

How to hire a graphic designer

BY MIKE WATTERS

WORKING WITH A GRAPHIC DESIGNER for the first time, like most things in business, involves a certain amount of risk. It's hard to know whether a particular designer will be right for your needs. Individual designers' working styles, technical abilities and specializations are all over the map.

So how do you ensure a good fit?

1. Look at their portfolios. Really look.

Look for work that meshes well with your marketing strategy and is appropriate to your industry. (If you don't have a marketing plan, it's time to create one.)

Once you find work you like, dig in deeper. If you're hiring for web work, don't just look at thumbnails on the designer's site; find the client's actually working website and click around. If you're hiring primarily for print work, arrange to see a print portfolio or at least some printed samples before you hire.

2. Interview your candidates — on the phone or in person.

Sure, email and Twitter are faster than a phone or lunch meeting. But only a live interview allows you to get to know your designer. Plus, if your project has specific technical considerations, a phone or in-person interview allows you to find out what your prospect knows without the aid of Google. Here are a few questions to ask:

- What do you look for in a client?
- Do you tend to work best collaboratively or on your own? (That's not a trick question — some clients work better with designers who just crank out products and don't do the whole collaborative process.)
- How do you resolve conflict in the design process?
- Do you work on an hourly or per-project basis? (I prefer per-project.) What are your rates?
- Speaking of pricing, how do you handle changes in the scope of work?



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The phone or in-person interview need not take more than 30 minutes, but you'll get a wealth of information about your candidates.

3. Call past clients.

I can't tell you the number of horror stories I've heard about "My Last Designer." Whoever this My Last Designer is, I don't know how he or she keeps getting hired. Seriously.

Whether you have a list of references provided or are simply trolling the designer's website for a list of past clients, here are a few questions to ask:

- What was the designer like to work with?
- Did he or she meet agreed-upon deadlines?
- How did you feel about the level of collaboration?
- Was the designer responsive to your feedback?
- Would you work with this designer again?

4. Keep in mind that good designers have good friends.

Your creative needs will likely extend beyond your designer. Once you have a designer you like working with, work with him or her to extend your creative network to photographers, illustrators, videographers, copywriters, web developers — you name it. Pretty soon, you'll have an entire agency at your disposal.

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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