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## How To Hire the Best Graphic Designer for You

- The best way to find a great designer is by word-of-mouth. Get a recommendation from someone you know and trust, or look to other businesses whose designs you admire and find out who created them.  
Check references thoroughly if you go this route.  
Or, give Hawk Design a call!
- When a designer shows you their portfolio, be sure to ask them what their exact role in each project was. Lee Erickson, former CEO and Creative Director of Erickson Barnett, explains: “One might say “Look! I did this for Nike!” but Nike gives clear standards and outlines. Did they have art direction? Who else did they work with? Did they pick the photo or was it given to them? These answers will better tell you how independently they work, and what their creative perspective is.”
- Make sure that the designer has experience in the medium that you plan to use—a designer who has a lot of great web experience won’t necessarily be good at designing packaging for a print project.  
Dan Blank, Creative Director of Bureau Blank, says, “One of the most important qualifications is that the designer has either done work in a format similar to yours (i.e. a consumer products website, a movie poster, an investor pitch deck) or solved design challenges similar to yours (i.e. we need to design a piece to encourage repeat business, we need a way to clearly explain our technology.)”  
Erickson adds, “The designer you’re looking for is one that understands your purpose, your content, and how to bring that to you and your customers.”
- In general, freelancers are less expensive than design agencies, but pricing will vary drastically based on two important factors: the designer’s level of experience, and what you want to get out of the whole process.  
Obviously, a designer with more experience and a larger portfolio will charge a higher rate. Blank suggests looking within a range of \$50-150 per hour. Anything more than that, and you might as well go with an agency, since “you’re probably just paying a premium for an individual with a lot of experience and ego but not necessarily more creative or technical ability.”  
Ultimately, the more extensive and complex the project, the higher the price—a total re-branding is going to cost you more than a single logo or packaging design. You might want to set a flat rate right up front, suggests Erickson. If you’re concerned that an hourly rate might get out of control, lay out the specifics of the deliverables you’ll be getting and agree on a price before the project even starts.
- Be specific. You don’t necessarily have to have a creative vision of the final product, but you do need to be able to describe what you would like to accomplish through the design.



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“You should prepare a detailed business brief that sets the stage for the designer to deliver successfully,” says Jeff Greenhouse, President of Singularity Design. “This document should give them a clear vision of the objectives, the business environment, the available resources and the constraints.”

- Probably the most important element of graphic design is getting your message across. This message is your company’s values, attitude, and purpose, all in one, and your designer needs to be clear on what it is if they’re going to come up with something that will make you happy.
  - Blank details the crucial points to note:
    - A brief explanation of your business model that the designer as an outsider can grasp.
    - A clear definition of who the target audience is and some thoughts on how they will be reached (is the piece for web/print? is it something used in person, by mail, etc.?)
    - What the communication objectives are, what the audience should know/do after seeing the piece.
    - Some thoughts about look and feel; if you don’t know, then you should find some comparable examples from similar companies that you either like or don’t like.
    - Erickson also says that it’s a good idea to talk to designers with clear adjectives that describe your message: “Say, ‘conservative, clean, elegant, innovative’—it gives them the kind of tone you want, from a look-and-feel perspective.”
- Outline your objectives. “Clearly describe the purpose of the project and who is going to use it.” says Erickson. “Also, is it a sales brochure? For retail, to show up on a shelf? A website design? A brochure for a campaign?” You’ll need to decide what you’ll have in your hands when the project is completed.
  - Clearly explaining your purpose and laying out the desired deliverables will make it much easier for the designer to give you exactly what you want.
- Your dollars and deadlines
  - Talk about your budget and your schedule. A design project has many steps, with several iterations—you should clarify when exactly you want each to be done.
  - “You want more than one version of a design—2 or 3 is ideal,” explains Erickson. “You can select one to move forward, and then ask, ‘How many rounds of revisions do I get?’ Negotiate for two. You don’t want someone to say ‘Here it is, we’re done.’”
  - Make sure you meet your own deadlines, too. “Content delays and unexpected changes are the number one cause of project delays, overages, and frustration,” says Greenhouse. “Once you have selected the designer and met with them to get the project started, be prepared to put together the content they need in a prompt and timely manner.”
- Claim ownership of the final product. “You are going to want to get the original art files. If you negotiate up front that you own this file, they have to give it to you,” says Erickson. That way, if you ever want to make edits to the design, you have unrestricted access to the work.