

# Hire a Professional, Not Your Cousin

Remember Get the Estimate First

by Diane Bridgwater



*Learn to work with a graphic designer in a win-win for you both. This is the second step in a series of how to build the relationship you want with your graphic designer.*

*Graphic design is a skill and talent and isn't learned by knowing the latest cool new program, so why do small business professionals hire a family member to design their logo?*

## Why is it important to hire a professional designer

**Experience, experience, experience WILL save you money!**

Graphic designers who are experienced in the industry will save you money overall. Initially you may pay a little bit more than hiring a designer straight out of college, but experienced designers are faster and can troubleshoot many printing, web and design related issues with ease.

- » Hiring a designer with typically five years experience or more is a good starting point and have at least two years working as a freelancer or owning their own company. Less than this does not mean they are not capable, but may lack the overall experience.
- » Ask the designer if they have experience working with a variety of outside resources such as printers, web development, writers and even other designers. This shows they are staying in touch with the industry standards, printing methods and other technology to help you save money on your project.

- » Don't hire a designer that is "learning" on your project, this could potentially cost you a lot of money. Be sure to ask what experience they have with your type of project.

## Learning the software program doesn't make them a designer

- » Please do not hire your "cousin" unless he is a professional in the graphic design industry. Hiring someone who might know a little bit about a graphic design software program just to save some money can cost you time and money in the long run overall.
- » Professional and experienced designers have the know-how, training and design eye to create a much better product for you that will sustain time and you will be proud to use it over and over again.
- » Remember, your time is valuable so please don't spend those hours creating something that a professional could have done in less time.

## Get it in writing

You've done your homework, gathered your likes and dislikes, figured out your budget, timelines and finished product desires. Now it is time to put it in writing before beginning working together.

## Get an Estimate of Work in writing based on your project description you discussed with them

Ask the designer for a detailed estimate of the work that you talked about. This estimate will detail out the scope of work for your project and should provide you with everything you will be charged for. Ask yourself these questions when looking over the estimate provided:

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## Hire a Professional, Not Your Cousin continued

- » Did any items get left out?
- » Does the designer bill by the project or the hour? Which way works better for your budget?
- » Are there fees to start the project? Upfront deposit?
- » What is the billing cycle? Broken up in thirds or 50/50.
- » What is the estimated timeline for the project?
- » Does this timeline fit with your timeline schedule?
- » Do the costs work with your budget?

Remember, you need to feel comfortable with the designer that you hire—this is a long term “dating” experience.

### **Ask questions and express concerns about the estimate you have received right away and be sure everything you discussed is in writing**

Make sure your questions and concerns are answered. Start your relationship with a designer off right with no unknown clouds hanging over your head. If you don't talk openly with the designer this can get you in trouble and worse yet end up costing you money. Now is the time to have your questions answered. If items are left out of the estimate, ask them to send you an amended estimate

to cover those items. If the designer listed items that you don't understand, ask them to explain.

### **Approve the estimate of work**

The estimate looks good to you, within your budget and all your questions answered, now it is time to approve that estimate and begin the work. This is a binding contract so be comfortable with it. Some designers will also provide you with a written contract that outlines your relationship and the ins and outs of your rights. Always ask for both an estimate of work and a contract and please do not proceed with the working relationship without knowing how much everything will cost you.

### **Do the homework upfront, keep the communication open and grow your relationship with your designer**

It's sometimes an uncomfortable feeling to discuss money, but if you keep this topic open and light and remember it's still a business transaction, there won't be any “icky” feelings. When we purchase from retailers and other businesses we know how much it will cost us, so don't let hiring a designer on a project be any different.



*Excerpt from Diane's forthcoming book, co-authored with Gina O'Daniel ([www.odanieldesig.com](http://www.odanieldesig.com)), soon to be available September 2010.*

In 1995, Diane moved from the corporate graphic design field to start Visual Communication. She saw the opportunity to provide government agencies, associations and businesses with easy access to a wide variety of professionals, without the creative limitations and overhead of the typical design firm. Since then, she has combined her education in organizational communication with her experience in design to bring together senior creative professionals able to provide a full range of services.

She manages the day-to-day operations of Visual Communication and her second company, speakerpublisher.com as well as handles design and project coordination on each project. With over 20 years of experience in the design industry her mission is to help demystify working with graphic designers and help educate small businesses on how to work with a designer and get the most out of their budgets.

Her reputation for having a keen marketing sense, flexibility and excellent listening skills has resulted in her current clientele which range from state and county agencies, advertising and public relations firms, corporations, non-profit associations and small businesses.



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