

# HOW TO (and not to) WORK WITH A DESIGNER

Imagine that you're Christopher Columbus.

You arrive in the New World and are so disappointed there are none of the oriental silks and spices you came looking for that you turn around and go home, missing all the wonders of the New World. That's what happens when you have preconceived notions about design. You can end up with something that's better, but NOT SEE or APPRECIATE IT because you're only focusing on the fact that it's not what you had in mind.

That's just *one* of the mistakes people make when they work with a designer.

A good designer's work will make something:

WORK BETTER — SELL BETTER — LOOK BETTER

SHED NEW LIGHT ON OLD SUBJECTS

The trouble is, a lot of people hire designers because they want their project to "look good." But that's just scratching the surface of what a designer can and should do. So they don't know what's possible, so they don't get the most bang for their buck. Just as writers are *not just* people who can type, designers are *not just* people who can use graphics programs.

Good Design is more than skin deep.

DESIGN IS COMMUNICATION.

OK, so how do you work with a designer to get their best work? Here are some suggestions:

- 1) **Choose your designer carefully.** Look at their previous work. The best designers don't have a "signature look." Their projects look as different as their clients do. Awards don't necessarily mean the design worked for the client.
- 2) **Leave your preconceived notions at the door.** Don't ask for a project "like someone else's but in a different color." Be open to new, unexpected ideas. Don't be afraid of something different. Let new ideas sink in.
- 3) **Tell your designer what you want to say rather than how you want it to look.**
- 4) **Be clear about specific features you need.** You want your designer to create a design specific to your needs. If you try to add features as you go along, the design won't fit as well.
- 5) **Do your research and be specific about your needs.** "I need to sell meeting planners on the idea of hiring me to create costumes for their events." That's *clear and specific* about both the product and the audience. The more detailed and specific you are at the start, the better the designer can tailor the project to your needs. If you add requirements later on, the designer will probably just have to shoe-horn them in, which won't give you the best results.
- 6) **Make sure your message and content are clear.** The more of your content you have complete, the better the designer can build your project around it. A good designer may make suggestions to refine your content to get your message across faster or more clearly, but the more content you have complete, the more the designer will have to work with.
- 7) **Design for your customer, not yourself, your friends or your colleagues.** Be specific so your designer knows who your customers are and what they want. It's more important that they like your project than that you like it. Always remember, "What's in it for them?"\*\*
- 8) **Have good reasons for your preferences.** You can show the designer projects that appeal to you, but dig deeper and figure out why they speak to you. Think in terms of feelings.\*\*
- 9) **Don't design by committee.** No good design was ever created by a consensus. The more people who have a voice in the process, the more watered down the results will be. Your friends and coworkers will often give you conflicting advice and people often have ulterior motives when they give you comments (they may be jealous or threatened if you get something that's too good, or they may just be ignorant). You should only have one person making decisions. Don't be wishy-washy and try to change direction late in the process.
- 10) **Don't tell your designer how to design.** *That's not your area of expertise.* Instead, give the designer your requirements & preferences, while giving them the freedom to create something that answers them as effectively as possible. If you micromanage your designer, that person won't be motivated to do anything but cash your check.
- 11) **You can't please all the people all the time.** Bill Cosby said "The only sure way to failure is to try to please everybody." If everyone thinks your project is "OK" then it's probably too dull to get much of a reaction from anyone. If you design a project with NO personality no one will hate it. Or love it.
- 12) **Trust your designer** (you *are* paying for their expertise).

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*Designers aren't just people who can use graphics programs, and if you treat them that way, they will become people who just want to receive a check.*  
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\* If the design pleases your customers, they'll please you.

*If you insist on a design that only pleases you, then your customers may not be inspired to buy your product or service and in the end you will lose.*

\*\* Design makes you feel, so tell your designer how it makes you feel.

*Instead of saying, "I like yellow," get to the root of it and say "I want something that feels warm," or "I want something upbeat and friendly." Focusing on your logical or emotional impressions gives the designer more to work with. Why? Because your customers may not "like" the same things you do, but a good designer can convey the impression you want them to have.*

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The way to inspire a designer is to give them the message you want to convey, and the freedom to convey it in a fresh, new way.

Then when they start to show you "comps" (design versions), give them specific comments.

**Yes, designers can make mistakes and take wrong directions.**

The reason that so many great discoveries have been accidents is because when you set out with a destination in mind then end up someplace else, you feel you've missed the mark and gotten lost.

**The reality is different—you may have ended up someplace different—but better.**

Yet if you're only viewing things in terms of "this is where I wanted to go and I'm not there," you will be disappointed, even with something better.

**And yes, you need to tell them if you feel the design is off-track.**

But you also have to stop and ask yourself if you're just being Columbus, missing the wonders of the new world.

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