

Graphic Design Articles & Features

How to Choose a Graphic Designer

Adrienne Turcotte

As a potential client, you recognize the benefits of hiring a professional designer to create your logo, stationery or marketing pieces, but there are just so many designers out there that it can be downright overwhelming. How in the world can you find one who is right for you?

Some companies think that the best way to get a design that they like is by holding a contest, but if you read [last month's article](#) you probably realize that this isn't the right way to go about it.

There are a lot of people offering design services, and they range in experience from true professionals with years of experience to high school students with pirated software who just want to make a quick buck. Searching the internet can be very time consuming and your efforts can leave you feeling confused and discouraged.

So Where to Begin?

There are many places to find graphic designers:

- You can check with your local Chamber of Commerce or small business organization for recommendations.
- If you have seen a logo or advertisement for another company that you found particularly appealing, you can contact the company and request the name of the graphic designer who produced the piece.
- Perhaps a friend or relative knows of a skilled designer that would be ideal. You never know until you ask!
- Many graphic design forums online will allow you to post a free "classified" ad describing your project and asking that interested parties contact you.

What Next?

It is usually best to review the work of at least 3 graphic designers before choosing one for your project. Ask to see samples of each designer's previous work accompanied by a price quote for your job. Professional designers keep portfolios of their past work to let potential clients see what they have done, and if their style would match the client's wants and needs. When reviewing a designer's portfolio, be sure to look for variety among their pieces. Even if a designer has a very recognizable style their work should show that they can come up with different ideas and not just variations on a theme.

Choose someone who will do their homework about your company - if they only want to know what your business name is and then they are ready to start working, they're missing something. A designer's job is not just to create something that looks nice; it is to communicate a message.

Be sure to find out what is included in the prices that you are quoted. You will probably be given a few concepts to choose from, then once you pick one, you will be able to make some changes to refine it. Be sure to find out what file formats will be given to you upon completion of the design, and get an estimate of how long the project will take. (Obviously, if you end up making a lot of changes this can alter the timeframe.)

A good designer will listen to your ideas and make suggestions or ask questions to make sure that they understand your goals. They will also return their messages (phone or email) within a reasonable amount of time, and will not let a project fall by the wayside. Professional designers work with a contract (to protect the client's interests as well as their own) which explains the steps involved in the design process and the expected completion dates for each step. It is also a standard business practice to require a deposit before starting work on a project.

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About Logos

If you are looking for a designer to create your company logo, flashy effects and cliché images (swooshes, swooshes everywhere) are usually not a good sign. A good designer is a strong communicator, and will not have a portfolio that is full of swooshes, starbursts, or other generic symbols. The fact that Nike's "swoosh" logo is successful DOES NOT mean that adding a swoosh to any other logo will make it successful. A talented designer will be able to find a way to represent your company's 'personality' in a simple and memorable image.

While simple, there can be more to a good logo than meets the eye. For example, the FedEx logo has a secondary design element - an arrow - built in to the white space in the logo. Even if we as viewers don't see it right off, it adds to the weight of the message subliminally.

Designers who offer dozens of template images with the accompanying text "Your Company Name Here" do not provide you with solutions that really represent your business and all that it stands for. A logo is really supposed to represent the "essence" of your business. It should be simple and memorable. It should be tailor-made for your company, taking into account who your customers are, what you are selling, what ideals you want associated with your company, and more.

A good logo designer will be able to supply you with vector files - that is, scalable files that will not lose resolution when they are made larger. A knowledgeable designer will not design your logo in Photoshop.

Another thing that you should bear in mind is that your logo will be used in many different applications: print (on your stationery, forms, etc) and web spring to mind, but you may also want to have it embroidered or engraved on something. A good designer will be able to create a logo that still "works" in straight black and white - no shades of grey, no drop shadows or lens flares or other "filter effects" - these can be added later for the web version of the logo, if you desire.

If you keep this information in mind it should take the mystery out of hiring a designer, and help you to select someone who can really communicate your message in the best way possible.

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