 3) Widespread, long-term prosperity allowed people to think of work as a way not only to make money, but also make meaning;
- 4) the half-life of organizations began shrinking, assuring that most individuals will outlive any organization for which they work.

(p. 41)

1.3 Digital Technology

In 1995 less than 1% of world population had an Internet connection. Today that number has increased to 40% (“Internet Users”, 2015). The weight and performance of laptops has also changed since 1995. Moore’s law (“Moore’s law”, 2015) states that every two years the number of transistors in a microchip doubles, which regarding to laptops means

increased performance and gives complex programs such as Adobe Creative Cloud the ability to run on a much smaller device.

The launch of light-weight smartphones and tablets have further increased the possibility of a portable work place and with the invention of telecommunications application software products, such as Skype, even the workers who are dependent on face-to-face interaction with customers or employers can achieve it from remote locations.

Pink (2001), refers to phenomenon as “Digital Marxism (workers can now own the means of production)” where technology has become more affordable and available to everyone.

Dal Fiore, Mokhtarian, Salomon and Singer (2014) came to the conclusion in their study “Nomads at last?” that mobile phones and computers have given people more reason to be mobile and that those technologies have enabled people to become more nomadic by reducing the factors that would otherwise force them to be more stationary.

With the cost of a laptop being within budget of the majority of working adults and the Internet widely available, location independent workers are able to work outside of a traditional work environment, such as an office, and instead choose their own workplace.

1.4 Digital Nomads

A definition of a nomad is “*A member of a people that travels from place to place to find fresh pasture for its animals and has no permanent home*” (“Nomad”, 2015). With digital technologies allowing people to perform location independent work as well as enabling easy mobility, the combination of the two have led to a relatively new phenomenon; digital nomads.

Wikipedia provides a broad definition of the term: “*Digital nomads are individuals who leverage telecommunications technologies to perform their work duties, and more generally conduct their lifestyle in a nomadic manner. Such workers typically work remotely—from home, coffee shops, public libraries and even from recreational vehicles—to accomplish tasks and goals that used to traditionally take place in a single stationary workplace.*” (“Digital Nomad,” 2015).

Common occupations amongst digital nomads include being a web designer, freelance writer, online teacher and programmer (Dunning, 2012). Many are self-employed while some are employed by companies who allow them to be location independent. The common factors for most occupations that suit digital nomads is the fact that they can be performed digitally.

According to Mish (2015), one reason people choose to become digital nomads is money. He states that a frugal lifestyle has become a borderline obsession for many digital nomads and that the aim of many is to travel to countries that allow them to live as cost-effectively as possible.

Websites like nomadlist.com offer digital nomads and aspiring digital nomads information on the cost of living in cities around the world as well

as information on Internet speed and safety. Even environmental facts such as humidity, temperature and air quality are presented on the website.

Closely related to money is the choice to combine digital nomadism with minimalism. This gives digital nomads the ability to travel light, only bring what they absolutely need and be able to change location with minimal physical and financial effort. They spend a minimal amount of time at check in, they do not have to wait at baggage claim, and the risk of having their luggage misplaced by airlines is non-existent (Petch, 2014) Having already embraced a digital lifestyle means that most of the tools they need day to day are available through laptops, such as paying bills, making calls, working, reading and general entertainment. This is why, according to many digital nomad sources online; minimalism and digital nomadism go hand in hand.

A study performed by UpWork.com, an online workplace, was conducted on 847 UpWork-users. Since becoming less tied to a physical workplace, 92% of participants in the study said that they are happier.

The study also shows that digital nomadism is on the rise with 39% of the participants calling themselves digital nomads while half of them (45%) said that they became digital nomads in the last year (UpWork, 2014).

1.5 Graphic design firms and freelancing

Several common occupations amongst digital nomads are within the field of graphic design; such as illustrating, web design and/or branding. However, being a graphic designer and digital nomad differs greatly from working at a traditional design agency.

One significant difference is that design agencies are commonly built up of a multitude of people specializing in one specific area, such as copywriters, creative directors, account managers, user experience specialists, social media strategists and other creatives (“Creative jobs”, 2015). This combination allows for large and complex projects to be completed with a wide selection of creative input.

Ed Burgoyne, author of *How the Agency Works* (2015) presents the following diagram to show an example of core team components:

Examples of Core Teams
Core components of teams

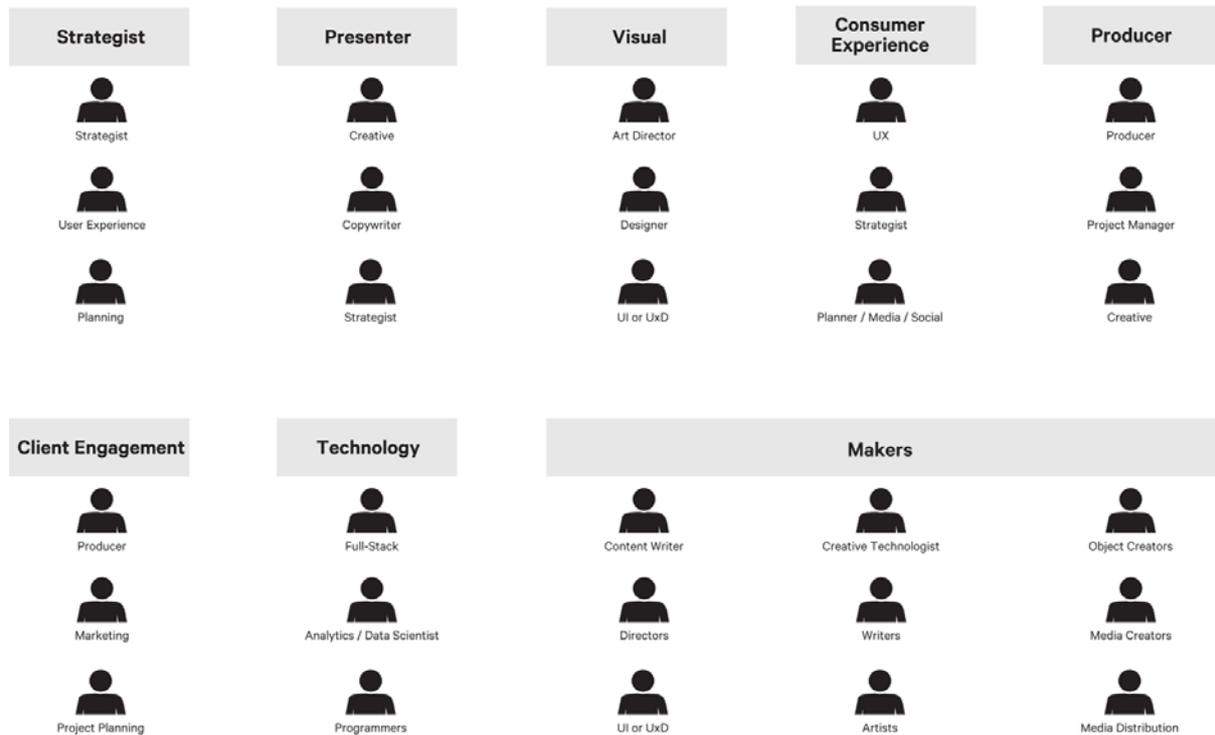


Figure 1 Examples of core teams by Ed Burgoyne.

The diagram illustrates an example of a core team at an agency and the multitude of titles and work tasks performed by its employees. This stands in contrast to the solitude of a graphic designer and digital nomad who is required to perform all work tasks on his or her own.

However, a design agency does not need to have one individual worker for each job title. Burgoyne (2015) states that people who bring skillsets that cross into other areas are called hybrid cross-functional.

Burgoyne (2015) also gives a detailed description of a work process at a design agency, which can be seen in a condensed and simplified form below:

the brief - information on the purpose of the campaign, target/audience and statement/message

the design process - finding inspiration, gathering material and creating

presentation - presenting the first draft

feedback - from clients and coworkers

delivery - sending the final product to the client

follow-up - making sure all aspects of the brief has been fulfilled

billing - requesting and receiving payment.

The difference between working for a graphic design firm and being a freelancer is quite significant. One design agency details the difference from a client's perspective ("Creative Agency vs. Freelancer", 2015) which states that a major difference is that a freelancer is mostly specialized in one area while an agency can perform more complex work which requires a wider variety of skills. However, in-house graphic designer Kevin Potts (2003) states, "*Freelancers understand they are singularly in charge of seeing a project through to the end, and that creates a valuable sense of ownership and personal responsibility.*" Freelancers are also described as having more flexibility and generally lower fees due to not having to support a large staff and offices ("Design agency vs freelancer", 2013).

1.6 Project objectives and constraints

With graphic design being a common occupation among digital nomads, the questions that arise are directly related to whether being a digital nomad changes the way a graphic designer works.

- Why does a graphic designer choose to become a digital nomad?
- What is required of a designer who chooses to become a digital nomad?
- Is the general work-process of a graphic designer affected?
- What are the benefits and limitations of being a digital nomad as a graphic designer?

The aim of this study is not to identify and document the general design-process of a graphic designer, but instead to gain an understanding on what the differences may be between working for a traditional design company and being a digital nomad.

2 Methods

For this study a semi structured email-interview method was chosen. Due to the topic being relatively undocumented, as much information as possible had to be gathered from the interviewees to receive a solid foundation upon which an analysis could be made. This method allows the respondents to discuss/think/reason freely about the questions (Bell, 2005, p. 29).

The selection of participants was a purposive sample of digital nomads who, by their own definition, are or had been graphic designers and digital nomads. A request was published on several forums for digital nomads or a direct contact was made after a google search for subjects. The aim was to achieve theoretical saturation and the number of participants was determined by the quality of responses received. Several more nomads were contacted during the course of the study.

2.1 The questions

Since the aim of the study was to answer the project objectives, all the questions were designed to encourage the respondent to, in detail, describe their work process. The aim was also to find out why they chose to become digital nomads and if any special requirements were placed on them due to that choice. This led to the questions being divided into 8 sections:

Marketing – use of digital resources to market themselves and their services

The Brief – how the briefing process works

Developing design ideas – inspiration, creative block and taking part in creative discussions

Presentation – presenting an idea/design to a client

Creating your design – feedback from other creatives and the essential tools needed

Follow up – doing a follow-up after a design has been delivered to a client

Final questions – their future, advice, what they would have done differently and whether they believed I had missed an important question

All of the questions were formulated so that they were always related to being a digital nomad and not to graphic design as a general occupation. However, the basis for the questions comes from Burgoyne's (2015) description of an agency's work process. There were 28 questions in total.

The questions document was not included in the request-message to participate. It was sent out after an agreement to participate had been received. In total there were ten participants in the study.

2.2 The interviews

The questions were sent via email due to the remote and diverse locations of digital nomads. This gave the respondents time to reflect and formulate their answers with limited influence by an interviewer. A word-document (see appendix 1) was sent and a two-week response time was given. The majority of replies were sent back within 48 hours. In total, 11 responses were received.

2.3 Analysis

The answers were compiled and an initial thematic analysis was performed after four responses had been received to determine whether further questions had to be formulated and sent out to the participants. This was later deemed unnecessary. When 10 replies had been received, a second thematic analysis was performed which allowed for themes and contexts to be noted which would be the base for the final discussion.

2.4 Information retrieval

A wide variety of sources were used for this study. The majority of information was found through database-searches such as google scholar and sciencedirect.com. Due to the topic being closely related to online-sources such as blogs and websites, information regarding digital nomads was found through google.com. A list of keywords used for both database-searches and google-searches can be found below. All sources were deemed reliable.

2.4.1 Search terms used

- Digital nomad
- Globalization
- Design process
- Nomad
- Graphic design
- Free agent
- Digital work
- Digital technology

2.5 Limitations

Due to the remote locations of the digital nomads interviewed for this study, the responses were entirely dependent upon how willing the participants were to formulate long or short answers. Much like a questionnaire, spontaneous follow up questions weren't possible without having to consider further response-time.

There is a possibility that the questions used were interpreted differently by each respondent, which may have been prevented had the interview taken place face to face.

Out of all respondents only one was presently not living as a digital nomad. It needs to be mentioned that this may have had an effect on the level of positivity (in terms of attitude) towards the lifestyle.

3 Findings and discussion

3.1 The term digital nomad and what it means

Digital nomadism often attracts workers who perform most of their work-related tasks via the Internet. All respondents were given Wikipedia's definition of the term digital nomad (see 1.4) and were asked whether they believed it applied to them.

Text 1

[...] This applies directly to me. Recently I ended up renting an office space in one location, but did not change the way I dealt with clients or vendors. Now I'm traveling again and no one I deal with needs to know my location has changed. That said, I'm not a fan of the term "digital nomad" – it sounds a bit cheesy to me. Not that I have any idea what a better alternative would be...

When breaking the definition down into components such as the combination of travel and work and not having a permanent work-location, almost all participants agreed that the definition applied to them.

It seems to be quite a general opinion amongst the interviewees that the term *digital nomad* is a bit of a buzzword, meaning that it is a phrase that has become very popular, and is simply a stylish and trendy word that they would rarely use to describe themselves.

Text 2

[...] I can work from anywhere, at any time, on anything I like. It is a freedom that allows you to work more naturally, rather than forcing yourself to work according to someone else's schedule, in someone else's idea of a good environment.

With the wide availability of the internet (see 1.2) and the portability and availability of affordable technology, the ability to travel while working is expressed as the foremost reason the respondents chose to become digital nomads.

The word freedom and its associations seem to be the factor that unites almost all participants in this study. The ability to choose whom, where and when permeates the responses given. Making choices based on their own personal needs and desires rather than the needs and desires of a larger company allows them to be in charge of both their careers and personal lives combined. This correlates to Pinks (2001) reason why free agency came to be - the need to not only make work but to make meaning.

However, the dependency on the Internet contradicts the meaning of freedom expressed by many of the digital nomads. They do not want to be dependent, governed or ruled and thus choose to live a nomadic lifestyle, but without the Internet, it is not possible to be completely independent. They are in fact limited to the countries and or cities that offer a solid connection to the internet.

The Internet might in this case be both a limitation and a benefit to a

graphic designer who chooses to become a digital nomad. It is a benefit because they can perform all their work via the web, such as communicating with clients, marketing themselves and delivering their products. It is a limitation because they are dependent on it.

However, since 40% of the world's population is connected to the Internet ("Internet Users", 2015) this still leaves a large number of countries and areas available.

Text 3

[...] I like to travel alone. There is a sort of drive for me to figure stuff out on my own. When I travel with others I sometimes feel weighed down. I love independence even when traveling so that 100% of my decisions are based on me.

Most of the digital nomads interviewed travel alone. Having chosen to not be tied down by corporate policies when it comes to work, they also do not want to be tied down by the people around them. Only one participant has recently chosen not to be a digital nomad due to family obligations and another participant travels with his partner but they have no children.

The results suggest that digital nomadism may be a more suitable lifestyle for designers without children or partners. Whether this is because a nomadic lifestyle is more appealing to younger generations without family obligations is unclear, however, the desire to be independent from any type of constraint seems to not only include physical restraints such as a house or an office, but also the desires and demands of other people.

Despite the nomadic lifestyle being an attractive choice for many graphic designers, not all respondents actively chose to become digital nomads, it just happened.

Text 4

[...] If I am ever a digital nomad, it is just a coincidence and not a choice. I prefer a steady workspace to return to.

The digital nomad who expressed this further explained that being able to work digitally makes it very easy to perform work tasks even when traveling for pleasure. The desire for a steady workplace however, was only expressed by this one participant.

That being a digital nomad can simply be a coincidence may be one of the reasons many people do not call themselves digital nomads, but nonetheless fit the description. Perhaps many individuals, who travel, whether it is for work or pleasure, simply fit the criteria of a digital nomad when they decide to do work digitally on the go.

3.2 The limitations of being a digital nomad as a graphic designer

When it comes to limitations with regards to being a graphic designer and digital nomad, the answer was not unanimous. One limitation of the lifestyle does not seem to be associated with technology, but with the lack

of face-to-face contact with clients and coworkers.

3.2.1 Communicating with other creatives

Burgoyne's illustration of a traditional design firm shows that one project can be worked on by many creatives who exchange ideas and give feedback for optimal results (see figure 1). However, for some respondents, the lack of feedback from colleagues is not an issue.

Text 5

[...] I judge my own work by my own standards. I do not tend to care what other designers think of what I do, nor do I really care about what my clients think. My only standard is effectiveness. If my goal is to sell a product, my feedback comes in the form of how many products are sold. If my goal is to impress the critics, my feedback is how many media outlets are discussing the work.

This view on feedback was not shared by the majority of respondents, however similar views were expressed. In this study, most of the interviewees agreed that if they need feedback it can be found on the internet. With forums such as Reddit, Facebook groups and online design communities, the availability of critique from fellow creatives is readily available should they need it.

The isolation from other creatives within the same field caused by digital nomadism may be what attracted some of the respondents to the lifestyle in the first place. As well as not having to act under corporate policies and regulations, they also do not have to interact and be influenced by colleagues. Travel in itself does not necessarily mean isolation, but perhaps working in the creative field without interacting with other creatives is freeing and something, which ultimately is desired by some.

However, some do miss the feedback and interaction with other creatives:

Text 6

[...] That is one part I sure do miss, working on my own. (But that may very well be the same for static freelancers as for remote nomads.) The creative 'ping pong' — Talking to other creatives, discussing and bouncing off ideas, thoughts and concepts.

Exchanging ideas, brainstorming and the general creative discussions with other designers during the early stages of a project seems to be the main interaction missed by the majority of respondents. This stage of the design-process differs from the later stages of a project where feedback is more of a live issue than giving and receiving concept-ideas. The majority of respondents have experienced working at a traditional design company and the ones who have not openly speculated around what they imagined it would be like and compared it to their current lifestyle.

Perhaps digital resources cannot fully substitute a face-to-face dialog, which would explain why some respondents expressed that they missed that interaction. Whether it is because face-to-face discussions are more spontaneous and does not require response-time prolonged by typing or formulating digital messages, or perhaps it is because interacting with another human being both through body language and shared surroundings

provides a more creative atmosphere than a Facebook message-thread?

Although, some respondents expressed the benefits of digital communications:

Text 7

[...] [I get feedback] through e-mails. The feedback I get is usually not only from one person, but it is summed up and then sent to me. I actually prefer that.

As mentioned earlier, with the availability of digital technologies such as Skype and Facebook, the option to receive feedback from other graphic designers is readily available, as long as there is access to the Internet. Many of the respondents answered that using these resources could be highly beneficial in terms of the quality of feedback they receive. One participant described the feedback received via email as "*short and to the point.*"

Perhaps, much like this study, which is based on email interviews, feedback taking place via email is more thought through, carefully formulated and concise, thus avoiding contradiction and lack of clarity.

Despite the general consensus that, although colleagues and other creatives are often missed when it comes to face-to-face discussions and that there are benefits to using digital resources to give feedback, one respondent argues that coworkers are much more than just people to talk about design with.

Text 8

[...] Let's say you return to work after a funeral and your colleagues give you a big hug and say "do you want to join us for sushi at lunch?", it can really help you feel better and more quickly give you the ability to focus on your work again, knowing that they are there for you [...]

However, it is not necessary to be employed by a traditional design firm in order to have colleagues. According to the same respondent, sharing an office with other freelancers is, to her, the ultimate solution to the designers who crave independency. You get to choose your clients; you can leave the office whenever you want; yet you still have access to the sense of camaraderie given by having coworkers.

Since this response was only given by one respondent and no similar answers were received, it is difficult to draw a conclusion that may apply to digital nomadism as a whole. However, it is an interesting perspective since this is also the respondent who chose to no longer be a digital nomad. Perhaps the ability to live and work without interacting with colleagues is essential to being a digital nomad. Based on text 5 through 8 there seems to be a scale ranging from "colleagues and feedback are unnecessary" to "colleagues and feedback are essential" and the respondents are all scattered between these two extremes.

3.2.2 Communicating with clients

Communicating with clients is similar to the feedback-process for digital

nomads. It takes place via email, both when it comes to the brief, the pitch and the follow up. None of the respondents expressed any concern when it came to the lack of face-to-face interaction with their clients. In fact, it seemed to be a preferred method due to the same reasons as with the feedback - it is carefully formulated, thought through and one of the interviewees even said that he could place demands on the actual information sent over by clients:

Text 9

[...] it is the problem with too many chefs... If you have a lot of people in the same e-mail thread and they contradict each other, I usually say that they have to kind of make up their mind on their part before bringing it to me.

Even the pitch and finished product is preferably sent via email. The interviewees say that the design should speak for itself and no explanation should be needed. Even if an idea is communicated well in a design, contaminating the client's personal view of the design is not a risk when the pitch and final product is delivered via email where descriptions and explanations can be kept to a minimum.

This suggests that when it comes to communicating with clients, having it done digitally is ideal. The benefit of communicating with a client in concise, well-thought-out, digital messages could also be applied here. Since this seems to be the consensus for most respondents, the difference between communicating with another creative and with a client is substantial. The aforementioned scale with the responses being scattered between two extremes in terms of the importance of colleagues and feedback, when it comes to clients, most respondents seem to be in agreement. This is interesting since it shows that in order to fulfill a job, i.e. create and deliver a product, the digital tools available may be more than enough for a digital nomad.

One participant summed up this generalized response:

Text 10

[...] The age of giving a client files on a disc are over, and everyone hates meetings.

3.3 Technology – the essential tools

Technology might be the main reason why digital nomadism has become a possibility for many graphic designers, whether they actively choose it or not. The availability of portable and easy to use technology has enabled designers to be more mobile than before.

Text 11

[...] Laptop, cellphone and fast Internet. That said, I still tote around my Pantone color books and a Wacom tablet. But they are simply luxuries, not essential.

The internet has already been established as a useful tool when it comes to interacting with clients and other creatives, however, according to all answers received in this study, the internet is not only useful, it is essential. They have to be connected in order to be reached and they have to be connected in order to deliver. Without the Internet, the digital nomad would cease to exist. All respondents list it as an essential tool together with a laptop. The option to work via internet-café's, where computers are available, does not seem to be ideal for the interviewees due to the need to be constantly connected to their client-base and have access to their software. When asked what type of technology they deemed to be essential, a laptop was the number one answer. Many even argued that although they travel with other gadgets such as a drawing pad, a smartphone or a tablet, they are not essential to perform their work tasks.

The availability of the internet today compared to two decades ago (see 1.2), may be the reason why digital nomads are on the increase (see 1.4), and that a laptop and internet are the essential tools for a digital nomad matches Dan Pinks (2001) belief that with the availability of computers and the Internet, workers now own the means of production. The view that nothing more than the essentials, a laptop and Internet, are needed also coincides with the minimalist mentality expressed by Petch (2014).

One respondent even says that what you carry with you comes with the job description of being a digital nomad and a graphic designer:

Text 12

[...]When you're constantly traveling, and you've actively made a choice to be a digital nomad, you do not put that much pressure on yourself to have the latest things or have a complete collection of pantone [books] with you. You're a graphic designer and a digital nomad and that definitely influences what you carry with you.

Other tools such as sketchbooks, books and paper samples were mentioned by some respondents.

Apart from a laptop and internet-connection, any other tool seems to be directly related to the designer's personal design-style. Respondents whose majority of work is web design seem to travel with the least amount of extra tools while an illustrator travels with the most.

3.3.1 Social media

The Internet provides the digital nomad with social media tools to attract and communicate with customers such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Much like for traditional design firms, an online presence is necessary for the digital nomad. But, unlike a traditional design firm, the digital nomad depends on it. Viewing the whole world as a potential client base, local marketing is not effective since the digital nomad rarely stays in one place for long. When it comes to using the Internet to connect with potential clients, the use of social media is the number one answer, although it is not always described as easy:

Text 13

[...] I guess I am still working on the 'easily find' part. The web is

an ocean of noise. It sure is hard enough to be visible enough in those muddy waters. ;)

All respondents, including the one who no longer is a digital nomad, use social media as their main marketing tool. The most popular tools mentioned are Instagram and Facebook.

The availability of social media and a strong online presence might be what allows a digital nomad to compete with larger design firms and local freelancers. Being able to be present digitally no matter their physical location might enable digital nomads to "stay in the loop" when it comes to new clients and then compete for their attention by using websites, Facebook and Twitter. Since all respondents answered that social media was their main marketing tool, and no one answered that they brought a client base with them from a previous, stationary work-place, this may suggest that social media is an effective marketing tool that enables them to work as digital nomads.

3.4 The Inspiration process

Almost all participants expressed that travelling while doing graphic design feeds them inspiration. Whether it is the different cultures, the different people or even the food and drink.

Text 14

[...]It is usually when fronted with different cultures, different colors, patterns and textures. And also from other artists from different backgrounds.

Taking inspiration from other artists from different backgrounds is an interesting aspect of the digital nomad lifestyle. Since they are not confined to one country, the ability to interact with other digital nomads, both via the Internet and the ones they meet while travelling, who have developed different types of skills or even different variations of the same skills based on their education in another part of the world might be a relatively unique benefit.

One participant described the method of reaching your destination, whether it is by train or plane, is inspirational in itself:

Text 15

[...]The travel part itself is what inspires me the most. (Right now I am writing these answers, while sitting in a garden in Italy. And that is why I love being a 'Design Nomad'.) My favorite spot for sorting ideas and getting inspired is just me sitting by and staring at the sea. (Also inspiring: Trains and planes, and train stations and airports.)

Another respondent who said that simply being out amongst people gives you ideas, especially at airports, supports the above answer. Seeing people who are stressed while traveling, carrying heavy suitcases and waiting for hours at the gate, inspires him when it comes to figuring out how they could be reached as a target audience. How can his design break through the distractions and noise of a bustling airport? He also credits his own experiences as a digital nomad as the reason he can be calm and collected

enough to focus on these things, instead of falling into the stress and anxiety of travel.

This is a very interesting viewpoint that a digital nomad has. Their experience when it comes to travel and moving into new environments may give them an advantage when it comes to observing people since they are not dictated and distracted by their own situation. Perhaps if a traditional design firm decided to send their employees to a different part of the world, it would not be the same since they themselves would not be comfortable in the new environment while a digital nomad would be.

Being a digital nomad is also, according to the majority of participants, influencing their work. Their styles develop in response to their surroundings; something, which they believe, would not have happened had they worked in one place.

Text 16

[...]The aesthetics of all these places definitely informs the work I do. We cannot help but borrow the colors and shapes and angles and everything that we see around us, when it helps us tell a story, or even just helps us make something look beautiful.

Another participant expressed that although most information on cultures or country specific patterns, colors and shapes are available online, nothing compares to experiencing it first-hand.

Text 17

[...] It is all about completely submerging myself in the culture. Not just when it comes to colors and shapes, but also when it comes to the way people speak, the tone of their voices, the words they use. This shows up in my designs, because when I see something I find beautiful or inspiring, it almost always ends up in a design, and all of my clients appreciate that uniqueness, which they might not get from a local design person.

This desire to submerge into a culture, to take as much as possible from their surroundings and transfer it into a design seems to be a common trait amongst most of the respondents. Perhaps the first-hand experience gives them some credibility in their choices, rather than picking and choosing colors and patterns from online sources that they may not have seen in the right context. The freedom of location that a digital nomad can offer a client might also be a unique selling-point for their designs, simply because they can offer to create designs that are backed up by cultural facts.

3.5 Personality traits and requirements

Being a digital nomad comes with a number of requirements and certain personality traits has to be developed in order to be able to perform work in an unstructured environment. When it comes to staying focused and organized while traveling, the answer was almost unanimous - it is all about discipline and, even when you are traveling, work is always first priority.

Text 18

[...]It is all about freedom with responsibility. You have to be organized and work just like any other person, since you have bills to pay and so on. It is all about taking your job seriously and do not see it as a hobby. Because it isn't.

The view that working in a garden in Italy or on a beach in Thailand is the complete opposite of working in an office might be a common misconception about digital nomads, solely based on the fact that they spend a lot of time in places other people might associate with a vacation.

Text 19

[...]It requires (and builds) more personal strength to work and travel at the same time. Right now I'm literally typing my answers to these questions in a small bedroom in Japan with my laptop propped up on two empty shoe boxes. There are no excuses when it comes to delivering what was promised, so I've had to develop a system of constant organization and self-motivation. I think in the end this has made me an extremely organized person.

This correlates to what Kevin Potts (2003) said about freelancers having a personal responsibility and a sense of ownership (see 1.5) when it comes to their work, which ultimately is the main motivation for staying organized and prioritizing their work obligations.

However, the spontaneity and irregularity of a digital nomads work surroundings is also the reason one respondent chose to abandon the lifestyle.

Text 20

[...]The more mobile I am the more unfocused I get. For a limited time, being outside my office or even traveling does good to my creative brain but for the most time I am the most creative when I stay in my routines.

It does not seem to be an impossible feat to develop routines and structure as a digital nomad, but perhaps it is not for everyone. It takes discipline, personal strength and a sense of responsibility combined with a deep-rooted need to travel and see the world. If one is lacking or absent, the combination may not be ideal.

3.5.1 Creator's block

Creator's block is a dreaded condition by most creatives. To come up with unique ideas, to meet a clients' wishes and desires and to ultimately meet the needs and desires of a target group can be daunting even when you have an abundance of creativity and ideas. The majority of interviewed digital nomads agree that being a digital nomad definitely ease or even prevent creative block. Not being confined to a physical workspace allows them to change their surroundings quickly whenever they feel a lack of creativity.

Text 21

[...] I just close my laptop, hop on my bike, take a lunch break or talk to people/ go to the gym. Once I get my endorphins pumping I usually am able to do a great job. Being a digital nomad DEFINITELY eases creative block because you are constantly moving forward (metaphorically and literally).

However, two of the respondents argue that creative block is not an option for graphic designers, whether you're at a traditional design firm or traveling:

Text 22

[...] Fine artists can use phrases like creative block. Commercial artists do not have that luxury. We must power through and deliver. Period.

This response suggests that despite a flexible and perhaps even impulsive workspace, fulfilling a client's demands should never be compromised.

4 Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest the following:

- The main reason the participants chose to become digital nomads is the freedom associated with the lifestyle. This can involve freedom from a boss, colleagues and physical limitations such as an office.
- Their ability to work is entirely dependent on having access to the Internet, which can be viewed as a limitation.
- Being a digital nomad does not seem to have any considerable negative impact on the work process of a graphic designer. In fact, any negative aspect is believed to be outweighed by the benefits of the lifestyle.
- Some participants agree that the part they miss the most by being a digital nomad is the ability to take part in a creative discussion with other designers. This is the only aspect of the lifestyle that they would change.
- Being a digital nomad requires a lot of discipline, structure and organizational abilities.

The main attraction of digital nomadism is freedom, which may be an answer to the question why graphic designers choose to become digital nomads, yet if they go to a place where the Internet is not available, or any location without a basic power-grid, they simply become unemployed travelers.

The work process of a graphic designer does not seem to be significantly affected by being a digital nomad. The main parts of the design process, such as the brief, delivery and follow-up, can still be fulfilled with minimal difficulty. It even seems that the few limitations mentioned by the respondents, such as lack of face-to-face interaction with a client, can be seen as beneficial rather than disadvantageous, forcing the designer and client to communicate more efficiently via written messages such as email and/or online forms.

The design-process itself seems to be positively influenced with the respondents expressing an abundance of inspiration provided by the travel itself, the cultures and the people they meet. Creative block is also not more of an issue than for a designer at a traditional firm, and might even be less of a problem due to the possibility of changing location quickly.

The lack of creative discussions with other designers can be seen as the biggest drawback of choosing to become a digital nomad. Similar to the lack of coworkers is the lack of a stable work-area. However, since this is not seen as negative by all respondents, with some even expressing a positive feeling towards it, this may suggest that being a digital nomad and graphic designer is not inherently a good or bad combination, but is dependent on a much wider range of personal traits. It is possible that these aspects of the lifestyle suggests that combining graphic design with nomadic lifestyle is not for everyone due to the demand for organization, responsibility and discipline, as well as the ability to handle the stress of travel and lack of creative discussion.

In conclusion, there is no definite answer to whether being a digital nomad affects the work process of a graphic designer. The results suggest that if being a nomad suits you as a person and you happen to have chosen graphic design as your career, all the basic tools you need are available digitally.

4.1 Suggestions for further research

Further research into how traditional design agencies view digital nomads would be beneficial. It would be an interesting aspect to explore whether traditional design agencies would benefit from allowing their employees to take on a nomadic lifestyle and whether this combination of work styles would lead to optimal design results.

References

- Bell, J. (2005). (4. uppl.) *Introduktion till forskningsmetodik*, studentlitteratur AB, Lund
- Burgoyne, E. (2015, January 14). *Advertising Agency Organization*. Retrieved May 12, 2015, from <http://adsubculture.com/workflow/2014/12/9/examples-of-advertising-agency-organizational-charts>
- Creative Agency vs. Freelancer. (2015). Retrieved May 18, 2015, from <http://www.artversion.com/about/freelancer-vs-agency/>
- Creative Jobs. (2015). Retrieved May 8, 2015, from <https://www.aaaa.org/agency/compensation/resources/jobs/Creative/Pages/default.aspx>
- Dal Fiore, F., Mokhtarian, P. L., Salomon, I., & Singer, M. E. (2014). "Nomads at last?" A set of perspectives on how mobile technology may affect travel. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 41, 97-106.
- Design agency vs. freelancer. (2013, November 17). Retrieved May 18, 2015, from <http://www.ironpaper.com/webintel/articles/design-agency-vs-freelancer/#>.
- Digital Nomad. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved April 13, 2015, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/digital_nomad
- Dunning, K. (2012, April 15). *Want to Be a Digital Nomad? Five Careers That Let You Work From Anywhere*. Retrieved May 18, 2015, from <http://global-goose.com/wingtips/careers-that-let-you-work-from-anywher/>
- Free Agent. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved April 14, 2015, from <http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/free%20agent>
- Globalization. (n.d.) *World Health Organization*. Retrieved 20 April, 2015 from <http://www.who.int/trade/glossary/story043/en/>.
- Institutet för tillväxtpolitiska studier. (February 2008). *Permanent förändring* (Statens offentliga utredningar, 2008:64). Retrieved from <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/10283/a/99453>
- Internet Users. (n.d.). In *internetlivestats.com*. Retrieved May 12, 2015, from <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/>
- Jansson, S. (1997). *Tio övningskampanjer i reklam*. Särö: Business Books.
- Moore's law. (n.d.) 2015. In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved April 14, 2015, from <http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/moore's%20law>
- Nomad. (n.d.) 2015. In *oxforddictionaries.com*. Retrieved April 14, 2015, from <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/nomad>
- Office for National Statistics. (2014). *Self-employed workers in the UK - 2014*. London: Office for National Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lmac/self-employed-workers-in-the-uk/2014/sty-self-employed.html>
- Petch, T. (2014). *The Greatest Benefits Of Being A Digital Nomad Minimalist*. [Blog Post] Retrieved May 10, 2015, from

<http://www.virtuallynomadic.com/personal-development/digital-nomad-minimalist/>

Pink, D. H. (2001). *Free Agent Nation: How Americans New Independent Workers Are Transforming the Way We Live*. New York: Warner Books.

Potts, K (2003). *Selling Yourself — Market Advantages of a Freelancer*. Retrieved May 18, 2015, from http://creativelatititude.com/articles/articles_potts_advantages.html

Slade, M. (2014, July 8). *What does it cost to be a digital nomad?* [Blog Post] Retrieved May 18, 2015, from <http://www.makingitanywhere.com/digital-nomad-cost-of-living/>

UpWork. (2014, February 4) *Digital Nomads: A Revolution in Work Freedom*. Retrieved May 5, 2015, from <https://www.upwork.com/press/2014/02/04/new-odesk-survey-shows-that-the-digital-nomad-lifestyle-is-here-to-stay-2/>

Appendices

1. Interview questions

General

Digital nomads are individuals who leverage telecommunications technologies to perform their work duties, and more generally conduct their lifestyle in a nomadic manner. Such workers typically work remotely—from home, coffee shops, public libraries and even from recreational vehicles to accomplish tasks and goals that used to traditionally take place in a single stationary workplace.

("Digital Nomad," 2015, para. 1)

This is a general definition of the term digital nomad, in what ways do you believe it applies/does not apply to you?

How many years have you been active as a graphic designer?

How many years have you been active as a graphic designer *and* a digital nomad?

Have you ever worked for a traditional design company (such as an ad agency etc)?

What are the main reasons you chose to become a digital nomad?

Do you travel alone or with other digital nomads? If yes, are their occupations the same as yours?

Marketing

From your own experience, building an online presence, can you give some examples of tools and/or methods you have found successful in marketing yourself on the web?

What are some strategies you use to enable customers to easily find/reach you?

The Brief

A creative brief is a control instrument used in the design process. It usually answers the following questions: purpose of the campaign, target audience, statement/message and reason for statement/message (Jansson, 1997)

Can you describe the briefing process from a potential client? Are there any special tools or methods that your clients use to communicate their request?

Digital nomads rarely meet their clients in person. Do you believe this has any positive or negative effects on the briefing process?

Developing design ideas (Sketching and inspiration)

How do you find inspiration while traveling?

Do you believe your life as a digital nomad has any influence on your designs? If so, in what ways?

Working for a design company or design department enables a lot of designers to take part in creative discussions with other designers about their design ideas. How do you receive feedback as a digital nomad?

How do you deal with creative block? Does being a digital nomad ease or worsen creative block?

Presentation

How do you present an idea/design to your client?

Does being a digital nomad create any limitations when it comes to presenting your idea?

Creating your design

Do you receive any feedback on your work from other designers? If yes, where and how does that take place? If not, is that something you believe would be beneficial to you?

Do you receive any feedback on your work from other digital nomads? If not, is that something you believe would be beneficial to you?

Do you receive any feedback on your work from local people? If not, is that something you believe would be beneficial to you?

How does being a digital nomad affect your way of working? (organizing your work, motivation, not having a set work area etc)

What do you believe are the essential tools needed to create designs as a digital nomad (for example, laptop, sketchbook etc)?

Follow up:

After your design has been delivered to your client, do you do a follow-up? If so, can you describe how it is done?

Final questions:

If you were given a chance to start your career as a digital nomad and graphic designer all over again, what would you have done differently?

Where do you see yourself in five years?

What do you believe is the biggest benefit of being a graphic designer and a digital nomad?

Do you have any advice for a graphic designer thinking about becoming a digital nomad?

Is there a question you believe I have missed that you would have liked to answer or that you believe would have been beneficial to this study?