

UXPin

Web UI Trends Present & Future

Dramatic Typography

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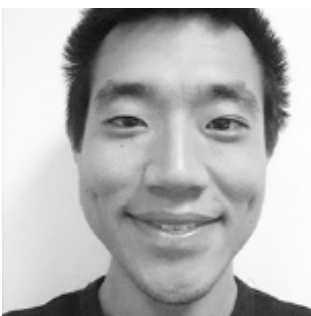


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What is Dramatic Typography?

Type with high drama: Big letters. Small letters. Images overlaid with characters. Beautiful strokes and flourishes.

These are the things that website designers and developers are playing with for almost every aspect of design – from basic responsive websites to apps and watch interfaces – in 2015 and beyond. The trend is popular for a simple reason: Simple and dramatic typography is visually appealing and easy to read.

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Today's dramatic typography has a different meaning from some other areas in design. The current trend focuses on a few primary concepts that incorporate drama and lettering:

- Web fonts evolution
- Oversized lettering
- Small typography
- Type on images
- Simple typefaces used in interesting ways
- Custom lettering and typefaces
- Typography as art

Using one of these concepts alone is not enough to make a dramatic statement, but can be an essential part of creating a design framework that uses type in a way that grabs the attention of users and encourages interaction with the text.

Focusing on the Basics

Many forms of dramatic type in the past have centered around unusual typefaces. In the early part of the decade, [novelty typefaces](#) were a key component of creating dramatic typography. Today's dramatic typography comes primarily in the form of simple and basic fonts used in bold ways.



Photo Credits: <http://pushcollective.com/>

To make the most of this trend, you'll want to think about the [basic principles of typography](#). It is important to understand concepts in type categories, type families and letterform shapes and strokes.

Type is commonly broken into a handful of categories that embody the mood, structure and impact of lettering. The high-drama typefaces of 2015 tend to fall in one of the two broadest categories: serif or sans serif, with the latter being the overwhelming favorite. (A sans serif typeface is one without extra stroke at the end of letters, such as Helvetica.)

When working with any of the techniques mentioned here, designers are often sticking to a single type family to create a “big design.” A type family includes the font and all variants of it. If you were using Helvetica, this would include the light, condensed, black, bold, italic, regular and all other variations of the typeface.

As described in *Web Design for the Human Eye*, stroke weight is also a major consideration.

The stroke is the width of each line used to create a character. Letters within a type family have either varying or uniform stroke widths. For many of the dramatic uses of typography, we are seeing, uniform stroke widths are the preferred choice. This is mainly due to the fact that uniform strokes can be easier to read across a variety of settings and against varying levels of contrast. These letterforms are also easier to read, both in terms of understanding and comprehension and visually against other elements.

The Evolution of Web Fonts

Dramatic typography has evolved so quickly because of the availability of typefaces to the masses. Aside from a handful of default typefaces or freebies that included questionable online usage, type kits are changing the game for web UI designers.

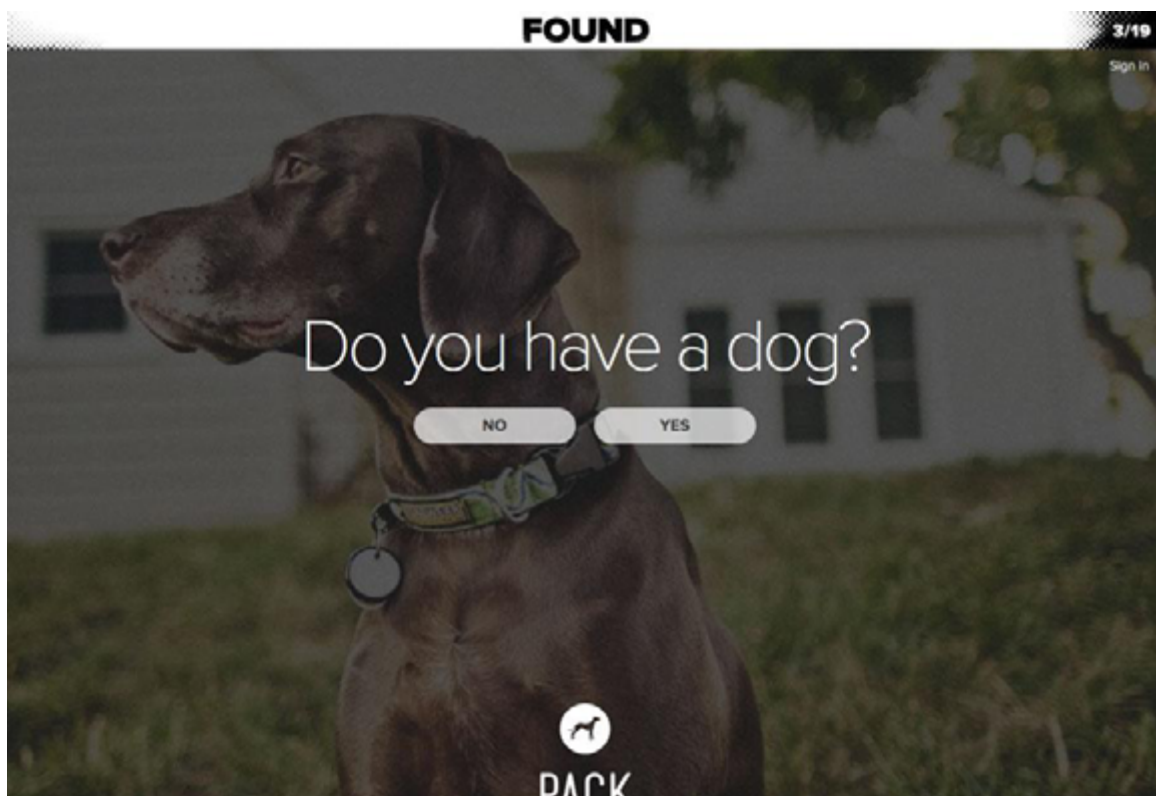


Photo Credits: <http://packdog.com/>

More fonts are available at low cost (or no cost thanks to [Google Fonts](#)). The number of options is increasing almost daily as well. Adobe also includes its [Typekit](#) service in all Creative Cloud plans. Without a large budget, almost every web designer now has an arsenal of typefaces to work with and choose from. This factor alone is almost enough to create a flood of type-based projects.

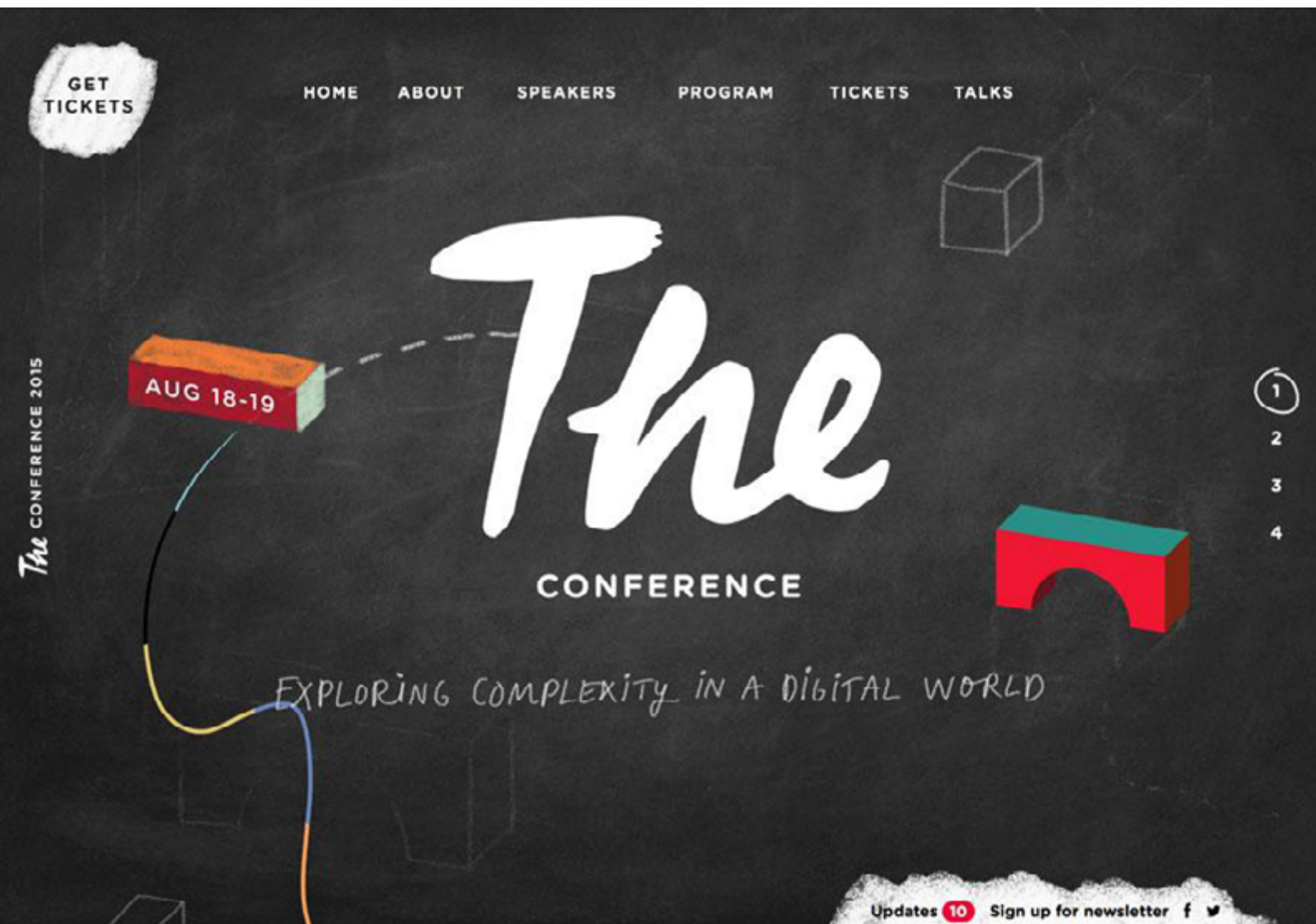


Photo Credits: <http://2015.theconference.se/>

The flood of available fonts also opens the door to theme-based website design as well. WordPress users have access to many of the same typefaces as home-grown websites and where font rendering was an issue even as little as 5 years ago, most modern browsers and interfaces can support pretty much any kit-based font today.

Oversized Lettering

Once you select a type family to work with, size is the first consideration.

And oversized typography is the leading contender for top web design trend of 2015. Big, bold typefaces that are paired with images or against a texture or solid background create a strong first impression.

The advertisement features a dark background with a pattern of small, faint icons. On the left, a smartphone displays the Zero app interface, which includes a status bar at the top showing 'AT&T 3G', '7:56 PM', and '92%' battery. Below the status bar is a search bar with the text 'Enter a new task'. Underneath are three task entries: 'Call mom', 'Thank You Note', and 'Grocery Store', each with a checkbox and a small orange icon. A blue circular badge with the text 'FREE DOWNLOAD' is positioned above the phone. To the right of the phone, the word 'Zero' is written in a white, cursive font inside an orange circle. Further right, the words 'ZERO' and 'THAT TASK LIST' are written in large, bold, white, sans-serif capital letters. Below this, the text 'ENTER A TASK & REMINDER IN SECONDS AND GET ON WITH LIVING YOUR LIFE!' is written in a smaller, orange, sans-serif font. In the bottom right corner, there is a black button with a white smartphone icon and the text 'Available on the App Store'. Below the button, a hand is shown holding a smartphone with the Zero app icon on the screen. A large number '1' inside a black hexagon is positioned to the left of the hand, followed by the text 'Enter your task and reminder. It just takes a few seconds.'

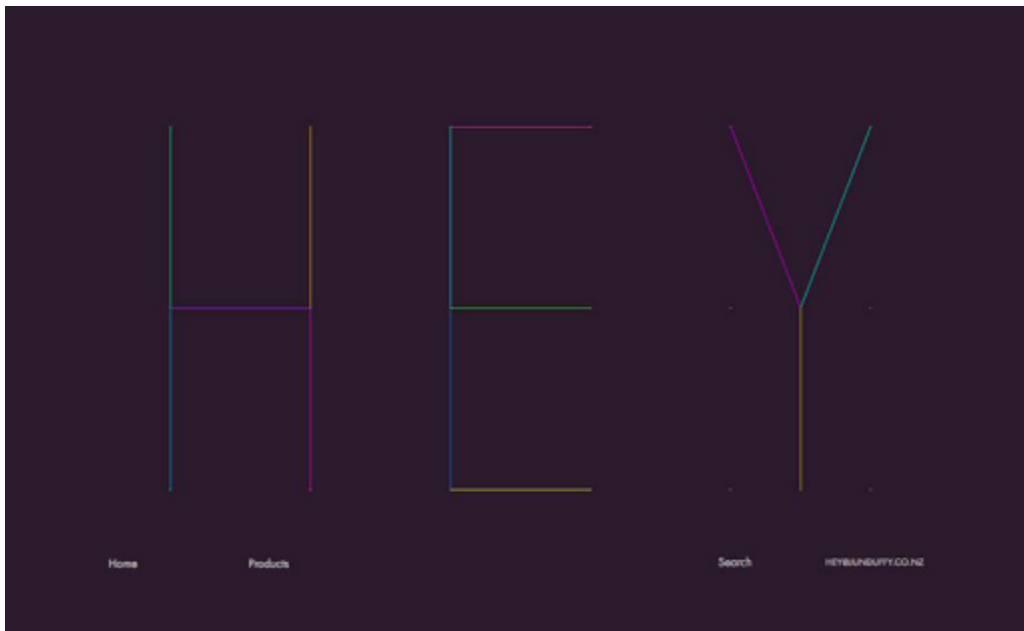


Photo Credits: <http://junduffy.co.nz/>

An oversized typeface is characterized by:

- A dominant proportion and weight compared other elements on the screen
- Size of the characters (often bigger than 85 points)
- Visual weight, such as all caps or super thick strokes (think slab serifs)

The way these supersized letters is being used is fairly unique as well. The focus is on serifs with rather thin strokes at incredibly large sizes. Designers are creating an outline that includes three to five words that almost entirely fill the screen. The other common thread is actually the color – white – which is used almost exclusively with this trend.

This technique works because of contrast. Big, white (although sometimes black or another color) is placed on top of an image or brightly colored background. Other commonalities include lettering that is aligned to the center of the screen and use of all caps. The resulting design forces you to read what's on the screen.

While oversized typography has a very defined style in this dramatic trend technique, you can use big type in other ways. Consider small tweaks to the trend such as aligning lettering to the left or right, don't get stuck in an all caps situation and play with color.

Pro tip: When working with oversized type, make lettering so big that the visuals feel uncomfortable and then start to back off. By starting big and decreasing size, you may find that you are willing to make the text bigger than you initially thought.

Small Typography

Everything you know about oversized type can be flipped upside down when you think of super small typography. But tiny type is also quite dramatic.

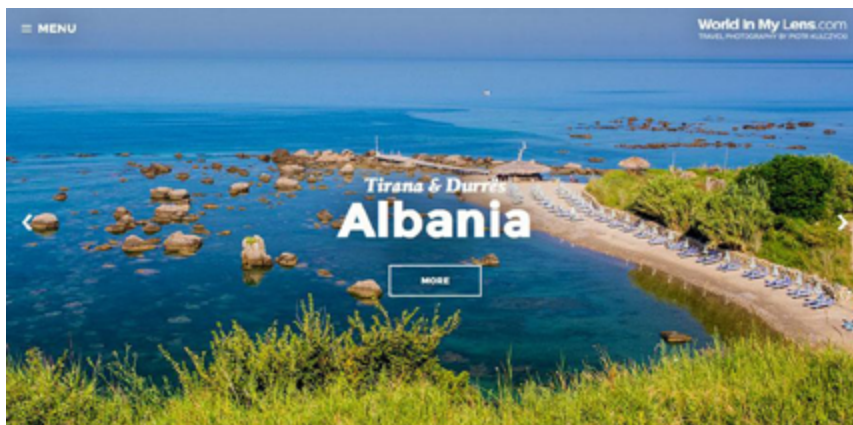


Photo Credits: <http://www.worldinmylens.com/>

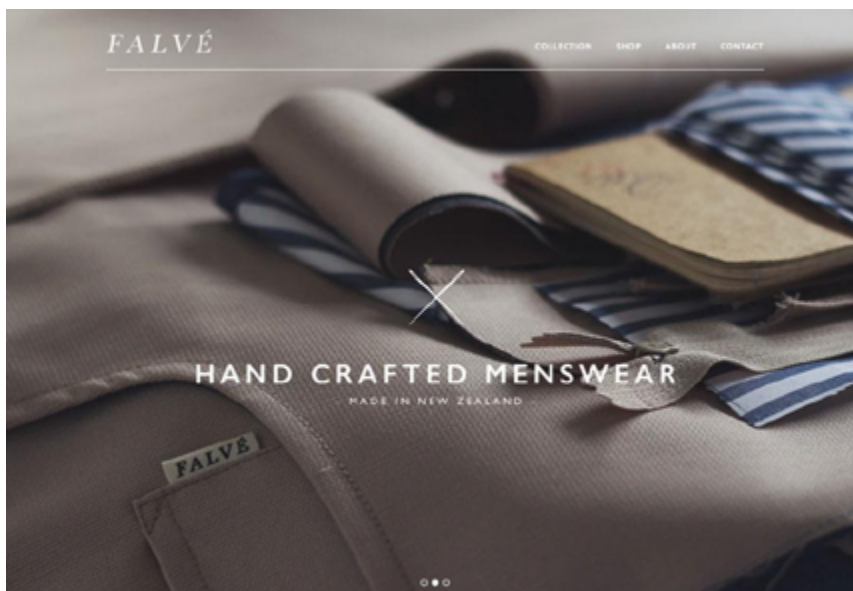


Photo Credits: <http://www.falve.co.nz/>

While the most common application in 2015 has been through the use of **ghost buttons** (transparent clickable buttons), small typography can be used in other ways as well. Small type, aside from

that used in buttons, is often black, used with a typeface that has a bolder or thicker stroke and in all caps. Small typography is often an element that brings focus and attention to words in a design that uses plenty of open space.

Small typography can also work brilliantly in contrast with a [hero-style image](#). The oversized image/undersized type pairing creates visual intrigue and interest.

Pro tip: Add extra emphasis to small type with color or a simple animation. The eye will naturally draw to type surrounded by space, but it's alright to use small type with a busier background as long as there is another element to direct the focus of users.

Type on Images

In the earlier days of the web, designers and developers often thought of type and images as two separate components. Dramatic type is often integrated with images to create a single high-impact user interface element.

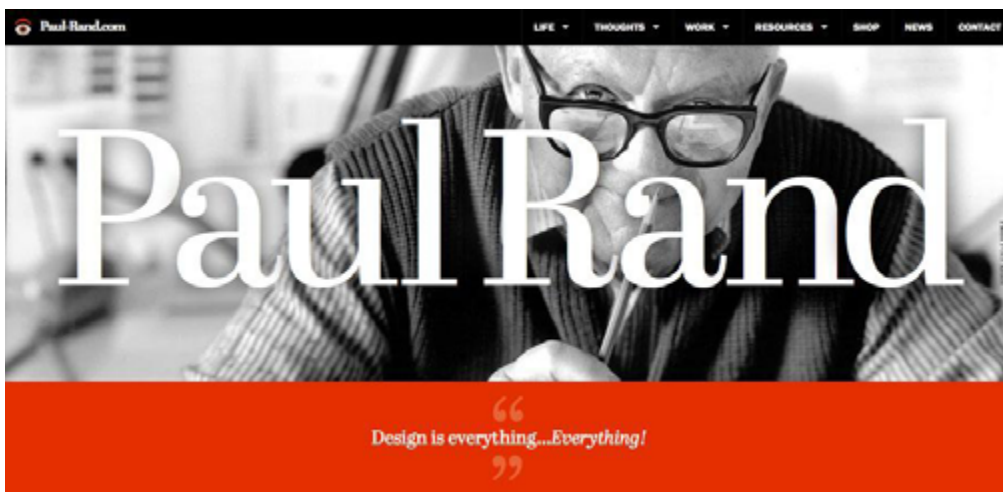


Photo Credits: <http://www.paul-rand.com/>

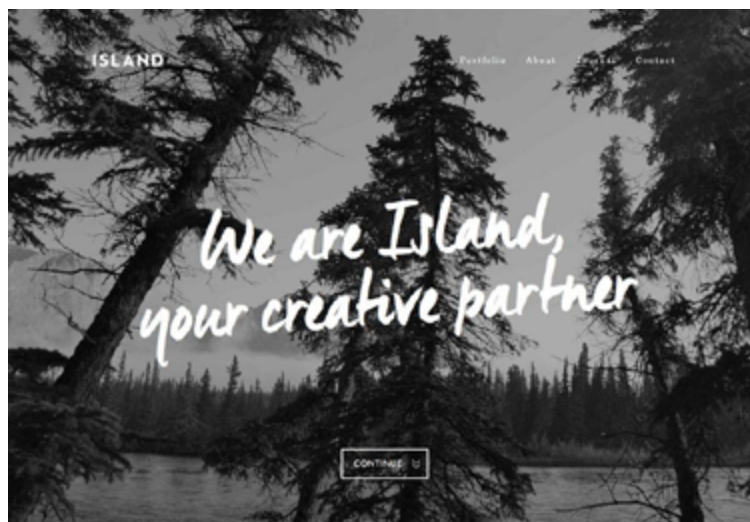


Photo Credits: <http://weareisland.com/>

The biggest concerns about creating type that lives on images are contrast and readability. As a designer, you have to pay close atten-

tion to every image and how type will play on top of it. (This includes looking at the combination of text and photo at a variety of break-points on numerous devices.)

As discussed in *Web Design for the Human Eye*, the words and images have to say the same thing in order to achieve drama. If the messages are different, the result is confusion. Think of it this way, if you are selling a designer portfolio, the words might be that of your name, but if the image is of someone most people can identify, say LeBron James, that will cause an immediate confusing juxtaposition.

Pro tip: Text should never cover or hide important parts of an image. What do you want users to see? Lettering must allow that part of the image to come through. This often includes the faces of people or any product or brand placement.

Simple Typefaces Used in Interesting Ways

Type on photos is dramatic, so what about type *in* photos?

Typography with thick strokes and simple lines can make a nice canvas for a strong, well placed image. This can be a design challenge and only works with the right combination of lettering and imagery. The best designs include only a simple image with one or two words that are easy to read.



Photo Credits: <http://anjarubik.mohito.com/en/>

Another option is to add embellishment of a simple serif or script typeface with images. This could include techniques such as adding a stroke or artistic flourishes to an otherwise simple set of letterforms.

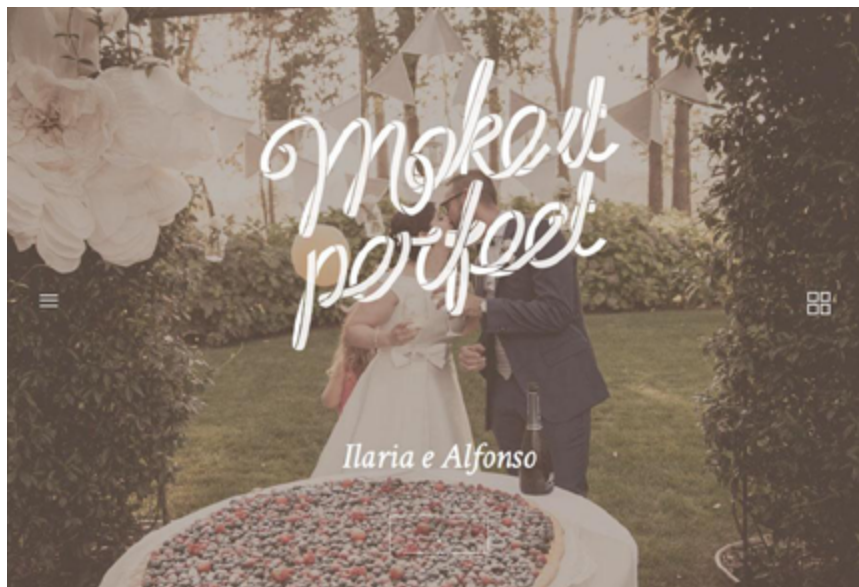


Photo Credits: <http://makeitperfect.it/>

Pro tip: Use this technique against a simple white or black background so all of the attention is on the words. This trend needs to stand alone and not compete with lots of other “tricks” in the overall design.

Custom Lettering and Typefaces

Every bit of typography and every single letterform is a piece of design on its own. Custom lettering and typefaces add a uniqueness to your design that is difficult replicate in any other way.

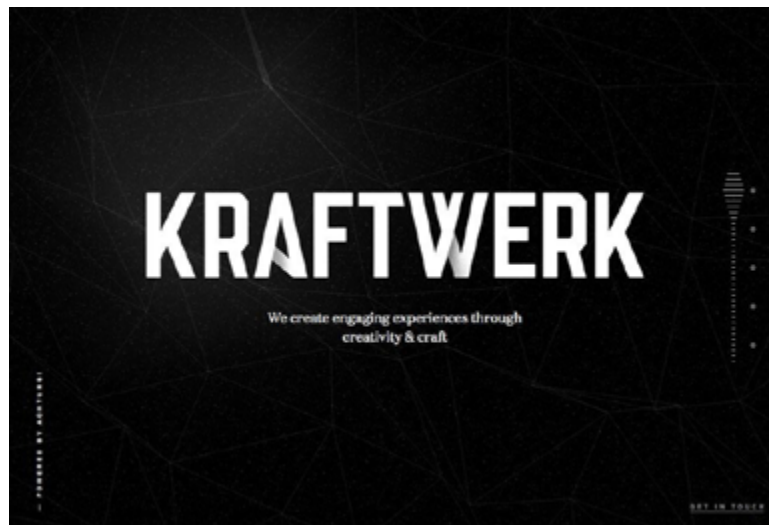


Photo Credits: <http://studiokraftwerk.com/>



Photo Credits: <http://unify.unitinteractive.com/>

But the key is quality. The second important factor is use: Any custom typeface should be used intentionally and sparingly. Most designers go the custom route when thinking about a logo or branding scheme.

The challenge with a custom typeface is compatibility. A custom font needs special work – from CSS to embedding as an image file – to ensure cross-browser and device compatibility.

The other option is to use a box or [web-safe typeface](#) from a kit, but choose something that is not the mainstream.

In the first couple months of 2015, the most used sans serif fonts we saw included:

- Proxima Nova
- Futura
- Avenir
- Open Sans
- Helvetica Neue

The most used serif fonts included:

- Caslon
- Garamond
- Freight Text
- Minion
- FF Meta Serif

Pro tip: When browsing through font options on a website such as [Google Fonts](#), avoid sorting by popularity. That way you won't get the most commonly-used options first. If you need a lot of flexibility,

consider sorting by number of styles. Check out [this great piece](#) from Smashing Magazine to learn more about selecting a typeface maximized for usability.

Typography as Art

Dramatic type might be lettering that isn't specifically designed to be read at all. The intent might be to create an art element to carry your website design with an integrated message.





Photo Credits: <http://www.designweekportland.com/>

Letterforms can be grouped and adjusted to form images, messages or shapes of their own. This can be a difficult and time-consuming technique and is best used sparingly, but when done well, the result can be quite impactful.

The trend is one of the oldest typography ideas in the book. Designers – especially those working with print materials such as posters – have been creating art out of lettering since the first letterforms were drawn by hand in ancient cultures.

The most important factor in this usage is to think about whether the actual words need to be comprehensible. Is the text a fun find for some users or is it necessary to understand the message you are trying to convey?

Pro tip: Avoid cliché letterform art such as word clouds or using a word to represent the thing in the word, such as the word “bird” in the shape of a bird.

Combining Typography Techniques

Creating dramatic typography is not a simple, one-stop design technique. The aforementioned techniques are often used in concert to create a complete design package.



Photo Credits: <http://www.vintagehope.co.uk/>

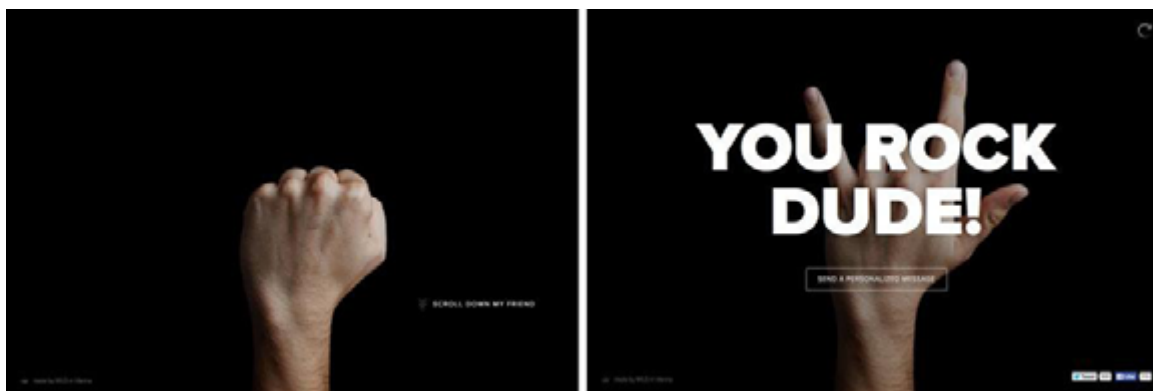


Photo Credits: <http://sendamessage.to/>

The site pictured above (in two panels) is a perfect example of combining techniques. In the home screen, small type is used to grab your attention and give emphasis to the image. Scroll down for a simple animation of the hand opening and oversized text (a thick-stroke sans serif in call caps and centered) draws you to the call to action on the site.

Combining techniques can be done in other ways as well. Think about using an image inside text. It will likely have to be oversized text so that the image is easy to see, right?

There are an almost infinite number of ways to experiment with dramatic typography effects. The best designs often pair simple techniques and stick to a single element with more elaborate ideas. In any instance, the type effect should match the mood, tone and branding associated with the message of the website.

Thinking Beyond the Present

Dramatic typography is not a passing trend of 2015. It is here to stay for a long time.



Photo Credits: <http://www.mooncampapp.com/>

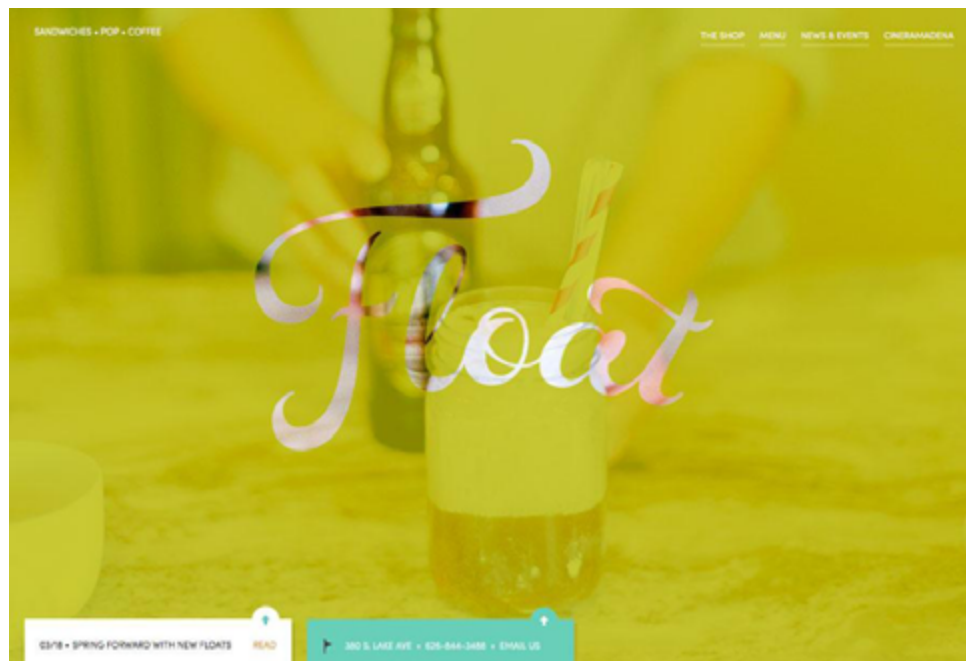


Photo Credits: <http://floatpasadena.com/>

Dramatic typography fulfills a variety of design objectives:

- Creates a distinct and readable message
- Works well with other trends ([flat design](#), [minimalism](#), [vibrant color](#), [custom photography](#))
- Is easy to understand and create
- Integrates with current web technology and design capability
- Draws in users to create a memorable impression

The question is how will dramatic typography continue to evolve this year and beyond?

It is almost certain that designers will continue to use high-drama text. They may, however, dial back parts of the trend that are starting to feel overdone.

For example, we may begin to see more color and less white type. More designers may opt for transparencies or 3D effects in the creation of dramatic letterforms. A shift from uber-thin to thicker stroke widths in letterforms could take place. Letterforms may also include more basic or simple animations or work as part of a larger scheme of scrolling or other user interface elements.

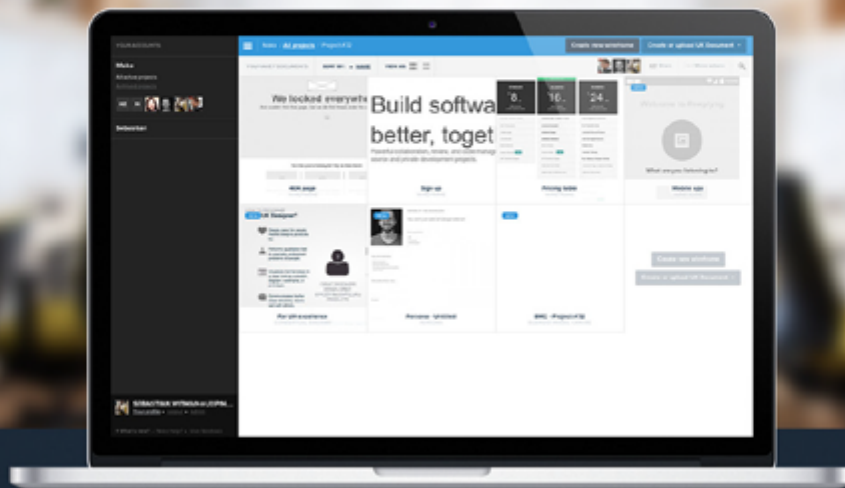
10 Free Resources and Tools

There is a lot of information on dramatic type, galleries of work and tools that you can use to help create great typography for a variety of projects. Try using some of these tools with the techniques above for your next project that centers on high-drama typography.

Here are 10 resources to get you started:

1. **WhatFont tool:** Identifies fonts in-browser with just a click.
2. **Creative Bloq – “Choosing Web Fonts 15 Expert Tips”:** Picking the perfect typeface can be intimidating; here are a few ways to get started.
3. **Typewolf:** Font recommendations, lists and ideas for how to use type on the web.
4. **Fonts.com “Eight Tips for Type on the Web”:** Effective type has to be clean, clear, appealing and readable. Tips to help you plan a type scheme and know which rules to break in order to create more drama.
5. **FFFallback:** Tests and analyzes the compatibility of web fonts used in your design and CSS and finds alternative selections for trouble spots.

6. **Designmodo – “Going Bigger with Typography”**: Guide for how to use oversized type and a gallery of examples.
7. **Awwwards Typography in Web Design Gallery**: Updated regularly, the list features plenty of websites that use typography in new and innovative ways.
8. **Top Design Mag – “25 Awesome typography Tutorials”**: Not sure how to actually create some of the techniques you have seen? This group of tutorials can help.
9. **Beautiful Web Type**: See live examples of the best and most popular typefaces from Google Fonts.
10. **Elegant Themes – “41 Best Free Web Fonts of 2015”**: Use this guide to help sort through the thousands of options available.



- ✓ Complete prototyping framework for web, mobile, and wearables
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 - ✓ Lo-fi to hi-fi design in a single tool
- ✓ Integration with Photoshop and Sketch



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