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The Fact That Changed Everything: David Berman and Do Good Design



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In 1999, the importance of sustainability and “being green” hadn’t caught on yet in mainstream pop culture. Gas guzzling SUVs were at their height and gasoline hovered at about \$1 per gallon. It would be four years before Alex Steffen and Jamais Cascio would establish Worldchanging.com and Davis Guggenheim’s *An Inconvenient Truth* was still seven years away from premiering at Sundance.

On one Friday night dinner at the Berman household in Ottawa, Canada, designer and typographer David Berman was deep in conversation with his father, a research chemist.

“I was sitting with my father and I was talking about the idea of how social action is not optional and how to use one’s professional life to leave a legacy of goodness,” says Berman. “And we figured out that 95 percent of designers that have ever lived are alive right now.” So how did he arrive at such a number? His father, a true scientist, would not stop until they had a quantifiable figure in their hands and, together, they had worked out the numbers using data provided by Berman’s many professional associations.

“I realized it was entirely up to the designers that are living right now to decide what their profession was going to be about,” says Berman of that startling figure. Berman left the dinner table inspired and challenged to reach out to the estimated 2 million designers in the world to share his revelation: they were decision makers with the power to bring positive outcomes for their projects.

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In the years since, Berman has successfully campaigned for more socially responsible designers. He established a Code of Ethics for Designers that has been adopted in Canada, the United States, Norway, and Indonesia. He's come from being one lone speaker on sustainability in design conferences to moderating a whole socially responsible-themed day in Iconograda's 2007 design congress. His 2009 book, [Do Good Design: How Design Can Change the World](#), was translated to Chinese, Indonesian and Korean.



As part of his campaign, Berman brought together a world jury to iron out standards for judging a design project's sustainability. Like [LEED](#) for architecture, the Iconograda Sustainability Standard would attempt to measure a design project's merits using a voluntary point system based on environmental, financial, cultural and social responsibility goals.

"One way we measure social responsibility is to what degree a project embraces universal design," points out Berman. Once a project applies for certification, it will then receive a number, which allows anyone to track a project's progress and performance.

The standard is still in its infancy and the jury— represented by graphic design professionals from every continent— has yet to define its precise metrics, but Berman proudly shares that all fifty Iconograda member countries have agreed to adopt the proposed standard.

Straddling many roles and projects would be a heavy load for others, but to Berman it seems to be a challenge he relishes. Today, sustainability is on everybody's lips from [large architecture companies](#) to [home care companies](#). Driven by a sense of responsibility, Berman says he has never harbored more hope for a better future than he does now. "Once people recognize that our future is our common design project, then they get on it."

Image via [Davidberman.com](#)

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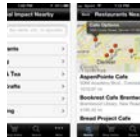
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