

## Graphic Design Articles & Features

### What to Ask a Graphic Designer Before Hiring Them

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If you have a business, at some point you're going to need a graphic designer. Though you may be able to print your own business cards or letterhead, if you want them to look good and really make your business stand out, you need someone who knows how to make fonts, colors and graphic elements work together.

A graphic designer is trained to use design elements (from photos to clip art to lines and boxes to typography) to convey information or create an effect on a consumer.

Basically, what you're trying to do is let people know about you, whether it's yourself, your business or your product that you're trying to show in the best light.

In other words, if you want people to sit up and take notice of you in print, you need something that catches attention and leaves a great impression. And that's where a good graphic designer is so invaluable.

What do you need?

Your first questions when hiring a graphic designer should be to yourself.

What are you presenting to the world that requires a professional design?

How will it be presented—in product packaging, in business stationery, in brochures, in magazine ads?

Do you already have an image that needs polishing or revamping, or do you need a logo created from scratch?

Do you need a single business card design, or do you want a total package with branding —associating your product and name with something memorable, such as a trademark or jingle?

Once you know the answers to these questions, you can start asking graphic designers some questions.

1) Ask how long they've been in business.

Someone that can prove twenty years of experience with happy customers is probably going to charge more than someone new to the business. They are also more likely to be able to help you figure out what you're looking for, unless you have a very concrete idea to begin with. If you don't have a solid idea of what you want, a less experienced graphic designer may take several tries to create what you want, and could cost more in the long run.

2) Ask to see previous work.

Many graphic designers have a certain style. While their work doesn't all look the same, there are often similarities you'll spot in their portfolio. Designer A may favor a softer look (with flowers or pastel colors), while Designer B may lean towards something edgier (dark colors, geometric shapes). Neither is bad in and of itself, but if you're trying to set up a day spa, you'd likely go for Designer A's style rather than Designer B. A punk rock band would have the exact opposite reaction.

3) Ask for references.

You don't want to hire a graphic designer who can never finish a project on time, especially if you're on a tight timetable. Is the designer open to suggestions? Can s/he take constructive criticism? Yes, they're the designer, but you're the customer, and your opinion counts. This can work the other way too. You could hear from references that this person takes his or her time, but it's definitely worth the wait because the price is right and the end product is fabulous.

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#### 4) Who does the actual work?

Are you hiring a firm that gives the grunt work to subordinates, who may not be able to do the level of quality work you want? Or is this a one-man show, where you have to wait your turn until the graphic designer can get to your project in his roster of clients?

#### 5) Exactly what services does the graphic designer provide?

If s/he designs a brochure, who prints it? If a banner is created, whose responsibility is it to get the real thing done? Are you going to be given a CD containing your logo and master copies of the brochure and letterhead files, then have to go elsewhere for printing, or will the CD be delivered along with your first batch of printed materials? Also, do you get a few mock-up options from which to choose, or is the designer just going to create one version for you to approve or disapprove?

#### 6) Will the graphic designer spend time consulting with you?

A good designer will take the time to listen to your ideas, and ask questions to make sure s/he is clear on your vision and the feeling you want your logo and marketing materials to evoke in potential clients.

#### 7) Ask about copyrights.

Does the graphic designer keep the copyright and just license reproduction rights to you, or do you get the copyright? Does the designer ensure that the brand s/he creates doesn't infringe on an existing brand?

#### 8) Ask about the price.

What are you getting and not getting? Ask for a list of what's included, whether it's in the form of a fee schedule or a whole project quote. Make sure you understand what you're getting yourself into, and what you're getting out of the relationship you're about to start.

You will be signing a contract and you will be in this relationship for the term of that contract. After you put your signature on something is not the time to discover you made a mistake, or had more questions.

#### In Conclusion

What you want to ask a graphic designer before you hire him or her is everything. Do your research on the going rate in your area for various design work, and be willing to talk to several designers before choosing one. Shop around. Ask around. If you see graphic design you like at a business, ask who did their work.

Most of all, remember that a graphic designer is supposed to give some type of memorable representation of "you", whether it's for business or for personal use. You will want an excellent working relationship that can potentially last a long, long time.

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