



# Ten Things to Consider

## When You Hire a Graphic Designer

No marketing plan can succeed without a creative presentation that distinguishes you from your competitors, promotes your value, and resonates in your market. It's vital that you work with an experienced graphic designer who can help you make your mark and engage your audience while driving them to act.

**But, what are the criteria for choosing a graphic designer who suits your needs?**

**We're here to help you sort it out.**

*Read more!* →

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**Step2:**<sup>™</sup>  
BRANDING AND DESIGN

*Step2 Branding and Design helps organizations identify what makes them great and use it as the foundation of a branding and marketing communications plan that gets them noticed, communicates their message, builds loyalty, and adds value.*

*Many markets are flooded with talented graphic designers. While many are very capable, they're not necessarily all the same. Design skill is only one piece of a larger puzzle. The ability to strategically apply that talent is where many differences lie. Here, are ten important factors to consider while sorting through the field of available talent.*

## 1 EXPERIENCE

Look for diverse work experience. Designers who worked in ad agencies or design studios usually have served a variety of clients and are generally efficient with their time. Those who worked with in-house corporate communications teams have likely developed skills across more disciplines and are more sensitive to budgetary constraints. If you can find one person with both histories, then you'll have the best that each can offer.



## 2 PORTFOLIO

Look deeper into their online portfolio. If they show a small sampling of work, that might be an indication of inexperience. Look for graphic designers who present a broad variety of work for a wide range of industries. See if they've done work for businesses similar to yours and how their strengths align with your immediate and long-term needs. If you're looking for advertising help, but see mostly logos, they might not be the right fit. If you're in a high-tech industry, a designer who focuses primarily on retail clients might not understand your audience or be able to handle a learning curve.



## 3 INDUSTRY EXPERTISE

How does the graphic designer think? Do they have a blog? Are they active in social media? What does their LinkedIn profile look like? Do they use these channels to focus only on showing samples of their work, or do they offer helpful advice and tips? If they have a blog and you find yourself learning from them, then they likely offer more bang for your buck.



## 4 SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Understand how your business fits into the client roster of the graphic designer. Can you be confident that you'll receive the same level of attention that other clients get? That's a direct question you should ask any candidate. You need to state your expectations clearly and up front. Listen for signs of over-promising.



**Their Words.**

## 5 CLIENT TESTIMONIALS

Nothing does more for any business than the words of others. The same thing applies to graphic designers. If they have positive Google Reviews and website testimonials, it tells you that their customers are happy and willing to go on record about it. But, look closely at the types of comments, too. Are they all the same, or do they offer insights into their relationships? Consider contacting some of their clients and asking them about their experiences working with the designer.



## 6 ACCESSIBILITY

If you're hiring a local graphic designer, they should want to meet you face-to-face to discuss your needs. And you should, as well. A lot can be learned from engaging in a conversation that goes deeper than the project at-hand. A strategic relationship is critical to the success of any communications effort. And understanding you, your product or service, audience, industry, and competition is vital. Furthermore, reflecting your attitude, personality, and style in the work is not only entirely appropriate, it brings to you real ownership. This requires a relationship of accessibility, open and honest communications, and, sometimes, proximity.

## 8 THE BIGGER PICTURE

When interviewing candidates, take notice of how they view your needs. Are they thinking along a project-by-project path, or do they want to understand the bigger picture of how it all fits into your business goals? The designer who looks beyond individual projects may be better suited to provide holistic advice that fits your bigger picture. Certain projects might be approached in a different manner if there's a larger objective to be met.



## 7 VALUE VS. BILLING RATES

Take the time to research what professional graphic design services cost and determine a realistic budget before you contact anyone. (Round numbers are fine.) Understand and appreciate the true value of the services you're looking to buy. Be sure to maintain the right perspective when evaluating fees. Most people don't hesitate to pay the furnace repairman or auto mechanic \$100.00/hour. Yet, nobody can argue that the public face of your business is any less important.

While you might find that less-experienced graphic designers charge lower rates, some tend to work slower and might require more hand-holding and direction. That means more of your time spent.



Experienced designers charge higher hourly rates, but typically need less direction, work efficiently, and are more attuned to best practices. They also tend to have relationships with industry experts, vendors, etc., and can help you find the right resources to complete the job. Finding the cheapest designer might have some immediate appeal. But, you could actually end up paying more through your time spent or in revisions. Their billing rate has to be weighed with other factors. Avoid those who undervalue their services or offer deep discounts to get your business.



## 9 REMAIN OPEN TO ADVICE

An experienced graphic designer has likely been there, done that, and may offer advice that could cause you to reconsider some of



your own ideas. This is a good thing! Look for a designer who is willing to respectfully challenge your thinking. And be open to it. If you tell them, "I know exactly what I want. I just need someone to put it together," you might just get exactly what you want. But it might not be what you really need. Remember, it's also in the best interests of the graphic designer that the project succeeds.

**Now that you've narrowed-down the field,  
where do you go from there?**

*Next steps* →



## 10 LOOK FOR SKILLS BEYOND THEIR CORE DISCIPLINE

Ask the designer about their skills and experience. Do they simply rattle off a list of projects, or do they discuss responsibilities and results? Look for genuine passion in what they do. Inquire about specific clients or projects you saw on their website and what role they played. Find out whom they work with and what they offer beyond their primary discipline. For example, some designers are also good writers. But nobody can do it all. They likely work within a network of experts, including web developers, printers, and photographers.

Evaluate how the candidate engages you about your business, market, and audience prior to discussing your project. They should want to understand your challenges and long-term vision, which will put them in a better position to provide sound recommendations.

If this is new territory for you, there's nothing wrong with letting them know. The true creative professional is the one who is willing to help you along, because they know it will make things run smoothly and benefit everyone in the long run.



### Creating the Conditions for an Engaging Relationship

A dynamic working relationship with your designer can yield results that look great, are effective, and provide a platform on which you can grow your business. But the more latitude you give them, the greater chance you'll have of receiving options you might never have considered. However, they also need to keep you involved



throughout the process, so you don't lose ownership of the final result. In the end, if you're both willing to learn from one another, everyone flourishes. With the right team of experts in your corner, you can take your business to the next level. And a great graphic designer is a valuable partner who can help you get there.

## This is not about us. It's about you.

Let's talk about who you are, what you're great at, and where you'd like to take your business. Step2 Branding and Design can help you take your best shot at getting there.

If you're not sure where to begin, drop us a line at [Step2Branding.com](http://Step2Branding.com) and let's talk.

Step 1 is up to **you**.

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