

Creating Custom Favicons

A start-to-finish approach for designers of all levels

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What is a Favicon?

A Favicon (this term is short for favorites icon), also known as a website icon, shortcut icon, URL icon, or bookmark icon is a 16x16 pixel square icon associated with a particular website or webpage.

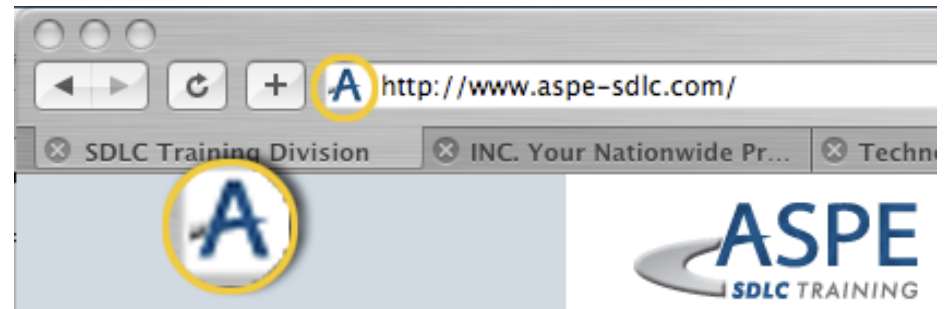
Browsers that provide Favicon support typically display a page's Favicon in the browser's URL bar and next to the page's name in a list of bookmarks. Browsers that support a tabbed document interface typically show a page's Favicon next to the page's title.

Why should I bother?

A Favicon helps to build upon the customer experience which your visitors are receiving. The presence of your Favicon will extend and emphasize the brand. The Favicon will appear at the top of the browser window, creating an instant recognition, and will also appear next to your webpage's title if it has been added as a bookmark or shortcut.

Favicons will NOT enhance your SEO (search engine optimization).

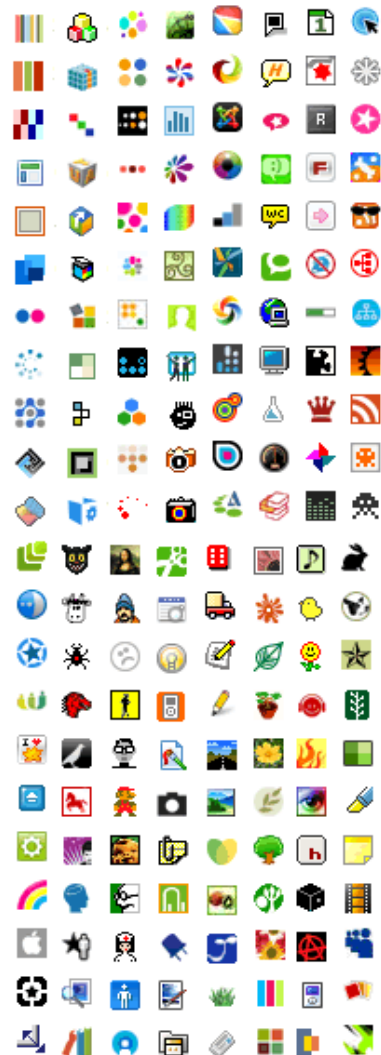
Web or graphic designers can specify or create such icons and install them into a website (or webpage) by several means. Most graphical web browsers will then make use of it.



Above is an example of a Favicon in action, as well as a slight enlargement

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A random sampling of Favicons as displayed on the internet.



What makes a good Favicon?

Favicons, by their very nature, will only show at a size of 16 pixels x 16 pixels at 72 dpi (dots per inch). So, in effect, they can only be this large:



Let's face it. This is not very large, and at 72 dpi, it is also not very detailed.

So, what makes a good Favicon?

1. A direct connection to your logo through the use of its symbol.
2. A direct connection to your logotype through the use of its first OR its most distinct letter.
3. Good use of contrast.
4. Good use of color (if appropriate).

So, what makes a bad Favicon?

1. An image.
2. Low contrast graphics.
3. High number of colors.
4. Lack of connection

Here's Why They Work Well:

Use of Logo. For many companies, the logo has been created as a symbol which identifies and connects the viewers with the product or service. What better way to create brand recognition than to include your symbol as a stamp of quality on each page. It helps to strengthen the relationship, and keeps everything together.

Use of Logotype Letters. Not all companies use a symbol. For many companies, a name is their symbol, or a style of writing is how the world should identify them. This will NOT fit in a 16x16 pixel space. In this instance, the use of the first letter, or the most prominent letter of the word would be a fine Favicon source. It keeps the power and distinction of the logotype when the entire thing cannot be shown.

Use of Contrast. The eye (even insect and animal eyes) are drawn to contrast. Creating a Favicon which utilizes high contrast graphics is a great way to gain attention from your viewers without distracting them.

Use of Color. The address area (where the Favicon shows up) is a large white area. Color—whether a splash or a block—will really help your Favicon pop. Consider the use of color in your branding.

Here's Why They Work Poorly:

Image Use: Images are complex, requiring a longer recognition period from the brain. You want your Favicon to provide instant recognition and connection— not a 3-second brain teaser test. Reduce the image to a logo or a letter emphasis. If this is not an option, crop in on the most distinct element of the image.

Low Contrast Graphics: The 16 by 16 pixel space is small. Anything you do to muddy the colors or confuse your viewer is going to distract them from your page and give a sense of poor design. If everything looks the same, create a large block graphic instead.

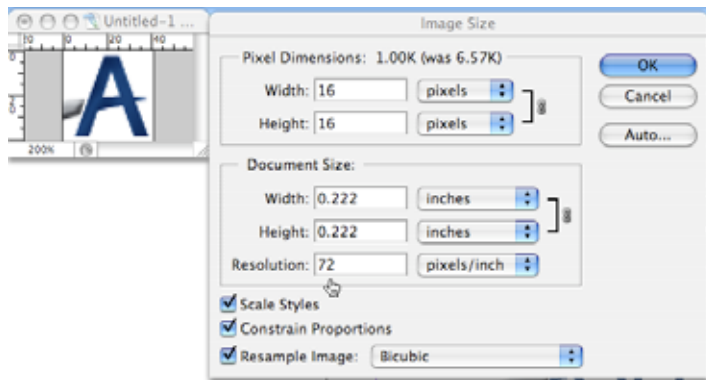
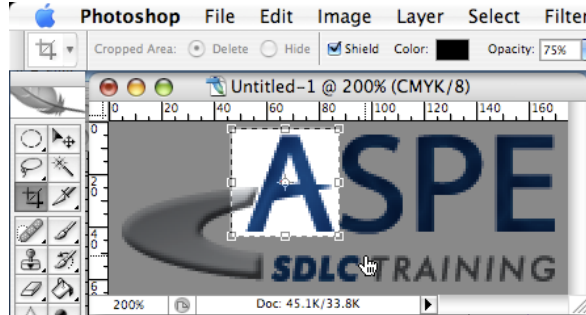
High Number of Colors: The human eye can see millions of colors. There is no need to cram them all into a 16x16 space. Too many colors blend together, confuse the eye, and lessen the impact of your Favicon. Similar shades blend in to a muddy hue which the brain cannot easily grasp. Try focusing on 1-3 colors at most. If you cannot condense them, make a solid color (1 color) to bring contrast to your site.

Lack of Connection: The Favicon should strengthen, not impede, your brand. A firm making semi-conductors doesn't need Santa hat or chicken leg Favicons. It doesn't make sense. If you are stuck with demands for something "fun", add a seasonal splash screen instead.

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1. Choose your graphic, image, or Type.

I will be creating a Favicon for the website www.aspe-sdlc.com. To start with, I will need to begin with their logo. This will give us a good start, and ensure that their current branding will be in this process from beginning to end.

2. Prepare your graphic, image, or Type, by bringing it into photoshop or another image program.

Some materials may be ready without this step. You may need to crop your image down to a proper square size, or cut out unwanted material. Since this graphic is very wide, I will need to trim it square.

Use photoshop (or other image program) to crop out unwanted materials. In this image, I have used the crop tool to trim our text and focus on the letter A. It is the most distinct of the logotype letters.

Hold shift with the crop tool to ensure a perfectly square crop.

3. Reduce your final Favicon size to 16x16 at 72 dpi.

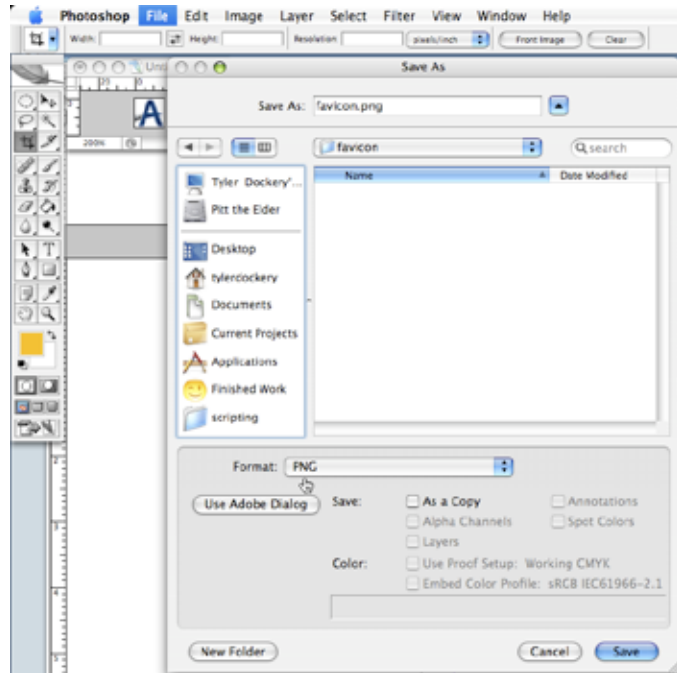
Using photoshop, the best way to do this is with the image size dialog box. It can be found by using the menus:

Image >> Image Size

or the hotkeys:
option-command-i (mac)
alt-control-i (pc)

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4. Save your image as a .PNG (preferred) or a .GIF.

The .png format is preferred from a web-standards point of view. A .gif image is an acceptable substitute but may not always be recognized by older browsers. This can be done using the menus:

File >> Save As...

or the hotkeys:

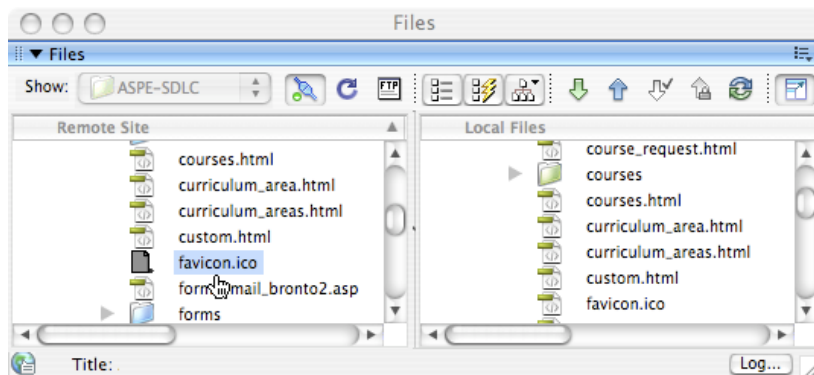
command-shift-s (mac)

control-shift-s (pc)

and using the pull-down menu to choose your choice from above. Give this item the name "favicon" (without the quotes, of course) and keep the .png or .gif. Due to the small size and color palette, do not feel the you need to use the "save for web" commands.

NOTE: you will need to make sure your file is set to RGB mode. In photoshop, this can be changed using the menus:

Image >> Mode >> RGB Color



5. Upload your image to the root directory of your web site, and rename to "favicon.ico" if desired.

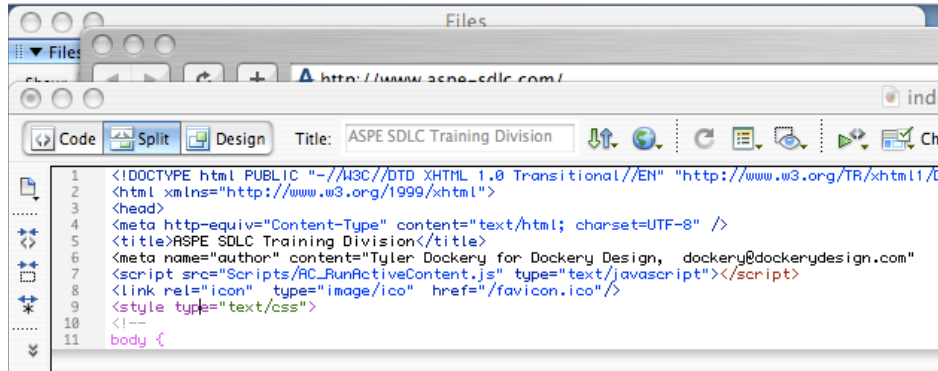
Using FTP software (Dreamweaver, GoLive, Fetch, Firefox's Dragon FTP addition, or whatever you are comfortable with), upload your Favicon to the root directory of your website. (This is the same location that your homepage is located. It is not suggested that you place this graphic in your website's image folder).

NOTE: You may wish to create an .ico file (it is preferred). Once it is uploaded, duplicate your .PNG file – will NOT work with .gif – and rename it "favicon.ico".

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6. Add the Favicon code to your web pages.

The .png, .ico, .gif format Favicon has been uploaded to your website root directory. Now all you have to do, is tell the browsers to find it, and display it when your page is loaded.

To do so, you will need to add some code to each page you wish to use the Favicon. The following code will need to be inserted into the <HEAD> tags of each document:

`<link rel="icon" type="image/png" href="/favicon.png" />`
if your Favicon is a .png graphic

`<link rel="icon" type="image/gif" href="/favicon.gif" />`
if your Favicon is a .gif graphic

`<link rel="icon" type="image/ico" href="/favicon.ico" />`
if your Favicon is a .ico graphic or renamed .png graphic

About the author.

Tyler Dockery is a designer, consultant, and educator with specialties in print production and web mechanics. Tyler is a member of MENSA and Arts Commissioner for Orange County, North Carolina, and the principal at Dockery Design. He has worked in the field of Design with such prestigious firms as Environmental Design in Georgia, as well as Generate Design, and Knotts and Associates in North Carolina.

Visit the Dockery Design team at www.dockerydesign.com

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Frequently Asked Questions

I have seen some websites with animated gifs. How can I make one?

You may or may not believe how many questions we have received in this regard. To keep up with demand, I have added a small appendix to this whitepaper outlining the steps to create an animated gif.

My Favicon is not recognized, even after I double checked all the steps.

Make sure to check in multiple browsers. Some browsers will NOT recognize .gif or .png Favicons. Browsers older than IE 5 (internet explorer 5) will NOT recognize Favicons at all.

My Favicon is recognized in Safari or Firefox, but not in Internet Explorer. Is the coding wrong?

No. Internet Explorer is not quite as sophisticated as most current web browsers– even its latest version. IE may not recognize your new Favicon for days or even weeks. Sometimes you can make it show by clearing your cache and deleting your browser history– although this will not always do the trick. Often, I find that in IE you have to bookmark the page for the Favicon to show, though it may or may not work for visitors using IE. I have also noted that if you click and drag to the right a few times the default IE Favicon in the address bar that it may refresh and get the Favicon. The truth is that IE just does not handle Favicons well, especially IE 6.

My renamed .ico is not recognized.

Some browsers may not recognize a renamed .png file– they may simply be too old. If you have duplicated the favicon.png, and it still exists on the root directory, simply rework your Favicon text in the header to reflect the favicon.png. You may need to use a photoshop plugin to save to .ico format.

A fine Open-Source product for both Mac and PC platforms can be found at: <http://www.telegraphics.com.au/sw/>

You can also find online favicon creators.

My boss wants to change the website Favicon every week or so, like the google search pictures.

It is possible to upload a new Favicon over the old Favicon and have it be replaced throughout the entire website. However, IE browsers will not always pick up on this change due to history, cache, or generalized programming bug issues. Worse, you could have some browsers recognize the new Favicon and some still showing the old one. Worse still, everyone in the office might see the upgrade, but the boss' computer might not show it. My suggestion is that you use some kind of a splash screen instead.

What is a "Splash Screen"?

A splash screen is a single page which your web site opens with. This can be a seasonal message (Happy Christma-Hannu-Kwanzaa-Kka!), a photo or graphic, etc. After a few seconds, this screen is normally replaced by your standard home page.

Do I need to use the title "favicon.ico"?

Favicon.ico is the default name for the Favicon, and most browsers will look for one on the root directory. If you note a different location in the <HEAD> tags, such as:

```
href="/images/favicon.ico"
```

or a different name, such as:

```
href="/pix/myfaviconrocks.png"  
type="image/png"
```

you may run into problems, depending on the flexibility and sophistication of the browsers you and your visitors use.

I don't have an image program. Help!

Image programs are expensive, photoshop is no exception. GIMP (the GNU Image Manipulation Program) is a free program for the MAC or PC platform which can be found at: <http://www.gimp.org/>

Adobe also offers a version of photoshop: Photoshop Express in a fully online version, which you can use for free after signing up. It can be found at: <https://www.photoshop.com/express/>

There are also online favicon creators which may be of use to you.

Our team will also create Favicons at an hourly rate. Please visit our website and request a quote.

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Appendix: Animated Favicons

Adding motion to your Favicons

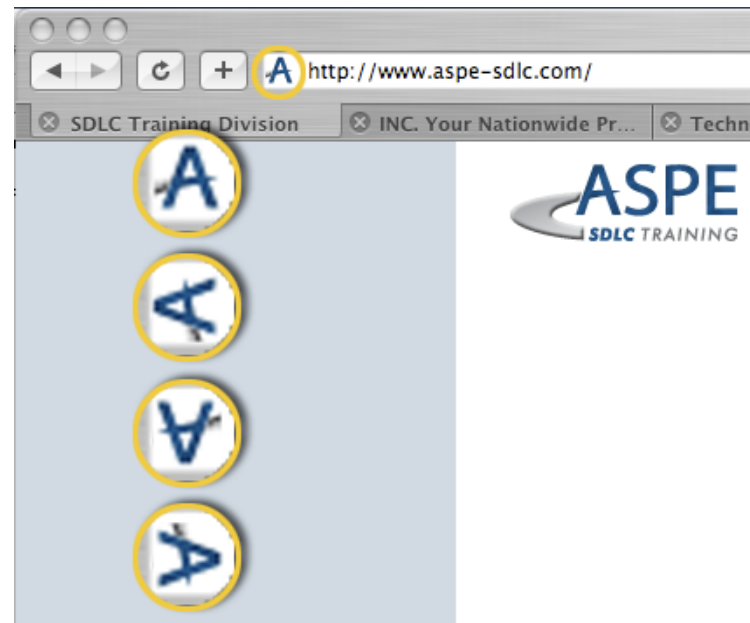
What is an Animated Favicon?

An Animated Favicon is similar to a normal Favicon (image which shows in the upper left of the address bar), with the exception that it changes over time. This can be as simple as 2 images which shift back and forth, or larger files with things fading in and out.

Not all Browsers which provide Favicon support will display animated Favicons.

Should I Choose A Static or Animated Favicon?

A Favicon helps to build upon the customer experience which your visitors are receiving. The decision to use a static or animated Favicon is really one of preference, although the deciding factor should not be the novelty, or the excitement of the animation. The deciding factor for animation vs. static Favicon should be whether the viewer will find the brand strengthened by the inclusion of the animation, or whether the viewer will be distracted or have the brand experience weakened by the inclusion.



Above is an example of the stages of an animated Favicon in action (spinning).

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What Does It Take to Make an Animated Favicon?

Animated Favicons will need a motion-animation program to be created. These programs include, but aren't limited to: Flash, Fireworks, or photoshop layers in conjunction with Imageready.

Export your image as an animated gif or save for the web, and choose animated gif.

Favicons, by their very nature, will only show at a size of 16 pixels x 16 pixels at 72 dpi (dots per inch). So, in effect, they can only be this large:



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The Pros of Animated GIFs:

Stand Out. Favicons can be seen everywhere. Animated .gif Favicons are not seen as often as they used to. Those who are using the animated .gif Favicon these days are really standing out. People who are already familiar with the Favicon often think someone has stepped into new territory by using one. Animated Favicons can really help to make your website stand out.

Connect With Strength. A static Favicon is a single image, and can only show one facet to the viewer. An animated Favicon (if tastefully done), can show the diversity of a company, as well as giving a glimpse of the kind of work, service, or change they can bring to the table. Working with style and grace, and animated Favicon has a real chance to Strengthen the connection between the viewer and the company.

The Cons of Animated GIFs:

File Size: if not handled properly (if animation is too wild) the Favicon size might become too large for browsers to handle. It might slow down page loads, causing people to lose interest, or it may not show at all.

Compatibility Issues: Not all browsers display animated Favicons. IE may not ever show them.

May Be Distracting: Honestly, many people find a constantly moving graphic annoying. If one appears at the top of every page, it may draw people's eyes away from your content— the main reason they have come to your web site in the first place.

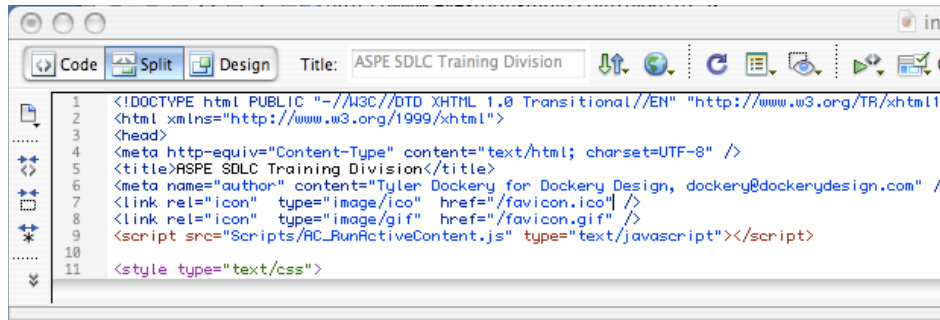
Consider using a program like Fireworks which will let you determine how many times the rotation is triggered. (you can choose to cycle through once only, or constantly, and any amount in between).

Size Is A Factor: At 16 pixels square and 72 dpi, you're really talking about a blocky, low-resolution image. It can be fairly limited to many people, even those with a fair amount of skill.

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```
1 <!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Transitional//EN" "http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1
2 <html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml">
3 <head>
4 <meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=UTF-8" />
5 <title>ASPE SDLC Training Division</title>
6 <meta name="author" content="Tyler Dockery for Dockery Design, dockery@dockerydesign.com" />
7 <link rel="icon" type="image/ico" href="/favicon.ico" />
8 <link rel="icon" type="image/gif" href="/favicon.gif" />
9 <script src="Scripts/AC_RunActiveContent.js" type="text/javascript"></script>
10
11 <style type="text/css">
```

6. Add the Favicon code to your web pages.

You will need to open your animated .gif image in an image manipulation program (see static Favicon instructions for details), and save as a .png version as well.

Once the .png and .gif format Favicon has been saved, upload them to your website root directory, and rename "favicon.png" to "favicon.ico". Now all you have to do, is tell the browsers to find it, and display it when your page is loaded.

To do so, you will need to add some code to each page you wish to use the Favicon. You will also need to add an extra snippet of code for those browsers who cannot or will not display animated Favicons.

The following code will need to be inserted into the <HEAD> tags of each document:

```
<link rel="icon" type="image/ico" href="/favicon.ico" />
<link rel="icon" type="image/gif" href="/favicon.gif" />
```

Browsers will first look and find favicon.ico. They will then attempt to show the animated Favicon. Should that fail, the static will show in its place

About the author.

Tyler Dockery is a designer, consultant, and educator with specialties in print production and web mechanics. Tyler is a member of MENSAs and Arts Commissioner for Orange County, North Carolina, and the principal at Dockery Design. He has worked in the field of Design with such prestigious firms as Environmental Design in Georgia, as well as Generate Design, and Knotts and Associates in North Carolina.

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