

47 Image Boards

A collage of collected pictures, illustrations, or brand imagery can be used to visually communicate an essential description of targeted aesthetics, style, audience, context, or other aspects of design intent.

Image boards, or mood boards, are a long-standing tradition used by a variety of design professions for a range of reasons, built from inspiration and serving to inspire and sell. The image board is typically created once the designer or team has decided on a general focus for design aesthetics, style, context, or audience. Images are then collected that are representative of that defined aesthetic, context, or user group, and these images are edited and collaged. The image board bears some resemblance to sample boards used by interior designers, whereby color, material, and sometimes hardware and product swatches are presented together to communicate a proposed design system.

For example, to create an image board to visually define the meaning of a chosen design aesthetic verbally described as "urban chic," images that convey the particular styles, colors, products, brands, and environments associated with the designer's interpretation of that aesthetic would be collected, edited, and collaged. For more specific design purposes, image boards can be created to describe targeted users or environmental context. For a user-based image board, the visuals might portray types of people that define an audience target, profiling their age demographics and tastes and preferences as conveyed through clothing, products, preferred brands, environments, activities, transportation, and social interests. An environment-based image board might visually define the typical surroundings for which a product design is appropriately intended, showing sample interiors, furniture, lighting, fixtures, and conveying color palettes and atmospheric tone.

As an internal tool, image boards can serve as a tangible focus for the designer, a visual reminder of the aesthetic context or audience for inspiring their design efforts. Image boards can also serve well as a consensus artifact for design teams, visually representing an agreed-upon version of a design aesthetic or context. To this end, the act of creating the image board can itself be an important tool, managed through team contributions so that all members take ownership of the decided-upon visual definition for design focus. Externally, image boards are powerful tools for effectively communicating design intent to clients, visually clarifying an aesthetic direction or targeted audience.¹

1. Most image boards are created by hand as physical artifacts, but software tools can also be used, and online services for the digital creation of mood boards are available. See, for example, <http://www.sampleboard.com> and <http://www.moodshare.co>

2. Hughes, Kristin. "Design to Promote Agency and Self-efficacy through Educational Games" in *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Girls and Games*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008: 231-246.



Left: These image boards were produced to help the design team better understand the pop culture, likes, and dislikes of teenage girls. Collage was a great method to use, helping capture the DIY spirit of teenage girls. The boards helped to inform the visual brand/identity and verbal language for a large scale, city-wide, role playing game.²

Image boards created by Rebecca Eortman and Michael Sui, courtesy of Kristin Hughes

Below: This image board was created to capture the styling and design intent for a series of wooden vessels. It is used as a reflection piece to show previous typologies of vessel forms in this series and to help inform future design iterations.

Courtesy of Mark Baskinger © 2011



Behavioral Attitudinal	Quantitative Qualitative	Innovative Adapted Traditional	Exploratory Generative Evaluative	Participatory Observational Self reporting Expert review Design process
100	Universal Methods of Design			

See also 56. Mind Mapping • 80. Stakeholder Maps • 85. Territory Maps