

How NOT to hire a graphic designer

BY MIKE WATTERS

DESPITE ALL OF THE AMAZING, talented graphic designers I have worked with over the years, I can't tell you the number of "My Last Designer" horror stories I've heard. Some of the major complaints include:

- Designers who don't return phone calls and emails.
- Control-freak designers who won't acquiesce to any client requests.
- Designers whose work doesn't meet technical standards for print or web.
- Designers who take the client's deposit and run.
- Designers who don't follow instructions.
- Designers who just don't understand the business or industry they are working in.

Most of the above issues can be avoided by following the process outlined in "How to hire a graphic designer." In addition to that list of "do's," however, these "don'ts" will help you avoid your own horror story.

1. Don't use crowdsourcing.

There's plenty of information on the web about **crowdsourcing and spec work** (see www.no-spec.com), and I don't want to get into the debate too much here. Suffice it to say that crowdsourcing is a poor design strategy because it favors the quantity of options over the quality of the work. Rather than creating custom visual solutions for client's marketing needs, crowdsourcers tend to create large volumes of generic, derivative work that can be used by any business.

2. Don't hire the first design company you find on Google.

Design is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Design companies and freelance designers vary widely in terms of experience, skills and price. Develop a marketing plan that identifies deliverables, timeline and a budget, and stick to it.



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3. Don't hire the cheapest designer.

I recently started working with a new client whose designer simply stopped returning phone calls. I hear this story all the time. The client chooses a designer because he or she is cheap and available, then the designer disappears. The problem with hiring designers who charge \$25 per hour is that they usually can't afford to stay in business very long.

4. Don't hire based solely on portfolio.

In design school, portfolio is everything. But outside of that environment, there are many factors that contribute to a successful business/designer relationship. These include the five Ps —

- **Portfolio:** Does the designer have high-quality samples of the type of work you are looking for?
- **Professionalism:** Does the designer have his or her act together? How quickly does he or she return phone calls?
- **Price:** Are the designer's prices within your budget? And is your budget realistic?
- **Personality:** Does the designer mesh well with the stakeholders in this project? How does the designer resolve creative conflicts?
- **Productivity:** How quickly can the designer turn projects around? What are the designer's technical capabilities (print, web, etc.)?

Based out of Portland, Oregon, **Mike Watters** has more than a decade of experience in developing visual brands for clients in technology, education, healthcare and publishing. For more tips and insights, become a fan of Mike Watters Design at facebook.com/MikeWattersDesign, or follow [@MikeWattersPDX](https://twitter.com/MikeWattersPDX) on Twitter.

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