

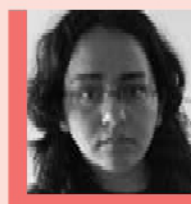
# WEBWISDOM

The business of art and design is not new to Indian creative traditions. **With the advent of technology, the legion of Indian designers took up the challenge of this new medium.**

The trend leaves us with few questions. **What prompts them to shift their interests? Are they prepared for the global challenges? How should they brace up to meet the international standards?** We invited few leading names from the industry to discuss these raging questions.



**Parag Gandhi.** He is the founder of Flying Cursor, an interactive digital creative agency. He was also part of The Wall Project, Mumbai.



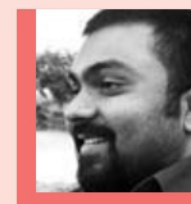
**Ashima Bawa.** She works as an Associate Creative Director – Art at Delhi-based digital studio, Digivaasi. The studio has worked for many well-known Indian clients and campaigns.



**Rajaram Rajendran.** Founder of Eleven Elements Studio, this Bangalore based web designer is also a filmmaker, digital artist and musician.



**Fatema Barot.** A senior graphic designer at Beard design, Fatema studied at Sir J.J School of Art and IDC, IIT-Mumbai. Beard Design, a digital studio, works with start-ups and entrepreneurs on branding and design projects.



**Dhanish Gajjar.** He is an User Interface designer, web developer and photographer rolled into one. He harbours love interest for minimalism and architecture.

**CG: Considering almost every designer starts with print, what prompts them to pick or shift to web design as a calling?**

**Ashima Bawa:** Though the basic principles of design remain the same for all platforms, designing for the digital medium is very flexible and exciting. It requires quick execution and understanding of the evolving medium. Plus, unlike print, one can quickly edit the design and replace it online. Moreover, there are a lot of ways to make the design more engaging, like adding animations, using HTML scripts, etc.

**Rajaram Rajendran:** Some people find the digital medium has a lot more opportunities to offer, to 'do' interesting things or solve some problems more efficiently. Ultimately, that's what counts. If one thinks a microsite or an app works better in communicating one's ideas, then that becomes a core choice.

**Dhanish Gajjar:** It is the obsessive urge to make everything look good around you. There are no words to express the feeling you get when something you've designed is seen, used and appreciated by others. Like most of our calling, you know it when you find it and that's what you want to do for the rest of your life.

**Fatema Barot:** The medium that designers use has always evolved. From early cave paintings to murals in the Sistine chapel to paper and now digital. So it is a natural progression for designers to increasingly start using the digital medium.

**Parag Gandhi:** Today digital is more than just web design or internet marketing. Interactivity, impact and engagement are commonly heard words. Apps and websites try to capture your imagination. They connect you with your offline world, tracks you down, where you go, what you eat and tries to surprise you every day. This engagement factor is different than any other medium ←

**CG: Once in the business, apart from the ideation capabilities and technical skills, what other things are required to be a good designer for the digital medium?**

**Rajaram Rajendran:** Knowing how to do a new text effect in Photoshop or a new CSS trick are not big things. The basics of design are. Get better at typography, colour combinations, timing, spacing, use of negative space etc. And understand what you use them for. That's what ultimately makes or breaks the work you put out.

**Ashima Bawa:** Print works in dpi (dots per inch) and CMYK, while digital works in ppi (pixels per inch) and RGB format. The end product is viewed on screen and not on paper or hoardings. Hence a lot of optimization is needed for the web to balance the quality of design with a flawless experience. You must keep abreast of design evolving across the world.

**Dhanish Gajjar:** When it comes to user interface design people often forget that it is not how it looks, but how it works. That's the hardest part of interface design because it gets tricky. The more elements you add, more complicated it gets for the users to process.

**Parag Gandhi:** Understanding of aesthetic values, brand aspects and brand communication is of utmost importance. The ability to read latest design and technology trends and adapt to the fast changing mindset of the consumer are must have skills.

**Fatema Barot:** Apart from a fine aesthetic sense, one needs a slightly technical bent of mind. The digital medium requires the perfect combination of the right and left brain. You need to figure out and master the science of screen sizes, interactivity, devices, browsing patterns, usability etc. The real challenge is to make sure that the medium doesn't make the work clinical and sterile while being functional and usable ←



## CG: It's been over a decade that Indian designers are churning out a lot of indigenous work. What makes an Indian web/UI designer similar or different from its international counterpart?

**Rajaram Rajendran:** They're similar in the process, though the objectives may differ at times. The major chunk of designers, both in India and abroad, does not really try to solve a problem. They just focus on making the client happy and get paid.

**Ashima Bawa:** At the core, it's not very different from international design as we follow the same basic principles of visual communication. But yes, there is a large cultural difference. Internet usage in India is still evolving. So you need to ensure your design is intuitive and accessible to all. For instance, most Indian websites need a prominent 'Home' button because it's not apparent to everyone that clicking on the logo will also do the job!

**Fatema Barot:** Like everything else, we're probably few years behind the West in our web design. If you look at the quality of work coming out from the US, Europe and even emerging countries like Brazil, you realize that we have a long way to go. We don't see too much of comparable work coming out of India.

**Parag Gandhi:** Internationally it is more about brand communication, design and storytelling. Reading, respecting art and experiencing new technology is in their culture and it reflects very well in their design. Brands, business, products, digital products, services in India are yet to invest in UI, design and language. Look at our bank websites. They are yet to fix their tone of voice in copy, let alone UI and design. We are far behind in terms of UI and Design when it comes to digital ←

## CG: Points taken. So, how should the Indian web and UI industry brace up to reach international standards?

**Rajaram Rajendran:** The talent and technical skills are there. I feel the methods in which they are used needs an immediate improvement.

**Ashima Bawa:** In part, it depends on the general level of digital literacy and adoption. Educating clients and partners about the best practices also helps. A lot of thought and work needs to go into the details like brief, IA, ideating, wireframe etc.

**Dhanish Gajjar:** As far as the user is concerned, the interface is the product. They see and interact with the user interface, not the underlying architecture. The right way of doing it is always creating the front end first and then coding it. Getting the elements right will have a big impact and the users will enjoy the product. Indian designers need to focus and invest more time and money to get the design right, not just rush their products out.

**Fatema Barot:** We just need to stop doing boring work. That will solve most of our problems. We need education infrastructure to produce people who can design for the web. Right now, almost no one learns how to design for the web in college. Not even graduates from most of our leading design schools. Most of our web design is done by people who learnt to design for other mediums and stumbled on to web design.

**Parag Gandhi:** Standards of awards, recognitions and eye for detailing are extremely low in Indian digital design. Also, brands and businesses should take strong steps to reinforce creativity in design. Most importantly, it is about individual passion, how good you want to look and how much you can learn or want to implement ←

## CG: All said and done, how does the future look like?

**Rajaram Rajendran:** Huge. Just like everywhere else. But only if you can put out something unique, only if you can solve problems and make things better. Otherwise, people will just continue choosing templates instead of designers.

**Parag Gandhi:** It's awesome, competitive, challenging and growing. Digital artists and designers will play a big role in content creation. The Indian design community is opening up to this huge shift of digital design and digital culture and in coming days, UI expertise in the service sector will play a key role.

**Ashima Bawa:** The prospects depend a lot on the designer. If one is willing to put in work and understand design and the medium, the prospects are good. Otherwise, it'll end up being a demand-supply service.

**Dhanish Gajjar:** More and more people are relying on the web and smart devices now. New tools are coming out in the market in forms of social networking tools, web apps or mobile apps. Designers have a good prospect because everyone likes to use good products, keeping the need for good designers alive.

**Fatema Barot:** Designing for the web is going to be an increasingly larger part of what agencies and design studios do. So most designers will have to adapt to this. This process is already underway and is driven largely by consumer habits. We need to embrace these new trends and aim to do pioneering work, rather than aping the west ←

「The Indian design community is opening up to this huge shift of digital design and digital culture」

## STRENGTHS

- Ability to solve a lot of marketing problems that traditional media can't
- A huge reservoir of talents
- Rich tradition of art and design
- Growing economy and job opportunities

## OPPORTUNITIES

- A rising inquisitiveness of the medium
- Growth of social media
- Exposure to the Western world
- Indigenous and innovative thinking

## WEAKNESSES

- Talent is not used effectively
- Indian design education is yet to wake up to the digital shift
- Low understanding of the platform and technology
- Slow internet penetration

## THREATS

- People are 'okay' with average stuff, templates and ripped-off stuff
- Slow growth in technological understanding
- Openness to experimentation and investments
- Business demands of shortcuts and cut-paste jobs

What's your opinion?  
Do write in to us at [Knock@CreativeGaga.com](mailto:Knock@CreativeGaga.com) with 'Web Wisdom' as the subject.