

Maptote is a small business based in Brooklyn, New York, that was created when Rachel Rheingold and Michael Berick combined their respective passions: fashion and cartography. Michael designs and creates stylized maps of specific locations that reveal the culture, landmarks, and layout of major cities, states, and countries. These designs are then screen printed onto various cotton items such as grocery totes, baby onesies, and bandanas. Rachel acts as a creative director and manager of the business, overseeing production and sales while giving general input on the Maptote designs.

One of the objectives of Maptote is to create environmentally friendly and locally produced products. The majority of their products are sewn in, screen printed in, and distributed from Brooklyn. This was extremely beneficial to my internship because I was able to learn about and see the entire production process first-hand. There are two companies that Maptote uses for sewing the bags and specialty items and there is one screen-printing company. About once a week, we visited all three of these locations in order to drop off or pick up materials such as cloth, ink, or bags ready to be printed.

Someone at Maptote, usually Michael or Meredith, completes all of the transportation of items, though there was one emergency trip that was delegated to me to complete on my own. Some coworkers of Martha Stewart had asked Michael to make a special Maptote for her upcoming birthday on short notice. Though Michael had managed to complete the design on time, the screen printers had called and said that the requested ink was out. My mission for the day was to travel to a Manhattan ink supply company, have the correct ink mixed, and then take it back to the screen printers for approval. Once at the screen printers, I had to call a car so that I could bring back some large boxes of finished products to the Maptote office. This errand was a true test of my independent ability to accomplish some important, time sensitive tasks for the business.

Though my responsibilities as an intern included business tasks such as this errand, my primary job was to create digital graphics and take photographs for the Maptote blog and

website. Between these assignments, I helped with inventory, packaging, shipping, errands, and the pick up and delivery of materials and products.

As avid readers of design blogs, Michael and Rachel wanted the Maptote blog to not only promote their products and the businesses that sell their products, but also to express their personal style and show other unique products that influence their lives and the design world in general. For every major holiday and important event for Maptote I researched designs, products, recipes, and histories in order to compose a single image representing the subject matter at hand. Rachel, Michael, and I maintained constant communication throughout the design process and they provided constructive criticism, suggestions, and final approval for each design. Completed images were then sent, along with the website links for the contents of the image to the Office Manager, Meredith McManus, who composed the descriptive text and posted the entries. Though I was only at Maptote for about two months, I created images for blog posts that will be used throughout the year.

Before posting my first blog image, Michael decided that he wanted my images to be a larger standard size on the website than they had been previously, but some unknown restriction was limiting the image dimensions. Using my experience with blogs and basic html programming, I was able to solve the issue and teach them how to override the restriction in the future. It was simply a matter of rerouting the image through an online image storage website, such as Photobucket or Flickr, instead of uploading it directly from the computer.

When new bags came out of production, I was responsible for photographing them and editing the files for records and the blog post announcing their arrival. I also created a specific blog post showing a photographic journey through the "Making of a Maptote." I documented each stage of production from the design to production to customer shipments. This project created an opportune bridge between my art major focus in photography and my interest in design.

One major issue that I helped resolve at Maptote was consumer confusion about the requirements and process of creating custom Maptotes. Customizing a Maptote can be as simple as adding a date and the names of a couple getting married to creating a location design that has never been made before. Many of the custom Maptotes are for weddings, but some businesses like to have their location on a bag or some organized events such as retreats and conferences order bags as souvenirs. A great many people were contacting Michael with an interest in ordering custom Maptotes, yet only a very small percent of these time consuming inquiries were fulfilled. To create a clearer understanding before initial contact, Michael and Rachel had me design a new page on their website for information on custom orders. They provided the text and images and after a few drafts, our final design was sent the web developer to be placed on the website. I am interested to hear later if the new, more visual design is more effective in expressing the information.

Because a lot of my design work was based on similar themes and style for reasons of branding consistency, my work sometimes seemed repetitive and I would lose my inspiration for and enjoyment of the task. This was best combated, however, with a break from my computer screen. I would simply ask Meredith if she needed any help with orders or packaging. There were also times when I was stuck between designs, waiting for feedback or approval to continue because Michael and Rachel were not always in the office. During those times I became a business intern, learning from Meredith how Maptote does business with shops, manages paperwork, and fills orders.

Even though I am an art student, learning about the business side of Maptote was just as important as immersing myself in the design side. Without the knowledge of how to start and manage a small business, an idea even as great as Maptote's could easily fail. One process I found particularly interesting was the tight control on the shops to which they choose to sell their products. When a new city or state design comes out of production, they research small, specialty stores in that particular area that carry products of a similar value and design taste as

Maptote. This allows Maptote to target their ideal customers directly and maintain control of where and how their products are distributed. Once a good store is found, Maptote will not sell their products to any other stores nearby in order to maintain a limited, but still accessible, supply in the area. Because Maptote creates such a specialized product, it is important to maintain its unique status by not flooding the market.

As a double major in psychology and art, I have always been torn between deciding which interest to pursue from my majors. To me, psychology always seemed to have a clearer, more concrete path to a career than art, but that was merely because I had yet to be exposed to many of the possibilities art can afford. Sometimes it is difficult to imagine exactly what one can do with a certain degree, but just having the opportunity to live in a city such as New York has opened my mind to the possibilities. Three other individuals also occupied the office space where I worked: a freelance photographer, a freelance graphic designer, and a designer working for a small clothing business. I was able to get enough of a glimpse of their operations to understand how my interest in their field could potentially be pursued in my future. After interning for Maptote, I have decided to work towards a career in art and design, whether it is through freelancing, getting more experience with another company, or going to graduate school for design. One of the greatest things I gained from Maptote was a sense of how I can successfully apply my artistic interests and talents to significant work after college.