

Communication with Your Design Team Heading into Summer Band

Jason Robb

As we rocket towards the start of another exciting marching band season, we enter an activity that has evolved into spinning more and more plates and juggling more and more tasks. We can become overwhelmed quickly even before we start the first rehearsal. More schools are working with professional designers to create their fall productions and how we as directors build our relationships with these creative individuals and keep them linked into the implementation of their designs will have a huge impact on the success we create for our students. Below are some easy steps for maximizing your ability to plan for the start of summer band.

Communicate Visual Design Needs, Wants, and Wishes

As we all are sending off our drill numbers to our visual designers, there is other information that can be really helpful before your designer digs into your show. Look through your music and think about information that would be extremely important for your students to perform their music to the best of their abilities.

Where should they hold? Are there sections where certain instrument groupings should be staged together? Do you want certain impacts staged far forward for volume? Where are the mics going to be set up for soloists?

I like to categorize these items into **needs, wants, and wishes**. There are things that we really need to happen vs. things we would like, or wish

could happen. At the end of the day, there are many logistical challenges that the visual designer will have to consider as they create your designs, but more information you supply them ahead of time will definitely improve their ability to create a product you love. While making musical changes, cuts, or inserts can be very manageable after a draft is completed, adjusting visual designs can wreak havoc on everything that comes before it or after it. Working with your designer to provide as much detailed information and structure prior to the drill being written will always create a smoother process for everyone.

Review Design Materials Promptly

As the summer progresses and materials are being delivered from everyone on your team, final wind movements, percussion parts, visual design, choreography, etc., responding to your team after these deliveries can provide a great opportunity to build your program's relationship with the design team.

As soon as possible after receiving any materials, comb through the materials and ensure that everything is as expected. If the design is great,

respond immediately and thank them for their work, as well as how excited you and your team are to work with them. If there are any adjustments that need to be made, still send them a thank you note, but also in a very organized and clearly stated way, send them any adjustments that were discussed prior and also send them a timeline for when you actually need these edits.

Full time designers are typically working for a dozen or more programs which creates some very tight delivery timelines.

Giving them the flexibility to go back and make any adjustments on a wider realistic timeline will ensure they can plan their time efficiently and provide you with the materials you need to set your students up for success.

Ask Questions Early

After reviewing design materials, take care to ensure you understand exactly how all of the materials delivered are to be implemented onto the field. Even though today's technology with Pyware, Ultimate Drillbook, uploading choreography videos to google/dropbox/YouTube can make access to information easier than ever, there will be details of some element that your staff does not fully understand how to implement.

**Want to hear more?
Jason Robb, Brent
Biskup, Jana Harvey,
and Andrew Markworth
will present
"Utilizing Your Design
Team to MAXIMIZE
Implementation"
on July 21 at 11:00 AM.**

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It is important for us as directors to study and plan these materials so we can reach out for any clarification from our design team in a timely manner. A phone call or text on the tower while material is being taught only will create stress for you, the students, and your design team. Communicating as soon as you have questions will allow your team to send over any explanations to ensure you are able to implement their product.

Communicate Delivery & Implementation Timeline

One of the most stressful situations for any band director or designer is when materials are running late. There are many reasons that music, drill, flags, costumes, etc. will be late, and if we expect that it will happen and how we will react, we can often control our destiny. Here are some tactics that can keep you on track.

1. **Communicate realistic delivery date windows and stay in touch with designers often.** Every step of the process for design, someone is reliant on another. Winds, Percussion, Drill, Choreography - if one is late, the steps after it will continue to get behind pace. Be sure to communicate with all members of your team when things are running behind. A quick email giving someone a heads up there has been a delay ahead of them can be helpful to get back on track.

2. **Communicate accurate implementation dates for when you plan to implement materials.** As you are working through your teaching process, stay in contact with your designers to update them when you are planning to realistically learn materials and update them on how it is going. Oftentimes designers can juggle groups depending on how learning schedules are going to align with your schedules.

3. **Be flexible.** WHEN (notice I did not say if) something is late, use that time to focus on what you can work on. Work to clean, reinforce, and strengthen materials you already have. Also communicate that to your designer, a text or email that reads "We will keep cleaning and producing what we have, just keep in touch so I can plan accordingly! Thank you!" Can go a long, long way.

Stay on top of Aesthetic Ordering & Production

With production times being longer than ever due to rising material costs and shipping times, we can relieve a lot of the start of school stress by staying on top of all our aesthetic needs. Props, printed vinyl, flags, and color guard costumes shipping delays can increase rapidly by putting off POs, sending in sizes, etc. An email sent 1-2 days later than possible, could hypothetically delay delivery by 1-2 weeks. Make an effort to get these materials squared away as soon as humanly possible. It will only make our lives easier by having these things taken care of before the actual school year starts.

All individuals on every side of the marching band equation want the best for all parties. Students, parents, directors, and designers all are doing their very best to maximize each other's success and enjoyment of such an incredibly rewarding activity. The more we can all be proactive in our communication as we head into our summer band camps, the more we can enjoy kicking off another successful marching band season.

Jason Robb is a freelance visual designer, pageantry designer, and educational consultant living in the suburbs north of Austin, Texas with his wife Jackie and son Joseph. He received his Bachelor of Music in Education and Trumpet Performance from Sam Houston State University. Before transitioning to pageantry design full-time, he had a successful career as a band director in Texas. He began his career teaching middle school band in The Woodlands for 5 years. In 2013, Jason relocated to Cedar Park, Texas as an Associate Band Director at Cedar Park High School, capturing a UIL Texas State Marching Championship in 2015. In 2016, Jason accepted the position of Director of Bands for Rouse High School in Leander, Texas. Under his direction, the Rouse program has been a Bands of America Regional Finalist, Regional and Super Regional Class Champion, and 5A UIL State Marching Championship Finalist. Jason was named the Phi Beta Mu Texas Young Bandmaster of the Year in 2018. He was inducted into the Alpha Chapter of Phi Beta Mu in 2020. From 2008 to 2014, Jason served on the instructional faculty of the Madison Scouts from Madison, Wisconsin. Jason returned to Madison to serve as the Program Coordinator in 2020. He spends his non-drum corps summertime designing and coordinating marching band productions, writing marching band drill, and consulting with band programs all around the country. Jason also serves as the Educational Director for Forward Leadership, a program offered by the Madison Scouts. Jason is an active clinician, presenting for Drum Corps International, the Texas Bandmasters Association, and the Texas Music Educators Association. Jason is also an active adjudicator with Bands of America, the Texas Music Adjudicators Association, and several premier pageantry and concert band circuits around the country.