



INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

# Conquering Digital Design at Oakley



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– Adam Smythe  
Lead Designer

The fast pace at Oakley keeps the design team hopping with new product introductions and deadlines. Read how Wacom’s Cintiq 21UX interactive pen display is helping the team improve workflow and productivity.

Some companies have a knack for anticipating trends, or even creating the trends. One of them is the eyewear and apparel firm Oakley, which for more than 30 years has stayed consistently ahead of the curve. A pair of Oakley sunglasses conveys a departure from the status quo. Aside from the unmatched optics, the sculptural design language is unique and recognizable, which is one reason they are favored by numerous pro athletes—or anyone who wants to make a statement.

The product line combines daring patterns with unique form factors. Colors, whether they’re splashy or muted, are custom hues you won’t find at the local paint center. The concepts are innovative, such as the Oakley THUMP, the world’s first digital music eyewear. One more thing: the products must be practical.

As a designer at Oakley, it’s Adam Smythe’s job to bring all these elements together. It’s a demanding and varied position. One day he’s designing graphics and concept artwork for snow goggles, or digitally recreating an oil painting so parts of it can be applied to sunglass frames. The next day, he’ll be developing paints and coatings for rapid prototypes.



Working directly on screen allows designers to find their creative groove and speed workflow, boosting productivity.

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Unique products like these require equally innovative tools, and Smythe’s principal creative tool is Wacom’s Cintiq 21UX interactive pen display. It combines the advantages of a color-accurate LCD monitor with the ergonomic performance of Wacom’s on screen digital pen technology. Smythe uses the Cintiq daily, and he is enthusiastic about what it allows him to do. First of all, he’s under constant deadlines, and the Cintiq’s intuitive performance and features enable him to save huge amounts of time—weeks in some cases.

“Rather than spending an hour or two mixing up a couple colors and spraying them out on frames, I can quickly render out comprehensive and photorealistic images with the Cintiq to communicate the same ideas in a quarter of the time,” says Smythe. “For the more advanced decorative finishes, this process can save me days and weeks of production time. Being able to communicate the end products before the materials to make them have been developed allows us to be more effective and strategic in our design and approaches.”

But as a designer, Smythe’s favorite aspect of the Cintiq is its superb on screen drawing performance.

“Where the Cintiq truly sets itself apart is with the ability to direct draw,” he says. “I have been through many projects, both concept and production art, that were much easier to accomplish with the Cintiq as one of my tools.”

And it’s not just that the Cintiq makes drawing easier, either. The Cintiq’s pressure-sensitive pen feels completely natural as an artist uses the brushes and behaviors in a graphics application. This enables Smythe to find unique creative approaches as he creates sketches and concept art.

“For concept art, achieving the hand-finished look is key. The Cintiq gives you the fullest utilization of the pen’s in the most native approach,” he says. “Because of the access to such a variety of brushes that can be paired with the Airbrush and 6D Art Pen tools, getting a very organic look and feel can be easily accomplished digitally with the Cintiq. Production art is expedited by being able to hand-shade the highlights and shadows in Photoshop, and make quick adjustments with the eraser or clone tools.”

Smythe acquired his Cintiq after showing dramatic productivity gains with a borrowed Cintiq. One of the staff designers had left the company, and his Cintiq was left unused until a new designer came aboard. So Smythe asked if he could borrow the Cintiq temporarily to get a feel for it, and his output quickly increased. His boss was so impressed that when a new person was hired, a new Cintiq was ordered for Smythe.

“Before, I was using a standard Wacom tablet, but I could see the power of the Cintiq,” Smythe says. “With artwork, the thing that was holding me back was illustration ability. But by getting onto more of a direct and more natural medium, it has helped me build those skills and progress while doing essentially the same work.

Asked to sum up the Cintiq, Smythe says: “It is the tool that helps me conquer the world single-handedly, with no time to do so.” The only barriers are a designer’s technical and creative abilities—both of which Smythe has in abundant quantities.

