

By Sam MacMillan



Clement Mok designs & CMCD Designing the Information Explosion

Right: Rocket Science is a hot, new interactive games company and the Internet is the communications vehicle of choice for targeting their game playing prospects. CMd structured a World Wide Web for Rocket Science that combines one-way and two-way communication-from game tips and hints to full motion movie clips to online resume submissions. CMd also created an online shopping department, where enthusiasts can purchase everything from hats and shirts to sunglasses and voice-activated squirt guns online. Over 90,000 people visited Rocket Science's Web site the first week it was in operation. Claire Barry, art director/designer.

Logitech, a computer peripherals manufacturer, needed new packaging to consistently represent different product lines and price points, and address the needs of the sales channels. CMd designed a packaging system that utilizes many of the same techniques employed by the consumer-goods packaging industry-strong color-banding to build shelf presence, simple benefits statements and compelling imagery to differentiate products. Greg Heard/Sam Fuetschl/Doug Becker, designers; Mark Crumpacker, creative director; Dave Peterson/Jock Sturges/Will Mosgrove/Chip Simon, photographers.

In the new realm of interactive multimedia communications, the hardest working man in the business may well be Clement Mok. He has literally grown up with the medium of interactive multimedia, beginning with his role as the team designer on Apple's launch of HyperCard in 1987.

Name a vector in the interactive multimedia arena and Mok is there, doing that. But that represents only one-half of his business, the other being conventional print work for a variety of high-tech clients who populate the corridor between San Francisco and San Jose, California. At the calm center of this whirlwind of (inter)activity is Clement Mok, the thoughtful, philosophical and extremely busy director of his eponymously titled firm, Clement Mok designs.

Mok's journey to the center of the interactive multimedia began when as a designer fresh from The Art Center in Pasadena, he jumped into the creation of on-air graphics with CBS in New York. After a short stint toiling in a faceless bureaucracy where he gained exposure to the seamier side of corporate politics, Mok left for the greener pastures of Donovan & Green. There he was introduced to the practice of design as a multidisciplinary, holistic application of communications across a range of work, from print brochures to product packaging, advertisements, signage and multi-image shows.

But it was at Apple that Mok came of age, book-ending his career as creative director there with the launches of Macintosh and HyperCard. "Apple was the true design education," Mok says emphatically. "Not only was Apple cross-disciplinary in the sense of print

and communication medium, but cross-disciplinary in the sense of engineering and product design." In the five-and-a-half years at Apple, Mok developed an appreciation and understanding of some essential aesthetics that form the touchstone of interactive media and that by their functional nature are out of sync with design aesthetics and values in the print world. "In 1987 we launched HyperCard: one of my very first projects was Apple's 1987 Annual Report Supplement in HyperCard. At that point you realize and appreciate the world of one-bit graphics. You were working with incredible limitations. And you have to live with that. I had some previous experience dealing with screen-based graphics, writing the very first MacPaint manual, and through trial by fire developed a very deep understanding of pixels and software. I learned and appreciated the binary aesthetic very quickly."

It is an aesthetic that has served Mok well: one he has extended into the terra incognita of digital new media. "The Net itself is just HyperCard on steroids. We still use that as a mental model in creating our designs — the organization models and navigation models. I don't have to learn a new operative model in order to design for the Net. You just cannot buy the latest authoring tools and figure out how to program and turn yourself into a producer and everything's going to turn out just fine. You have to see a lot of stuff, and try to overcome the visual aspects of it and focus on observing the behavior. Don't always evaluate things on what is just beautiful and terrific. Evaluate behavior is something that is very foreign to graphic designers."

To explain his point, Mok tells the story

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Left: IVI Publishing, the leading publisher of digital health and medical information, has depended on CMD for a full range of services over the past several years. CMD's Design Group has created the IVI corporate identity, their first annual report, a product packaging family for the Mayo Clinic series of CD-ROM titles, which have sold more than a million copies and a variety of promotional materials. CMD's New Media Group has functioned as a design-oriented R&D team for IVI. Through research and creative proto-typing, the New Media Group has helped the publisher identify key areas critical for developing an integrated product strategy. CMD's CD-ROM product designs for IVI include the best-selling Mayo Clinic Family Health Book, the Mayo Clinic Family Pharmacist, Prime Practice—a quarterly interactive medical journal—and a high school textbook. Planning for a digital future beyond CD-ROM titles, CMD has also prototyped a new broadband online service interface for interactive personal digital assistants and interactive television. Clement Mok/Mark Crumpacker, creative directors; Clement Mok/Claire Barry/Doris Mitsch/Jack Herr, designers; Lillian Svec, information designer; Brad Husick, technology consultation; Paula Meiselman/Nancy Penny/Carolyn Sloan/Mark Tippin/Blair Beebeel/Clancy Nolan, new media integrators.

This page: CMCD, an affiliated title development company, created a series of seven digital clip image collections targeted to the design, advertising, multimedia and publishing industries. CMD has supported the development of its sister company consulting on everything from packaging and advertising to marketing and distribution strategy. Clement Mok, creative director; Joshua Distler/Clement Mok/Sam Fuetsch, designers; Mario Parnell/Steve Underwood, photographers.

data into a system of communication and knowledge. It is designers with interactive experience who find themselves increasingly in demand to turn this information into a commodity, to humanize these cold ones and zeroes into information with personality, with the ability to communicate its underlying structure and provide access to its most salient features. According to Mok, “We are not dealing with information but the identity of information; information without flavor is bland and boring.”

These skills will be increasingly important, as interface designers become the product engineers of the information age. The hot new job title, one that will become more common as information becomes a product, will be “Information Architect.” Popularized by Richard Saul Wurman. The Understanding Business, vivid studios, and Clement Mok, the adherents of this philosophy find themselves in Clement’s words, “orchestrating and manipulating information, be it on a page or on a screen, working with information to create products. We have, perhaps more than at any other time, a chance to place ourselves in the role of product designers, manipulating and structuring how certain information behaves

and performs.” Slapping the table for emphasis at the end of the word, Mok exclaims. “Hey, we...are...product...designers! We have an incredible opportunity to be in the driver’s seat as opposed to being the victim.”

Being in the driver’s seat is a place Clement Mok clearly prefers to be. With his business staking out seemingly every dimension of the explosion of activity in the interactive arena, are there any limits to Clement Mok’s professional horizons? Posed that question, Clement takes a long time to answer. A long time. For a moment, I’m not certain if he really feels there simply are no limits, or if the question is just wildly off the mark. When it finally does come, his response is thoughtful and measured. “Selling more pieces of a utility or software, selling more of something that inherently does not benefit people or affect people would be one of those parameters that I’m not all that interested in. Or things that further only one dimension of a business or organization. Things that don’t have a whole of integrity to them. Making money is good, but if that is the sole purpose of what I am helping that person to do. I don’t know...”

By way of clarifying his point, Clement takes a piece of paper and draws two lines

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Left: To introduce Aeron, a radically new office chair manufactured by Herman Miller, CMD created a "teaser" video using evocative images and music to set the premise and criteria in evaluating this new design. To support direct sales efforts, CMD designed an interactive electronic concept presentation that illustrates the chair's genesis and key features. One aspect of the interactive presentation is a three-dimensional, user-controlled navigable movie of the Aeron chair. The movie combines over 1,700 digital photographs in a seamless view from multiple angles, allowing Herman Miller sales staff to show the product without having to transport the 40-pound chair to every customer site. Clement Mok, creative director; Claire Barry, designer; Lillian Svec, information designer; Paula Meiselman/Blair Beebee, new media integrators; Stan Muselik, photographer; Ward Schumaker, illustrator; Dan O'Sullivan, programmer; Peter Rack, producer; Terry Heffernan, video director; Cathy Carolan, video producer.

This page: For the first time, Microsoft is positioning itself as an information service provider. The Microsoft Network is the center-piece of this effort. CMD was engaged to create the user interface for this online service. The challenge was to create an environment simple and inviting enough to attract home users and robust and serious enough to engage corporate audiences. CMD also developed a framework that will accommodate branding for the third-party information-providers. The Microsoft Network will ship with each copy of Windows '95. Clement Mok, creative director; Clement Mok/Claire Barry, designers; Lillian Svec, information designer; Brad Husick, technologist.

along an X and Y axis that intersect in the middle. At the end of the horizontal line he writes "Titles," at the other "Tools." At the bottom of the vertical line he labels "High in Data," at the top, "High in Entertainment." Then, mapping the working territory where Clement Mok designs and CMCD has driven its stakes, he draws an area at the center of the diagram.

"In looking at the body of work, what has been interesting has been on the axis and not on the edges. What makes it valuable and what we're good at doing is those intersections — marketing tactical strategies and design systems. Where those two points meet. And the other axis is art and technology."

Clement Mok designs is operating at the center of those two interests and not out on the edges, simply because, as Mok puts it, "Our core skills aren't way out there." He pauses to think over what he just said, and then laughingly admits, "However, if someone asked me to do a Stephen Sondheim CD-ROM, I'd probably do it.

all that interested in. It things that feature with the dimension of a business or organization. Things that don't have a whole lot of category to them. Making money is good, but if that is the only purpose of what I am helping the person do, I don't know..."

By way of changing his point, Clement takes a parcel of paper and shows how lines along an X and Y axis that intersect in the middle. "In the end of the horizontal line he writes "Titles," at the other "Tools," at the bottom of the vertical line he labels "High in Data," at the top, "High in Entertainment." Then, mapping the working territory where Clement Mok designs and CMCD has driven its stakes, he draws an area at the center of the diagram.

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