Visuals in Music Promotion:
Developing an Effective Visual Marketing Campaign
Within the Musical Brand of the Bluegrass Genre

MFA Thesis
Grant Cochran
Visuals in Music Promotion:
Developing an Effective Visual Marketing Campaign
Within the Musical Brand of the Bluegrass Genre

Master of Fine Arts Thesis Project
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Poster from a 2002 bluegrass concert in Nashville, TN.
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Poster from a 2011 bluegrass concert in Nashville, TN.
INTRODUCTION

The American-born genre of bluegrass music is not a widely accessible form of music. Very rarely will bluegrass music be found on commercial radio. If you want to hear bluegrass music, you will usually have to search it out. Author Dwight Warden describes bluegrass music as being a music that is under the radar. It is not a style of music that has major marketing companies to support its promotion, as would the genres of Pop or Hip Hop or Country music. Bluegrass music is not a largely commercially-bolstered style of music. And because of that, it faces its own kind of hurdles within event promotion. And since the focus of the music is in the sound, not the look, the importance of promotional visual design is often ignored in the marketing of bluegrass concerts and bluegrass music festivals. So, what kind of promotional visuals would most effectively appeal to those who go to bluegrass music events? Nobody really knows, and that’s the problem. The purpose of this thesis research is to discover what the most effective style of visual design would be that would appeal to fans of bluegrass music and persuasively draw them into actually attending those bluegrass music festivals.
As most scholarly writings relating to bluegrass music have been in regards to promoting the sound of the music instead of the promotional look of the music, there is not much research to be found on this specific subject. And that is certainly understandable as the target topic is, by definition, auditory instead of visual. In the book, Bluegrass, A History, the author states that “for all its growth, bluegrass remains understudied” (Rosenberg xiii).

The process of my research is to, first of all, analyze what visual promotion has historically been used in bluegrass music. I will then identify what type of visual marketing is currently being used in the promotion of bluegrass concerts and festivals. Then, through interviews and surveys, I will identify what kind of promotional visual design would be the most widely appealing to the range of the people who would be attending those bluegrass events. And not just the most appealing, but the most effective for drawing those fans in to the events.

There is a wide range of people that find bluegrass music appealing. Bev Paul, the General Manager of Sugar Hill Records in Durham, North Carolina, says research shows that “bluegrass consumers are active, educated buyers.” But even though this musical genre is finding an audience, authors Deborah Price and Phyllis Stark indicate that there is a need for “exposure with more aggressive marketing techniques.”

So, what kind of visual design would be the most effective in appealing to bluegrass music fans? This thesis begins by looking at what kind of promotional design has historically been used within bluegrass music. Since the beginnings of the genre (historically considered to have begun in 1945), there have been some commonly used visual methods to promote bluegrass concerts, such as posters and fliers. There have, of course, been many changes in marketing methods since the 1940s and there have also been some changes in the visual styles being used.

My research involves seeking input from festival attendees, musicians, and promoters in order to determine what kind of marketing design is most appealing to the fans and would effectively influence them to attend the event. This thesis deals with finding out what visual imagery most effectively attracts bluegrass music fans to bluegrass events. Then, with that research, this project will culminate in the design of a series of deliverables to be used in the marketing a major new bluegrass event which will begin in the Fall of 2019.

This thesis also involves the research of varying visuals currently being used within bluegrass promotion. I have seen several types of bluegrass promotional designs that I feel could fall within several distinct categories. Which of these styles are the most effective? Are those designs determined by budget constraints? Are the visuals determined by the tastes of targeted age groups or geographic regions or even fringe styles within the genre? The answers to these type of questions can be obtained mostly through the research process of Desirability Testing (Hanington 64-65), along with elements of the Survey (Hanington 172-173) process and with various aspects of A/B Testing (Hanington 8-9). The Desirability Testing process is defined in the book Visuals in Music Promotion | Grant Cochran | Visuals in Music Promotion

“For all its growth, bluegrass remains understudied” — Neil V. Rosenberg
as exploring “the effective response that different designs elicit from people, so that the team can focus design efforts on shaping the exact emotional response they want people to have while using their products” (Hanington 64). A range of defined bluegrass festival promotional designs will be presented to the survey participants for which those participants can express their favor or dislike. The results of this aspect of Desirability survey research will have a direct impact on the resulting look of the final designs of festival and concert promotion deliverables.

After identifying those visual preferences through the interviews and the survey, those aspects will be applied to a series of deliverables that will be based on those design preferences. This will involve the Prototyping process (Hanington 138-139) as those design preferences will be applied to the materials that are to promote a new start-up festival in the
Midwest. The authors of *Universal Methods of Design* describe Prototyping as “the physical realization of product or interface concepts... representing the creative translation of research and ideation into tangible form” (Hanington 138). So, the preferences that are identified from the earlier Desirability Testing will be applied to the visual designs of the promotional material for the specified bluegrass festival. These final prototypes of festival posters, website, and advertising will be made available to the promoter of the new high-profile bluegrass festival that will be starting up in October of 2019.
RESEARCH

BACKGROUND OF THE MUSIC

Not many forms of music can pinpoint the moment of its inception. Of course, as with all art forms, there are numerous directions of influence that can be found within bluegrass music, but many experts identify the year 1945 as when everything actually came together to define what is now known as bluegrass music. As an industry, country music began in the 1920s, as recording technology and broadcasting capabilities came into play. For example, the well-known “Bristol Sessions” recorded by Ralph Peer for the Victor Recording Company, showed that there was a vast (and profitable) market for the music played and sung by rural musicians and singers. Peer “opened the field of recording to artists who had been left out” (Zwonitzer 84). The rural music included mountain fiddle sounds, family harmony (the original Carter Family), and even delta blues (Jimmy Rodgers).
The 1930s brought about the popular rural stylings of brother duets, such as the Delmore Brothers and the Blue Sky Boys (Artis 32). One of the well-known brother duet acts of the day was the Monroe Brothers, which consisted of Charlie and Bill Monroe. Eventually, the Monroe Brothers act broke up, leaving each brother to branch out on their own.

Bill started his own band and named the group Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys, in honor of his home state. Bill’s band was quite popular, and he toured throughout the south. Bill experimented with numerous instrumental combinations in order to put together a stringband sound that was his own. In 1945, he hit pay-dirt — a young banjo player from North Carolina named Earl Scruggs came to Nashville and auditioned for the band. Earl’s style of playing was completely different from the more common “frailing” style of banjo. Earl used a 3-finger picking style that the rural audiences had not heard before, and it caught on like wildfire. This combination of banjo, guitar, mandolin, fiddle, and upright bass became identified with the sound of Bill Monroe’s band, and eventually became known as “bluegrass” music. Other bands began to form and emulate the same type of sound as the Blue Grass Boys. Earl Scruggs and Lester Flatt left Bill’s band and formed their own group, Flatt & Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys. Even though Flatt & Scruggs added one more instrument to the mix, the dobro (resophonic guitar), the instrumentation of bluegrass music has retained the same mix over the years. Bluegrass music is not so much considered a part of “country” music anymore. Even though there has been some occasional crossover through the years, bluegrass music is not found on country music radio. Bluegrass music has its own “stars” and its own venues.

EARLY VISUAL PROMOTION

In the early days of bluegrass, the method of promoting band appearances was mostly through concert announcements on the radio and with the distribution of posters. The impact of the visual promotion provided by the posters was vital to the success of the band and the music. Creating and obtaining those posters was up to the bands themselves. One of the most highly used providers of those posters in the South was a small letterpress print shop in Nashville, Tennessee called Hatch Show Print. Many southern musicians obtained their visual poster advertising through Hatch Show Print because “the shop proved sympathetic to musicians who came through the front door in search of inexpensive posters to advertise their gigs” (Sherraden 103). The shop’s long-standing use of traditional letterpress has resulted in a visual style of poster that connects closely with the shop and with bluegrass music.

Bill Monroe, the figure that is considered the founder and “Father of Bluegrass,” used Hatch Show Print extensively for the promotion of his concert appearances (fig. 1). One of Monroe’s former band members, Bob Black, who grew up around the printing industry and earned his college degree in graphic design, described Mr. Monroe’s process of using Hatch Show Print to supply his visual promotion materials:

For a couple of weeks before each show, Birch Monroe (Bill’s brother) could be seen traveling about Brown County, always wearing a hat, white shirt, and tightly knotted tie, nailing up posters for the event. Often, the posters came from Hatch Show Print in Nashville, a very old company that has been producing posters for country, vaudeville,
In 1965, music promoter Carleton Haney had the idea to begin a multi-day outdoor bluegrass festival to be held on Labor Day weekend. This is considered to be the very first outdoor bluegrass festival and the beginning of what became an extremely popular form of presenting the genre. The promotion for the festival was a simple, 2-color poster that featured typography that indicated the time and place and participating bluegrass acts (fig. 2). Author Ron Roach describes the importance of this first bluegrass festival for the later success of the music. Bluegrass fans “were relatively few in number, bluegrass festivals did not yet exist.”

THE TARGET AUDIENCE

“There are about 18.7 million bluegrass fans in the U.S.” (Silverstein 2). “Research from leading research firm Experian Simmons indicates that bluegrass consumers are actually ahead of other consumers in terms of their online usage” (Silverstein 12). Author Deborah Evans Price states that “live shows remain the top tool for familiarizing music listeners with the genre.” Scott Lindy, the Director of Country Programming for Sirius Satellite Radio, when he said that “I’ve been hooked for about three years now, and it all started with a bluegrass festival I got talked into going to.”

Bluegrass music has an appeal to people of all ages, both male and female. Sometimes considered a mostly male-dominated form of music, many barriers were overcome to where “numerous women are now leading their own bands, a few women are finding work as side musicians in male bands, mixed-gender bands are becoming more common, and, inspired by the visible success of Alison Krauss and Rhonda Vincent, more young women than ever are taking up bluegrass instruments” (Henry 381).

There are actually two target audiences for the resulting thesis deliverables. As the design deliverables will be for a newly-started bluegrass festival in Missouri, there is the target audience of the festival promoters and the target audience of those that the promoters hope will attend the event. For the promoters, the deliverables will hopefully add to their success financially and their success in continuing the festival into future years. Aspects of that can be achieved from things such as “a consistent brand identity that transfers from the parent organization to the event” (Silverstein 19). For the attendees, the deliverables should be a major factor in helping them decide to actually attend the event.

The primary potential impact that I’m hoping to be made with the result of this thesis research is for bluegrass music promoters to see the importance and the effectiveness of good promotional design, and thus, put more time, money, and emphasis on developing that visual design for their music events. As stated in research done by Henrik Hagtvedt, “visual art has a substantial influence on consumer behavior. For this reason and for the reasons we outlined previously, the phenomenon of art infusion is an area that merits further research from a managerial perspective, a theoretical perspective, and a general human interest perspective” (Hagtvedt 388).
THE CURRENT STATE OF BLUEGRASS VISUAL PROMOTION

Author Alan Gowans states that “nowadays, advertising is the most prominent of all persuasive arts in both the western and eastern worlds” (Gowans 9), and that “the issue of persuasion is central in any consideration of poster design” (Gowans 10).

The decisions on the manner of promotional design varies from one festival event to the other. And the priorities of how much time or emphasis is placed on that promotional design also varies from one festival to the next. Lara Gomora, the Marketing Director for Arizona’s Pickin’ in the Pines festival, says that “we create the festival artwork each year and the Co-directors act as our client [in order to] give input to what they like or don’t like until we come to the final product.” Budget is a big factor in how much emphasis is place on the design. Tricia Graves, promoter of the Graves Mountain Festival of Music in Syria, Virginia, states that “We do use our local printer that we use for all of our printing needs for the design and printing -- but we do check rates with other printers just to make sure that our source is a good choice dollar-wise.”

In looking at the current state of bluegrass festival promotion, I was able to gain some insight from various bluegrass festival promoters from across the country. They have indicated the process that they go through in order to produce their promotional materials and how important the visual design is to the success of their festivals. They have provided some good insight into the thought process that is put into the visual materials. Many of the individuals that are in charge of the visual promotion come from a graphic design background and are quite aware of the needs for quality design in their materials.

IDENTIFYING DESIGN CATEGORIES

As I reviewed the visual material that is commonly used for promoting bluegrass events, I was able to identify some basic categories within those designs. I have identified five different visual styles — straight typography (usually in an old-timey letterpress style of visual type), typography with band promo images (most commonly used style), typography with festival logo, typography with related graphic, and typography with unrelated illustration (mostly used in targeting the younger, fringe sub-set genre of “jam-grass”).
STRAIGHT TYPOGRAPHY

This visual category is basically straight text. There will most likely be some aspect of design to the text, but the entire appeal of this type of marketing, is the language itself — the names of the bands or the reputation of the venue. The pull on the consumer (the bluegrass fan) is the text. There are few visual frills added. They typography that is used is sometimes hand-drawn or set in the look of distressed letterpress.
TYPOGRAPHY WITH PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS
This particular category also emphasizes the participating musical artists. But this method uses not just the name of the bands, but an actual image of those artists to influence the bluegrass concert-goer to attend the event. Judy Adams, who promotes bluegrass festivals in Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina, says that “most folks enjoy the pictures of the entertainers.” Bobbie Day, promoter of Missouri’s Starvy Creek Festival points out that “we like to put a lot of pictures on the flier.” The promoter for Arizona’s Pickin’ in the Pines stresses the success of including images of the headlining musicians. “We put new branding on the poster and focused more on the bands as they really drew in our crowd this year.”
There are a number of bluegrass festivals which have developed a logo to represent their particular event. An identifiable consistency develops from one year to the next and provides a method of branding to the festival. Regarding the logo of a large bluegrass festival in North Carolina, Silverstein states that “this makes a lot of sense, because it provides a consistent brand identity that transfers from the parent organization to the event” (Silverstein 19). And “if logos are well-designed, appropriate, and distinctive, they can go a long way to setting your brand apart” (Silverstein 20).
TYPOGRAPHY WITH RELATED ILLUSTRATION

The most obvious way to connect bluegrass festival promotion with a visual is to include images of bluegrass musicians or of bluegrass instruments — some visual that is connected to the actual event. For example, the visual designs used for the promotion of the Pickin’ in the Pines festival in Arizona, usually try to incorporate some aspect of outdoor imagery. The promoter of that bluegrass festival, Lara Gomora, says that “we usually incorporate some nature elements since we are an outside festival in the forest surrounded by mountains, and camping is a big part of our festival.”

Examples of bluegrass promotional posters that featuring related illustrations.
Examples of bluegrass promotional posters that feature unrelated illustrations.

TYPOGRAPHY WITH UNRELATED ILLUSTRATION
Occasionally, there are promotional materials using designs where the visuals seem to have no apparent connection to the music or to the event. The use of such an unrelated visual can imply an appealing edginess. The use of this particular style is usually connected to a younger age-range, such as the “jamgrass” audience, instead of the traditional bluegrass audience. The type of music known as “jamgrass” is a style of music that is considered to be on the fringe of the bluegrass genre. Its sound is still “rootsy” and acoustic and they use the traditional bluegrass instrumentation, but it leans much more heavily on what radio music director Scottie Robertson refers to as “rock material” that “lends itself to interpretation through bluegrass.”
CURRENT USAGE

During my research, in order to gain a more complete picture of what kind of promotional imagery is being used across the country, I divided the U.S. map into four different regions — the Northeast, the Southeast, the Midwest, and the Western regions, and identified the major bluegrass festivals in those areas. I was able to find current examples of the advertising materials being used for 57 different bluegrass festivals from 37 different states. As I reviewed the promotional material that is being used, I divided those designs into the aforementioned visual categories.

There are not a lot of examples of the STRAIGHT TYPOGRAPHY category currently being used to market bluegrass events. Of the 57 different festivals that I looked at, there were only 2 which would come under this particular category. In those examples, the name of the festival is the prominent typography.

There were also very few uses of the TYPOGRAPHY WITH UNRELATED ILLUSTRATION category. Of the 57 different festivals, only 2 festivals used imagery that was not specifically related to the music or the location of the event. One of those 2 bluegrass music events could be considered “jamgrass,” but the other festival was definitely in the “traditional” bluegrass music camp.
There are quite a few currently-run bluegrass festivals that use promotion materials that would fall within the **TYPOGRAPHY WITH FESTIVAL LOGO** design style. With a logo design that festival promoters are able to use year after year, they are able to convey a consistent image. That logo visually represents something of a persona connected with the festival. The various aspects of the festival — good music, good food, enjoyable camping, etc. — are all represented with the visual identification of the logo that has been created for the festival. Of the 57 different currently running bluegrass festivals that I looked at, there were 12 that had developed a specific logo image that went along with their advertised event.
The promotional materials of the remaining researched festivals were split fairly evenly between the **TYPOGRAPHY WITH PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS** visual category and the **TYPOGRAPHY WITH RELATED ILLUSTRATION** visual style category. There are 21 different festivals (of the overall 57) that predominantly market their bluegrass festivals using photo images of the participating singers and musicians. This is the predominant category of design for bluegrass festival marketing that is currently being used by festival promoters.

The featured bands are the stars that have the drawing power for bringing in paying fans. Those who attend bluegrass festivals are coming to hear the music. And if those fans can quickly see and identify that a group of musicians whose music they really like will be performing at the venue, then they will more likely set aside the time and finances to attend.

Examples of current festival materials that predominantly feature band promotional photos.
And then, of the researched 57 currently running festivals, there are 20 that develop promotional materials that are using some sort of illustration that relates to the music or the location. Those visuals can include images such as bluegrass instruments or bluegrass musicians; or images dealing with the location of the performance venue, such as related outdoor scenery or specific landmarks connected to the concert site.

This type of promotional design can consist of any number of illustrative styles, but each are meant to catch the eye of any who might want to attend. These illustrations convey more of a feel to the overall festival instead of specifically focusing in on the star power of the included performers.

Examples of current festival materials that predominantly feature related illustrations.
PRESENTING THOSE CATEGORIES WITHIN A SURVEY

In order to determine the direction of design that appeals to the bluegrass fan, a survey was developed that presented those promotional design categories. Those design categorizations were presented as options to bluegrass music fans in order to determine which visual style would be more likely to influence their attendance. Of course, there are many elements of design that end up influencing individual decisions, but the results of the survey indicate how important specific categorical aspects are in those decisions.

In order to maintain the choices to visual appeal alone (instead of band-name appeal), the design choices were presented as all being for the same single concert featuring the same bands. But each design was based on a different identified visual category. The only differences were in regards to the visual design. The survey participant was presented with this range of designs and instructed to quickly choose the image that would most likely influence their attendance at the event. To where does the eye of the viewer go first? The band name? The band image? The identifying mark of the festival? The survey results let me know which image style would most influence the participant to attend the event. The book *Universal Methods of Design* describes this method as Desirability Testing, which is exploring “the effective response that different designs elicit from people, so that the team can focus design efforts on shaping the exact emotional response they want people to have while using their products” (Hanington 64). For further insight, the participant was also given the option to comment as to why they chose this particular poster design. Additional questions were included to help identify whether a certain visual design style is a preference based on age or sex.

The thesis survey was presented through social media to groups of individuals who are known to attend bluegrass-related concerts and festivals. Invitations to participate in the survey were initially sent to 88 different people, with the intent for those participants to invite additional bluegrass fans to participate in a “snowball” process.

After a brief description of what the survey would entail, the survey participants were provided with a link that took them to the survey. That survey was available on the surveymonkey.com website. The actual survey began with an introductory instruction page. Then the participant would choose to either “agree” or “disagree” with the required Consent Form, which dealt with subjects such as risks, benefits, and confidentiality. In order to continue with the survey, the participant was also required to agree that they were at least 18 years of age.

From there, the participants were instructed to quickly choose, from a series of categorical designs, which visual design would most likely influence them
to attend the promoted bluegrass festival. After the respondent made their choice, the participant then had the option to explain why they made that particular choice. In order to determine if musical tastes within the genre had any connection with the visual design choice, the participant had the option of listing some of their favorite bluegrass bands. Brief follow-up questions involved age, sex, and residence.

The design of the deliverable promotional materials are directly based on the results of this survey. This will involve the Prototyping process (Hanington 138-139) as those design preferences will be applied to promotional materials for a new bluegrass festival in the Missouri. The authors of Universal Methods of Design describe Prototyping as “the physical realization of product or interface concepts... representing the creative translation of research and ideation into tangible form” (Hanington 138). These final prototypes of festival posters, website, and advertising will be made available to the promoter of the new bluegrass festival that will be starting up in October of 2019.
THE RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

There were many responses to the survey and there was a wide range of participants. There were survey responses that came in over the time period of 10 days. When the results were tallied, it ended up that 60% of the survey participants were male, and 40% of the participants were female. The majority (24%) of the survey participants were in the 55-64 years age range. There were 11% in the 18-24 range, 18% were ages 25-34, 8% were ages 35-44, 21% were 45-54, and 18% of the survey participants were age 65 or older.

The TYPOGRAPHY WITH RELATED ILLUSTRATION category and the TYPOGRAPHY WITH UNRELATED ILLUSTRATION category came in with the least amount of preferences from the survey respondents. There were only 3% that preferred the design with a related illustration and just 5% that preferred the one with an unrelated illustration.

And even with these two illustration-related categories, the main reasons that the survey respondents gave as to their choice dealt with how easy it was to read the band names, not with the design aspect of the added illustration. Well, there was one survey respondent whose reason for liking the illustration was that it was “cute.”

The design category option of TYPOGRAPHY WITH FESTIVAL LOGO came in with a preference rate of just 18%. Of those respondents who listed a reason for this choice, they mostly seemed to be drawn to the aspect that the logo gives them a quick identification to the actual festival.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSTER PREFERENCE</th>
<th>REASONS</th>
<th>M/F</th>
<th>AGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C (18%)</td>
<td>I like the logo at the top. In my experience with festivals, each state has an identifiable logo that’s quick to recognize.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>55-64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The “road into the mountains” artwork at the top matched the name of the festival.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not cluttered, but gives info.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>65+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of survey participants that preferred the category of STRAIGHT TYPOGRAPHY was, to me, surprisingly high at 24%. As it was earlier found through researching currently-used promotional design that this visual style is not a visual design method that seems to be much in use anymore for bluegrass promotion, I did not think that there would be many bluegrass fans preferring this option.

The respondents that preferred this visual category seemed to prefer its simplicity. The actual names of the participating performers are what caught their attention. The visual aspect and power of the written word are the elements that drew their interest.
I am kind of amused at the one response that gives their reason for choosing this option as being the “Best font,” when each of the poster design options used the exact same font. I think that this indicates that the respondent just didn’t want to have any image to interfere with being able to identify the performers by name.

Here are some of the reasons that were given by the survey participants that preferred the straight typography design:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSTER PREFERENCE</th>
<th>REASONS</th>
<th>M/F</th>
<th>AGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (24%)</td>
<td>Simple, clean, brief, names of the bands prominent.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>45-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I always think simple text when presented in the right color is timeless. If there is a name I have not heard of, a photo may influence my opinion of the band prior to listening.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I like it simple. I'm just looking at the names to see if someone I like is there.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I prefer the old style of poster. Primary people that will be going to a show like this will already know the names and don’t need to see faces. I do also like the poster with the “logo” of the festival. More modern, but prefer the old style.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s clear and doesn’t look homespun.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caught my eye best and I could read at a glimpse what and who it was.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>45-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simple, plain text design caught my eye the quickest. Best font.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>35-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Symmetry.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>55-64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But, as the results of the survey came in, a clear visual design winner was obvious — **TYPOGRAPHY WITH PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS**. 50% of the survey respondents chose this visual category. The category of visual design that most appeals to those who attend bluegrass-related concerts and festivals is the promotional material that most predominantly features the images of the musical performers. The image of the performers (along with the typography) most quickly helps the bluegrass fan identify whose music they would hear if they attended the bluegrass festival.

The visuals of the performing musical acts effectively influences the concert-going decisions of the bluegrass fan. And, of those who picked this particular visual category, 63% were male and 37% were female, which aligns quite closely with the overall percentage of male/female responses.

Some of the reasons that were given by the those who made this category choice, were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSTER PREFERENCE</th>
<th>REASONS</th>
<th>M/F</th>
<th>AGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B (50%)</td>
<td>Like photos.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>65+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The name of the festival is very visible as well as the dates. It also shows the pictures of the bands so if you don’t recognize the names, you might recognize their picture.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I find that having band photos is helpful as sometimes we don’t remember the band names.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>65+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I like logos, but I also think pictures grab people’s attention more.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pics of bands.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes I don’t know their names, but know their faces.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I like to see CURRENT pictures of the band.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>45-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pictures of the bands involved.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>55-64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It's nice to get a visual of the bands that are going to perform.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>55-64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It displayed images of the performers.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>55-64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think people will look at pictures and then info before they look at just printed information.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>65+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DESIGN PROCESS

I had fully expected the survey responders to indicate a preference for the design option that used illustrations of the music or the festival location to promote the event. As a graphic designer, using such an illustration for marketing would be the design route requiring the most creativity and design skills. But the survey results indicate that the design category featuring illustrations as the predominant visual are actually the least favored design direction.

From the results of the survey responses, the clear direction for the design of the deliverables is to predominantly feature the images of the festival performers. I think that this indicates that, to the bluegrass music fan, the most important visual is the one that provides the most direct information as to what musical performers can be heard at the festival. I believe that the survey participants are indicating that the main draw to the bluegrass festival is to know what musical artists they will be listening to if they attend. The aspect that will influence the bluegrass fan to attend is the music itself — they want to know who they will be hearing.
if they come. And the quickest, most direct way to be able to identify whose music they will hear at the event, is to feature photographs of the performers.

As the predominant design aspect of the deliverables is the image of the bands themselves, the first step was to gather the promotional photos of the festival performers. Most full-time professional bluegrass artists have promotional photographs that they provide through a Media Kit or an Electronic Press Kit (EPK). These photos are provided, free-of-charge, to anyone promoting an appearance of that particular band. The EPK is often available on the band’s website.

The bluegrass bands to be featured on the deliverables are The Lonesome River Band, Balsam Range, the Becky Buller Band, and the Greg Blake Band. The EPKs of these bands were found at:

https://www.lonesomeriverband.com/press-kit/
https://balsamrange.com/photos/
https://beckybuller.com/press-kit/
http://www.gregblakemusic.com/contact1.html

Again, as the “typography with band image” design category is the favored direction indicated from the participants in the research survey, I proceeded with finalizing the deliverable designs to feature visuals of the performing musicians and singers. As the poster visual provided with the survey is the early, bare-bones visual style that is preferred in the survey, the related deliverables are all based on that same visual design.
The design deliverables consist of five different methods of promotion design for the Ozark Mountain Bluegrass Festival:
1. The 14"x22" Promotional Poster.
2. The 8.5"x11" Promotional Flier.
3. Web Ads
4. The Festival Website design.
5. Festival T-Shirt design.

I also knew that I wanted to add some subtle texture to the backgrounds of the series of promotional pieces. So I gathered some samples of paper that had different weights and textures. I then took some close-up photographs of those textured papers. My favorite texture ended up being from a photo of the back of an old bluegrass festival poster that I have. In order to get a usable background texture, I brought that image of the paper into Adobe Photoshop and adjusted the levels just enough to bring out some of the contrasting tones in the paper texture. This texture is consistently used through the majority of the deliverable designs.
The overall design of the deliverables are all based on the flagship design of the promotional poster. The promotional poster is based on the standard window card size of 14"x22". Because of the research results from the survey, the predominant aspect of the promotional poster is the photographic images of the festival performers. The name of the festival and the pertinent date and contact information are also included, but the layout of the poster is designed to where the eye will, first of all, be drawn to the images of the participating bands.

There are two different options offered with the promotional poster. First of all, there is a full-color poster that is available. This option is set to be printed as a CMYK process ink build with full bleeds. There is also the additional design element of an added background texture, but it is not an aspect that would take away from the predominance of the band images.

A second 14"x22" promotional poster option would be a less expensive 2-color poster. This poster design also features the performer photography and typography in a letterpress style of design.
The 8.5”x11” Promotional Flier, with the intent to print at a large run, will be made available in a full-color CMYK version and also with a cost-saving 1-ink half-tone version. Even though it is structured at a different size and ratio than the Promotional Poster, it continues with the same design and information.

The Web Ads, again featuring the festival performers, are available in 3 different sizing options: Full Banner (468 pixels x 60 pixels); Half Page Ad (300 pixels x 600 pixels); and Skyscraper Ad (120 pixels x 600 pixels).

The Full Banner Ads have 4 different options, with each featuring one of the festival performers.

The Half-Page Ad shows images of three of the four performing bands.

The Skyscraper Ad has an image of each of the performing groups.
The design of the Festival Website consists of the Home Page, plus five additional pages of pertinent information. The Scheduled Performers page includes links to those band websites.
Website Home Page with links to additional pages.
The final deliverable design is for the Festival T-Shirt. As halftone images don’t always make the best t-shirt designs, and for the fact that the survey participants’ main concern seems to be the ability to quickly discern what performers they will be hearing, the t-shirt design features the straight typography of the performers names.
FINAL WORK

In the process of producing the final deliverables for developing an effective visual marketing campaign for a bluegrass music festival, the main goal has been to emphasize the photographic imagery of the participating performers. For most of those who attend these musical events, the readily identifiable visual of the featured bands helps them to reach the decision as to whether they will spend the time and money to go to the festival.

The predominant visual feature of each of the deliverable pieces is the promotional photography of the bands involved with the specific bluegrass event. Those photographic visuals are combined with large, bold typography that fully identifies those bluegrass bands along with the name of the bluegrass festival and the time and place where the event takes place.
The typography visual that is being used at this stage for the deliverable pieces is based on a letterpress style of text imagery. This particular style of typography is often used for promotional material in the genre of bluegrass music. There is a sense of the traditional and a connection to the past that is conveyed in the use of an old-fashioned letterpress style of text printing, much like the typography style found in the earlier-mentioned Hatch Show Prints. This particular typography style is fitting in the way that CNN reporter Jon Waterhouse describes the Hatch Show Print typography as “blending the time-honored letterpress tradition with contemporary cool.”

The text of the deliverables was originally designed to consist of a bold, mostly condensed, sans-serif type of font. Then, at the recommendation of thesis committee members, in order to maintain better readability, there were changes made to the typography and to the colors that were used.

![Original poster design using sans-serif fonts.]()  ![Revised poster designs using slab-serif fonts.]()
Typography changed to slab-serif fonts and colors changed on website pages.
DEFENSE OF WORK

What visual promotional design makes the most impression on bluegrass music fans when they are deciding whether or not to attend a bluegrass festival?

That may seem like a question that would be unimportant to anyone except those who like to listen to bluegrass music. But then, consider those promoters who have invested in putting such an event together — the answer could mean the difference between hosting a successful event or losing a large portion of their monetary investment. The answer would also be vitally important to the touring bands and musicians whose livelihood depends on the successful continuation of such events.

The goal of this thesis research is basically fairly simple: to identify what type of promotional design, out of all the various styles of design currently being used, would be most effective in drawing in the bluegrass music fan to attend the music festival.
The first step in this process was to research what kind of visual promotion has been used throughout the history of this musical genre. From there, to research what designs are currently being used in the marketing of bluegrass music. Several styles of design were identified: straight typography, typography with band promo images, typography with festival logo, typography with related graphic, and typography with unrelated illustration.

In order to discover the preference of those design styles among bluegrass fans, I developed a survey which presented those categorical designs. The survey was sent to known bluegrass music fans, and using the snowball method to acquire responses, the clear choice among respondents was the marketing design that features promotional photos of the bluegrass bands that are playing at the festival. The responses from the survey participants indicated that the most important information that they want to garner from the promotional material, is to quickly find out who they will be hearing if they go to the music festival. And they are best able to identify who those musicians may be if they are visually presented with an image of the musicians.

With this directional information that was gained from the survey, I was able to follow that process in designing the related deliverables. I applied this particular category of promotional design to materials that could be used for a new bluegrass festival that is planned to be held in the Fall of 2019 in the Midwest. The deliverables include designs for posters, fliers, a variety of web ads, a website, and t-shirts. And each of these marketing materials predominantly effectively feature the name and image of the bands that the attendees would expect to hear when they go to the bluegrass festival.
WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

So, now that we know this information — what is to be done with it?

Former Blue Grass Boy, Bob Black, says that “visual presentation is much more critical in bluegrass promotion than most people realize. I’ve seen far too many festival fliers that display the particulars of a show without any regard to composition or stylistic presentation, because well-meaning promoters simply don’t understand the importance of such elements in attracting new fans to bluegrass.”

The information derived from this research could hopefully be just the beginning of helping bluegrass promoters realize the importance of quality visual promotion and its influence on the music’s success.

Black further states that “it’s a wonderful music, but you can’t get people to come and hear it without using quality promotion.”
In providing the results of this research to bluegrass promoters and to the educational resources of the International Bluegrass Music Association, this could be the start of making a difference in the amount of time and financial investment that goes into the visual promotion of the music.

This could also be the beginning of further study, in years to come, of what makes for effective visual marketing in bluegrass music promotion. There could be additional research to delve into topics such as: how many promotional photos should be applied in effective marketing materials? Should a limited number of the musical headliners be featured? Is there such a thing as too many promotional photos on a festival flier?

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, “bluegrass remains understudied.” But that can change, especially in regards to further research into the visual appeal and the visual influence of promotional materials for the genre.
IRB Exemption 3632.012919: Visuals in Music Promotion: Developing an Effective Visual Marketing Campaign Within the Musical Brand of the Bluegrass Genre

Dear Grant Cochran,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46.101(b):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board

January 29, 2019

Grant Cochran

IMAGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMAGES</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>poster/flier examples on pages 34-41</td>
<td>Provided as festival promotional materials through festival websites. See permission letters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promotional band photos used on deliverables</td>
<td>Provided as promotional images through the band’s online Electronic Press Kit. See permission letters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-shirt model image and survey illustrations</td>
<td>See Getty Image Premium Access Thinkstock Essentials usage agreement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All other visuals are from the author’s personal collection of photographs and bluegrass posters.
October 3, 2018

**Graphics in Bluegrass Promotion**

As a lifelong bluegrass musician with a degree in graphic design, I have been involved in musical promotion since the early 1970’s. Tee-shirt design, business cards, show cards, CD cover graphics, posters, fliers, website design—in short, almost every form of visual promotion has been part of my background in the music business.

Several factors have become primary considerations for me in the area of visual marketing. Simplicity is probably the foremost consideration. As an artist, I am apt to fall prey to the over-use of new and exciting graphic techniques which may cause me to lose sight of the true goal—which is to generate interest in the band which I am promoting. Getting carried away with design elements is something to guard against. A neutral observer (in my case, my wife Kristie) is very helpful in this regard.

Knowledge of the nature of the music being presented is also an important consideration. A Rock ‘n Roll band might use visual graphics that are very cutting edge in order to draw listeners who are into that musical genre. Outrageous imagery is what these listeners expect (after all, they are used to light shows, smoke machines, pyrotechnics, etc.). Bluegrass listeners, however, are interested in the content of the music more than its visual presentation. Subtler methods of graphic representation are therefore required.

Hatch Show Print, located in Nashville, uses traditional printing methods (old-fashioned letterpresses, silk screens, wood-block letters, half-tone cuts for photos, and so forth) for successful promotion of country and bluegrass shows. These elements are used in very creative ways. For example: superimposing the same image in several different colors and slightly out of register to create a very attractive and pleasing poster. The use of older printing methods in new and imaginative ways is perfect for promoting traditional music—a combination of the old and the new.

Distressed typefaces, which are old-fashioned looking, can also be used to good advantage in promoting bluegrass because they convey a feeling of age and wear, and therefore long-time excellence and dependability. This type of subliminal messaging is another key to successful promotion.

Visual presentation is much more critical in bluegrass promotion than most people realize. I’ve seen far too many festival fliers that display the particulars of a show without any regard to composition or stylistic presentation, because well-meaning promoters simply don’t understand the importance of such elements in attracting new fans to bluegrass. It’s a wonderful music, but you can’t get people to come and hear it without using quality promotion.

—Bob Black
**Request to Use a Press Kit Image**

**PM**

Penni McDaniel <penni@moonstruckmanagement.com>

Today, 7:49 PM
Cochran, Grant Douglas

Hi Grant,

Thank you for your request to use assets that appear in Lonesome River Band’s electronic press kit. You have permission to use any images, videos and other promotional material on their website. If you need anything else, please let me know.

Best of luck to you in your graduate thesis.

Penni McDaniel
Moonstruck Management
www.MoonstruckManagement.com

---

**Request to Use a Press Kit Image**

**MT**

Mandy Tenery <mandy.tenery@balsamrange.com>

Today, 8:02 AM
Cochran, Grant Douglas

Hi Grant,

Sounds like an interesting project!

You have our permission to use the photo in your project. We’d like to give the photog credit, David Slimchock

Best of luck!

Thank you!

iPhone & Typos I Apologize

Mandy Tenery
Tour manager/ Publicity
Balsam Range
www.balsamrange.com
336-502-1921

---

Written permission to use the Balsam Range promotional band photograph.

---

Written permission to use the Becky Buller Band promotional band photograph.

---

Written permission to use the Greg Blake Band promotional band photograph

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Written permission to use the Lonesome River Band promotional band photograph.
Written permission to reproduce the image of the 3 Sisters Bluegrass Festival promotional poster.

Written permission to use the image of the Gettysburg Bluegrass Festival promotional poster.

Written permission to use the image of the Bald Cypress Bluegrass Festival promotional poster.

Written permission to use the image of the Joe Val Bluegrass Festival promotional poster.

Written permission to use the image of the Jerusalem Ridge Bluegrass Celebration promotional poster.
Written permission to use the image of the Wilmington Bluegrass Festival promotional poster.

Written permission to use the image of the Central City Bluegrass Festival promotional poster.

Written permission to use the image of the Walnut Valley Festival promotional poster.

Written permission to use the image of the Jekyll Island New Year’s Bluegrass Festival promotional poster.

Written permission to use the image of the Green Mountain Bluegrass & Roots Festival promotional poster.
Written permission to use the image of the High Mountain Hay Fever Bluegrass Festival promotional poster.

Written permission to use the image of the Northwest String Summit promotional poster.

Written permission to use the image of the Telluride Bluegrass Festival promotional poster.

Written permission to reproduce the included poster images from Hatch Show Print.

--

Hi Grant,

So long as the image is being used exclusively for educational purposes and not being used for any monetary or promotional gain, you are free to use the image. Best,

The Folks on Planet Bluegrass

---

I authorize Grant Cochran, to reproduce images of any or all of the following Hatch Show Print posters:

- a Bill Monroe window card (unknown date; possibly early 1950s)
- a 1994 Bill Monroe/Special Consensus concert in Chicago
- 1992 Ralph Stanley concert at Schubas in Chicago
- 1997 Bluegrass Nights at the Ryman
- 2001 Bluegrass Nights at the Ryman
- 2017 Bluegrass Nights at the Ryman
- the 2002 All-Star Bluegrass Celebration at the Ryman
- a 2000 Bean Blossom Festival poster
- 2003 Tribute to John Hartford on the Belle of Louisville steamers
- a 1996 AKUS concert at Rowan College
- a 2001 AKUS concert at Brearley Academy
- a 2005 AKUS concert at Denver Paramount Theatre (unknown date)
- a 2008 Jerry Douglas at Lilith Fair in Independence
- 2016 Earl & Willy’s at Nashville
- 2003 Open Road in Charlottesville, VA
- 2008 Tony Rice at Imperial Theatre
- 2008 Danica at Buffalo at the Lovelace Barn
- 2013 World of Bluegrass poster
- a 2015 Merlefest poster
- a 1996 Willie GO release party (unreadable date)

In his thesis, *Visuals in Music Promotion: Developing an Effective Visual Marketing Campaign within the Musical Brand of the Bluegrass Genre*.

This permission extends to reproduction of works, in their entirety, to this piece of writing only. The posters may not altered in any way, and cropped areas of the posters may not be reproduced without further permission.

A limited number of copies of this thesis may be produced (10); if further copies be necessary, or should these be considered for a larger publication (including within a another publication), or a larger option (such as a book), additional permissions will be required.

Geoff Ault
Print Shop Manager/Associate Director

224 S Avenue South, Nashville, Tennessee 615-256-2805 info@hatchshowprint.com
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Day, Bobbie. Message to the author. 15 Nov. 2018. E-mail.

Gomora, Lara. Message to the author. 8 Nov. 2018. E-mail.


Graves, Tricia. Message to the author. 8 Nov. 2018. E-mail.


