General state of the chapter

AIGA Minnesota is coming back out of the woods. We're not fully into the clearing yet, but we're no longer in the trees.

Over the past year, we've dug in our heals, rolled up our sleeves, and responded to a plethora of external circumstances, internal issues, and member needs. We released our long-serving full-time employee due to lack of funding, picked up the slack left in the wake, managed to secure a $15,000 sponsor, and still produced a full calendar of 60+ programming opportunities for our growing and diverse membership.

We're still struggling with the shifts of our members (we need to continue to focus on the needs of emerging designers, specifically those engaged in non-print-based work), and will continue to deal with the challenges of getting all the work done when there's not a paid employee around to take care of it.

We're hanging in there. We won't quit. We'll stay strong through the blizzard and shovel our way out once it has passed. We're Minnesotans—that's just what we do.

Number of programs offered in the past year

AIGA Minnesota created or partnered with other organizations to produce over 60 events in the past 12 months. The vast majority of our programming (75%) was produced by AIGA Minnesota, and the rest was offered to our members through collaborative agreements with other producing organizations. Our chapter continues to offer a wide range of programming to serve the needs of our diverse membership; we offer programming opportunities tailored to students, emerging designers, in-house designers, and veteran designers. Regardless of the affinity group targeted, the mission of AIGA Minnesota remains at the heart of all programming: to advance designing as a professional craft, strategic tool and vital cultural force.

Detailed overview of programming

Programs for all members (30 PROGRAMS/EVENTS OFFERED IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS)

AIGA Minnesota Design Show
Since 1977, the juried AIGA Minnesota Design Show has highlighted the most exceptional design work being produced in the upper Midwest.

AIGA Minnesota Design Camp
For nearly 30 years, Design Camp has been the premier (and only) design conference staged at a hunting lodge in the woods. 2009 featured Aaron Draplin, Ellen Lupton, Erik Karasyk and David Schwarz, and DJ Stout as well as workshops, Pantone Bingo, bonfires, the signature Swizzle dinner, and occasional libations.

See Change: The Power of Visual Communication
The first-annual See Change conference was a gathering for communication professionals across the visual spectrum produced in collaboration with the University of Minnesota. Featured speakers included Lisa Strausfeld, Rodney Smith, Nigel Holmes, Gary Koepke, Janet Froelich, Kwaku Alston, Doug Powell, Sharon Werner, and Michael Hart.

Luncheons Series

One of the longest-running programs of AIGA Minnesota, the summer Luncheons series features local and regional speakers.
· Solopreneurs: discussion featuring Doug Powell, Dan Woychick, and Kenneth Kunkle
· Imagehaus: 10 Years of Visual Zealotry
· Periscope: on its award-winning brand work for the Minnesota Twins
· Geek Girls: queens of all things social networking
· Planet Propaganda

re:Design Retreat

A half-day day workshop that re-thinks sustainable design. Featuring presentations and panel discussions pivotal to the sustainable design movement, including Jeff Johnson, Bjorgvin Saevarsson, Maikel van de Mortel, and Joshua Foss.

Green Salons

An inaugural series, this morning event promotes sustainability and local community.

Studio Tours

Studio tours give members an inside look at the inner workings of printers, interactive shops, advertising agencies, design studios, and photographers. A free member-exclusive, this informal event allows guests to network, learn new skills and tricks, and ask questions following a brief presentation by the host studio.
· Studio On Fire
· Sussner Design Company
· Clockwork Active Media Systems

Cocktails with Creatives

A free, informal monthly networking event open to members and non-members held at varying locations around the metro. Averaging 75 attendees each, this monthly event is a great way for creatives to stay in touch, to recruit new volunteers, and to promote upcoming events on an informal level.

New Member Nights

Held once a quarter, the New Member Night offers new members a chance to meet the board, tour the AIGA MN office and meet other new members. The evening is a great way to get to know others and see a few familiar faces at upcoming AIGA events.

Programs for Students and Design Educators (10 PROGRAMS/EVENTS OFFERED IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS)

Pivot

An opportunity for AIGA student groups to develop programming for their fellow students, Pivot is bi-monthly and hosted at a different campus each time. Events have featured a panel discussion on typography at the MCAD, and a three-part workshop on print and packaging production at Dunwoody College of Technology.

StimuLatté

A free monthly social gathering for design students that provides an opportunity to network. Members and non-members are welcome.

Portfolio One-On-One

Long-held as the nation's largest and oldest student portfolio conference, this annual event offers students an entire weekend to tour local design firms, apply for more than $3000 in scholarships, receive feedback on their portfolios in one-on-one review sessions, and attend workshops conducted by the region's best creative professionals.

Faculty Forum
The Faculty Forum, held in conjunction with Portfolio 1 on 1, is a chance for design educators to take a morning and meet to discuss a variety of topics while their students are sharing their portfolios. This third-annual event included Adobe demos and featured a panel discussion regarding curriculum development.

Bi-Annual Student Leader Meet-Ups
In the spring of 2009, the Education Committee started a concerted effort to gather student leaders from all AIGA Minnesota student groups. Twice a year, in the spring and the fall, we invite student leaders to discuss best practices, learn from each other's successes, and find ways to further develop inter-collegiate programming.

Programs for Emerging Designers (6 PROGRAMS/EVENTS OFFERED IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS)

MNtor Program
A four-month mentoring program designed to fertilize the career growth and professional success of emerging graphic designers by pairing them with professional-level AIGA members to define the mentee's career goals and aspirations as well as to offer advice and guidance.

So... Lecture Series
A quarterly series of lectures, discussions, and social networking hours where emerging designers (specifically, designers with 0 to 5 years of experience) can get down to the nitty-gritty behind all those awkward yet essential topics that you were never taught in school.
• The Secrets to Becoming an Innovative Design Team
• Rookies: Emerging Designers on Entering the Job Market
• Strategy Behind Design: Modern Climate
• #WhoAreYou: Tools to Build a Better Web Presence

Programs for In-House Designers (2 PROGRAMS/EVENTS OFFERED IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS)

Coffee Break Series
Mid-afternoon inspiration and networking targeted specifically at in-house designers.
• Winning Strategies: Selling Creative to Non-Creatives with Craig Oskow (Medtronic) and Damien Wolf (OrangeSeed).
• Internal Agencies: Why They Kick Ass with Amanda Brinkman, VP of Branding and Creative Services for Allianz Life.

Programs for Veteran Designers (2 PROGRAMS/EVENTS OFFERED IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS)

Vino With Veterans
An invitation-only, sporadic event designed for veteran designers to share experiences, reconnect with their peers, and get new energy for the design profession

Programs offered in collaborative participation (16 PROGRAMS/EVENTS OFFERED IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS)

InSights: Design Lecture Series
For more than 20 years, AIGA Minnesota's InSights: Design Lecture Series has brought leading designers and thinkers from around the world to the Twin Cities. Presented in collaboration with the Walker Art Center.
• Eddie Opara
• Peter Buchanan-Smith
• Irma Boom
• Stefan Bucher

Alphabet Bash
An annual networking opportunity for members of local communications organizations to make business connections, develop relationships, and explore business development opportunities.

Disruptive Effects
Design and business symposium designed to stimulate business community thinking about design and how it can impact global issues.

An Evening with Chip Kidd
Lecture and Q&A at the Minneapolis College of Art & Design

Freedom on the Fence Screening and Discussion
Hosted by MCAD, this film screening featured a Q&A with director Andrea Marks about the film and the art of Polish posters.

CVA Leaders of Design
Patrick Coyne Lecture & Reception, in honor of 50 years of Communication Arts.

Design Research Workshop
Capturing and understanding human experiences, in collaboration with IDSA

Green Drinks
Every month, people who work in the environmental field meet up at informal sessions known as Green Drinks. NGOs, academics, government, and business alike are part of this organic, self-organizing environmental network.

2 Apps Per Day
A full-day workshop at the University of Minnesota about bringing standards-based web design to the iPhone and iPad.

MCAD 2010 Sustainability Film Series
A series of visionary, thought-provoking and informative films on sustainability issues and solutions.

FontConf
A free, participant-driven conference focused on using web fonts and improving website typography.

Died Young Stayed Pretty and Poster Mart
Film Screening and rock poster sale, in collaboration with the Walker Art Center.

Drawn Here (and There)
Two-event series in collaboration with the Walker Art Center about creative teams working remotely. Featuring HouMinn Practice and Non Format.

Membership highlights

Membership highlights

We are on a steady rise in membership from 1,093 in September 2009 to 1,220 in July 2010. How are we doing it? Professional and Associate level membership drives, for our organization, just don't work. The cost of membership is too high for a quick sell or the swam effect ("my friend's doing it so I will too"). We've needed to dig in deeper to find what is working and what isn't.

Our two member campaigns actually aren't drives at all; they are two specific programs. AIGA Minnesota's Portfolio 1-on-1 targets students in the spring and AIGA Minnesota's Design Camp targets professional and associate level members in the fall. Without quality programming and events, our membership numbers would not be on the rise. By offering a discount for members to attend and also join, we capture new members and returning members. This is our chance to showcase the value of membership in action.

The second contributing factor to our rise doesn't come from analyzing the numbers but from connecting with our members. After the our first year of implementing AIGA Minnesota's Ambassador group, we are happy to report an increase in members volunteering for the chapter, a revitalized growth in current volunteers moving up into chair and director positions, and continuing to reinforce the value of member at every event with an AIGA Minnesota table to cross-promote events and find new volunteers and members. We now have a dedicated Ambassador just for photographing every event, and we hope to add a videographer. In exchange for free attendance, Ambassadors work the event to mix, mingle, and manage the membership table. We hope to keep this group at a small size of 5–7 members.

We also have a quarterly New Member Night. At this event, new members meet the board, see the national AIGA "Get Inspired" video, and are given an overview of the chapter accompanied by a new member packet of programs and events, contact names and volunteering opportunities. This is a great way to welcome our new members and allow them to get to know other members just joining AIGA and put a name and face to Ambassadors.

Membership challenges

We are still trying to understand the drop in student level members becoming associate level members. We feel that the incentive is too good to pass up, but are still not sure if the discounted rate for the first year out of school is being communicated well by the national organization. We will need to use our existing communication channels with students to increase awareness of this great offering.

The Digital Designer: Interactive designers have still not yet discovered AIGA. With Minnesota Interactive Marketing Association (MIMA; a local competitive organization) rates as low as they are and events as cheap as they are, it is a very, very hard sell. We have a few good case studies but this is an area that we need to grow in. We have added and interactive category to our award show, and this is a great opportunity to showcase AIGA Minnesota. But we need more to offer this growing member segment.

State of chapter finances

We are reporting from July 2009 through the end of June 2010 to communicate the most recent information available on our books.

Beginning approximately May 2009, we began zero-based budgeting. No expenses were incurred without requested approval from the executive committee and/or board. In July of 2009 we released our one full-time employee. A period of adjustment followed. However, positive financial results were felt immediately.

Financial highlights from the reported period
- Membership moneys increased 5.5%
- We secured an annual sponsor—the first in 2 years—increasing our unappropriated sponsorship dollars by 254%
- Although programming income was slightly down, we still managed a gross profit of a half percent
- Our total chapter expenses decreased by 34%
- With help from an unexpected annual sponsorship and the decrease in chapter expenses, we ended this period with a total net income increase of 562% over the previous like period.

Our chapter is clearly on the road to financial recovery. It was required of us to make hard decisions over the past year. We have adjusted the board culture by changing attitudes around how and where we should spend membership dollars. The executive team and finance committee is currently putting in place the framework that will continue to support the financial security of our chapter for years to come.

How is the chapter stronger?

One of our greatest successes this year was securing a $15,000 sponsorship with Microsoft, which has given us some security in covering a majority of our annual fixed expenses. Additionally, we have worked hard over the last year to drastically reduce our fixed operating costs. Along with the help of these two things, we have also continued our zero based budgeting plan from last year to ensure that money is not being overspent. This has put the chapter on a much stronger financial footing than it has been in recent memory.

We have also implemented a system of sending a comprehensive survey at the end of each year to our members. This provides us valuable and direct on how the chapter is doing to serve its members, what we can do better, and what our membership would like to see. It also gives us insights into new programming opportunities that have proven valuable in just the past year alone.

Lastly, AIGA Minnesota is stronger than last year all because of the responsibility and passion our volunteers have for the organization. Within the past year, we were forced to take the difficult action of releasing a long-time chapter employee, and our volunteers stepped up to the plate to take on all of the extra work. Without the strong commitments from these fine people, our chapter would not be where it is today.

What are the upcoming challenges?

One challenge we foresee in the coming year is getting our volunteers to maintain their level of commitment with all of the work there is to be done without a full-time employee. We are currently researching ways to take away some of the workload we have experienced by no longer having that paid help. Some of the things we are researching are a new content management system, a website redesign, and a new registration system for events.

Another big challenge is to retool our communications strategy. For many years, we have continued to do what we've always done and we think that now is the time to build a new communications approach from scratch for what we are doing for all events.

The third challenge we are facing is developing a plan for how we want to spend our money in the future. We would like to prioritize our needs so that we can have a roadmap for everyone to follow that will ensure we will not face the same economic hardship in the future.

The best thing accomplished in the past year

Better/Cheaper/Faster: During the economic downturn, communicating with our members had become more important than ever. We took a page from AIGA/NY's playbook and gave our members a direct avenue to be able to give us feedback. In December, we sent a short survey to all members. The results gave us many insights on what our membership needed and wanted, what we were doing well, what we weren't. In January, at our local retreat, the board analyzed these results and developed goals based around them.

Shortly thereafter, we emailed our membership back with our plan of how we would address their needs, where we planned to put our focus, and to remind them of what we were doing well already. Over the last few months, we have tried to remember this "Better/Cheaper/Faster" promise in everything that we do: Better programming focused on member needs; Cheaper events so that more people can afford to attend; Faster communications so that everyone knows about goings-on well in advance. A large organization such as AIGA Minnesota can't turn on a dime, however. We're working as best we can to implement this new mantra across all committees, sub-committees, task forces, and events.