

## Working with a graphic designer

**“I believe that in a crowded marketplace DESIGN may be the most potent tool for differentiating one’s products or services.”**

- Tom Peters, Management Consultant

Not all graphic designers follow the same procedures in completing a project. But this cursory overview will help you become familiar with the ins-and-outs of the creative and production stages of the graphic design process.

Before any work begins, we suggest the following:

- a communication strategy; assigning one company staff person as the decision maker and key contact for graphic design;
- a written contract covering project parameters and responsibilities;
- money matters such as estimates and billing;
- and a project timetable.

Since the communication strategy is the single-most important element guiding a project from its initial stages through final refinements, make sure that you and the graphic designer understand what it says.

Initial research should include an audit of your competitors’ and your company’s current communications. In trying to establish a distinct position for your company or one of its products or services, you don’t want to mimic a competitor’s work or contradict a message your company just sent out.

The first stage of creative work includes concept development. This is an exciting process, exploring various options and weighing their merits against the communication strategy. Once the concept has been established, the refinement stage begins. Along the way, you see the project evolve, each time becoming more refined. Other creative work such as writing, illustration, or photography usually occurs simultaneously with refinement process.

At the end of the concept refinement stage, the graphic designer will usually present a final comprehensive layout or mock-up to the person at your company who has final approval authority. He or she should be

satisfied with everything that will go into the final product, including typography, photography, copywriting, paper and colors. Copywriting takes on particular importance because proofreading responsibility rests with the client unless other arrangements have been made. In today's electronic world, desktop publishing allows copy to go directly from word processing to set type. Correcting copy during the word processing stage, rather than later, saves time, money and headaches.

Since the approval process may involve more than one client representative, expect changes at each decision-making point. It is important, however, that the client's key contact person keeps track of and agrees to all changes before the designer makes them. Then, the production stage begins.

During production, you will be asked to review and approve preliminary proofs at each stage of the project. This proofing process ensures accuracy at every step in the process and keeps things on budget and on schedule. During the production stage, the designer ensures the technical accuracy and overall quality of the final product.

A design project can span weeks or months. What you end up with will be the result of a joint effort. Talented designers and savvy clients produce effective graphic design by making the most of their common interests and their individual preferences. If you decide to work together on future projects, take the time to assess your experiences and look for ways to improve. A union forged by success can generate profits and growth for both of your companies.

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