

A Client's Guide to Design:  
How to Get the Most Out  
of the Process

1



*AIGA | the professional association for design*

AIGA | the professional association for design  
164 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010  
212 807 1990, [www.aiga.org](http://www.aiga.org)

AIGA Board: Bill Grant, president;  
Shel Perkins, secretary-treasurer;  
Richard Grefé, executive director;  
James Ales, Connie Birdsall,  
Laurie Churchman, Moira Cullen,  
David Gibson, Steve Hartman,  
Marcia Lausen, Debbie Millman,  
Marty Neumeier, Bennett Peji,  
Hank Richardson, Mark Randall and  
Bonnie Siegler; Michael Hodgson,  
presidents council representative

Publisher: Richard Grefé, AIGA  
Editorial content: Joanne Stone,  
The Writer, Spicewood, Texas, and Lana  
Rigsby, Rigsby Design, Houston  
Design: Grant Design Collaborative, Atlanta  
Paper: Domtar EarthChoice, Solutions  
Pineapple Smooth, 80 lb. cover and Solutions  
Recycled White Smooth, 80 lb. text  
Printing: Peake DeLancey Printers, LLC  
Fonts: Interstate and Filosofia  
Copyright: © AIGA 2007. The first edition  
was published in 2001.

Presenting Sponsor for the AIGA  
Design Business and Ethics series:



[www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)

Paper Sponsor for the AIGA  
Design Business and Ethics series:

**DOMTAR** EarthChoice®  
High quality paper with a conscience

[www.domtarearthchoice.com](http://www.domtarearthchoice.com)

Printing Sponsor for the AIGA  
Design Business and Ethics series:

**Peake**  **DeLancey**

[www.peakedelancey.com](http://www.peakedelancey.com)

# A Client's Guide to Design: How to Get the Most Out of the Process

Getting the most out of the process	3
Finding the right designer	7
The design brief	15
Budgeting and managing the process	17
AIGA standards of professional practice	20
Business expectations for the professional designer	24

## A Client's Guide to Design: How to Get the Most Out of the Process

If you represent a corporation, institution, advertising agency, investor or public relations firm, or are an individual in need of graphic design, you've landed exactly where you need to be. Welcome.

Unlike so much in today's business world, graphic design is not a commodity. It is the highly individualized result of people coming together to do something they couldn't do alone. When the collaboration is creative, the results usually are too. This brochure is about how to get creative results. Developed by AIGA, the discussion that follows will give you realistic, useful information about the design process—from selecting a design firm to providing a clear understanding of objectives, evaluating cost and guiding a project to a desired end. It is a kind of "best practices" guide based upon the best thinking of many different designers with very different specializations and points of view, as well as clients of design who have a long history of using it successfully for their companies. The fundamental premise here is that anything worth doing is worth doing well, but if it's to be done well, it must first be valued.

### **The value position**

Design—good design—is not cheap. You would be better served to spend your money on something else if you don't place a high value on what it can achieve. There's a view in Buddhism that there's no "good" karma and no "bad" karma, there's just karma. The same *can't* be said for design. Karma is a universal condition. Design is a human act (which often affects conditions) and, therefore, subject to many variables. When the word design is used here, it is always in the context of good design.

A lot of famous people have written many famous books on the importance of design and creativity. The subject matter ranges from using design and creativity to gain a strategic advantage or make the world a more livable place—and more. Much more. The focus here is on how to make the process of design work in the business environment so that the end product lives up to its potential.

We live in a time of sensory assault. Competing for “eyeballs” —which is to say, customers— is more than just an Internet phenomenon. The challenge for companies everywhere is to attract consumers to their products and services and keep them in the face of fickle markets.

The answer to this challenge starts with each company’s people, products and services, but it doesn’t end there. How companies communicate to their markets and constituencies is becoming the primary means of differentiation today. Never, in fact, has effective communication been more important in business. And it has increased the pressure within companies to establish environments and attitudes that support the success of creative endeavors, internally and externally. More often than not, companies that value design lead the pack.

**Books designers read:**

- *6 Chapters in Design*, Saul Bass
- *AIGA: Professional Practices in Graphic Design*, AIGA
- *Blur: The Speed of Change in the Connected Economy*, Stan Davis & Christopher Meyer
- *Bradbury Thompson: The Art of Graphic Design*, Bradbury Thompson
- *The Cluetrain Manifesto: The End of Business as Usual*, Christopher Locke
- *The Death of Distance*, Francis Cairncross
- *Jamming: The Art and Discipline of Corporate Creativity*, John Kao
- *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Thomas L. Friedman
- *Looking Closer: Classical Writings on Graphic Design*, ed. Michael Bierut
- *New Rules for the New Economy*, Kevin Kelly
- *Orbiting the Giant Hairball: A Corporate Fool’s Guide to Surviving With Grace*, Gordon MacKenzie
- *Thoughts on Design*, Paul Rand

### **What design is and isn't**

Design often has the properties of good looks, which perhaps is why it's often confused with style. But design is about the underlying structure of communicating—the idea, not merely the surface qualities. The late, great designer Saul Bass called this “idea nudity”—messages that stand on their unadorned own. Certainly, it's possible for a good idea to be poorly executed. But bad ideas can't be rescued. When, for example, a global fashion house put verses from the Koran on the back pockets of its designer jeans for all the world to sit on, that was a bad idea before it was ever designed and produced. And the outcry of indignant Muslims worldwide loudly attested to this. Using a different color or type style wouldn't have changed the outcome.

Ideas give design its weight, its ability to influence audiences positively, negatively or not at all.

### **The objects of design**

Design is about the whole, not the parts. If you wear your \$2,500 Armani suit with the wrong pair of shoes, you are apt to be remembered for the shoes and not the suit. Inconsistency raises doubt and doubt makes people wary. This might not matter much if customers didn't have alternatives, but customers do. And they know it.

So?

So, it isn't enough for a company to have a great logo if the communications effort isn't carried out across the full spectrum of the company's interaction with its marketplaces—from how the telephone is answered to corporate identity; branding; packaging; print materials; advertising; Internet, intranet, interactive multimedia and web-related communications; and environmental graphics. The “swoosh” didn't make Nike a successful company. Nike made the “swoosh” an iconic reflection of a carefully orchestrated approach to the marketplace. (For better or worse, the marketplace is now deluged with “swoosh”-like shapes, identifying companies ranging from sportswear to software. It's the frame of reference for what many think of when visualizing the word “mark.”) It's unlikely the “swoosh” would be so memorable had it stayed confined to, say, hangtags on shoes.

## Finding the right designer

People with a great deal of experience—both as designers and as clients—will tell you that if you really do your homework in the selection process, the chances are excellent that what follows will bring about the hoped-for results.

### **Where to look**

There are more than 19,000 members of AIGA, and there are hundreds, if not thousands, of other businesses providing graphic design that aren't members. There are also other graphic design associations with their own memberships. And this is just the United States. It's a big community and, as with all businesses, design is increasingly global. Where do you start?

The membership lists of AIGA and other design organizations are available to the public. They are a good place to begin, especially if you're starting from ground zero. You will find the lists arranged by city and state, so that if location is an issue for you, you can define your search geographically. Start with AIGA's online membership directory at [www.aiga.org/membership](http://www.aiga.org/membership).

Design industry publications are another source. They are both numerous and accessible. Not only do they publish the work of designers on a regular basis, many also publish design annuals that display what the publications judge to be the best design in a variety of categories. These publications will not only show you what designers are capable of producing, but also how companies of all sizes and from every sector of industry are using design to communicate effectively.

Reviewing them is a fairly easy way to see a lot of work quickly. Doing so may also tell you something about where your own design comfort zone lies. And while your personal comfort zone isn't necessarily the right yardstick for making a selection, knowing it will help you in the "briefing" process (more on this shortly).

Still another way to find designers is to look around at what other companies are doing; call the companies whose efforts you admire and ask for their recommendations. Companies that are doing a good job of communicating are companies who care about it, and they're typically willing to discuss the subject. Furthermore, if they're doing good work, it usually means they are good clients. Find out from them what makes a design client a good client.

Designers themselves are also good sources. Ask them whom they respect within their field. There's nothing wrong with getting them to name their competition. While it might make choosing tougher, when you make the final selection from among designers who are peers, you usually come out better than when you don't. (And if the relationship doesn't work, well, you have some future contenders you already know something about.)

**What to look for**

Locating designers to interview is a fairly uncomplicated proposition. What to look for among the potential candidates—what makes one or the other the right firm for you—is more complex. It's not a beauty contest. Seeing work that you like is important and altogether appropriate as a point of departure. But it's not enough to warrant a marriage proposal.

The nature and technology of what is designed today is changing and expanding, and so is the discipline of design. As with many businesses and professions today, there's more to know and the knowledge itself has a shrinking shelf life. Some design firms have organized themselves to do everything, adding new capabilities as the demand warrants. Others do related things, such as corporate identity and annual reports. And still others do one thing—interactive multimedia, for example.

If you have a retail packaging project, a firm that designs only environmental graphics might not be your best choice. Why? Well, the reasons have less to do with design than with technical requirements, vendor knowledge, pricing and scheduling. The designer who knows how paint and materials hold up in weather or how signage is viewed from a moving vehicle may not know a thing about seam wraps and how products are treated on retail shelves.

Still, there is no litmus test to say one firm can do the job and the other can't, or that a firm without a certain kind of experience can't learn. In fact, some companies see a real benefit in hiring a design firm that brings neither prior experience nor preconceptions to their project. If you've identified a firm you'd like to work with and are comfortable making a leap of faith, you probably should.

The “discovery” process is where you can make that determination. And the more thorough you are, the more likely you are to find a firm with whom you can achieve great—who knows, perhaps even spectacular—results. So ask questions. Lots of them.

What’s the design firm like to work with? What is its culture and how does that match up with your company’s? How flexible is it? Does it want lots of direction? Or lots of latitude? And how much of either are you prepared to give? Who are its clients? And how did it get them? Does it have a thorough understanding of their businesses? What kind of working relationships does it have with them? And with its vendors — from writers to photographers, printers, web consultants and fabricators? Is it a specialist? Or generalist? Does it have the manpower and technical capabilities to do what you need? How does it arrive at design solutions?

And don’t stop here.

How effective has the design firm’s work been from project to project? Does it even know? And does it know why? Can the firm demonstrate that it has done what it promised in terms of budgets and schedules? Are you talking with the people who will do the work for you? Are they the ones who did the work you liked? If not, have you seen their work? Does the firm share the credit—good and bad—for its work? Does it exhibit a good grasp of business and does the condition of the company reflect this? Do you feel that you will enjoy working with the people you’ve met?

Some of these questions are subjective, intuitive. Most have concrete answers. If, for example, a firm can't tell you what its clients were trying to achieve or how it arrived at its solutions, chances are it doesn't deal in ideas. If it isn't adept at running its own business, it probably won't be good at running your project. If it talks only about itself, it may not be a good listener.

To get your answers, go first to the design firms you are considering. Then check out external references, especially clients—and not just the references provided. Get comfortable with the honesty of the firms you are talking to. Find out if their experiences and those of their clients gel. Trust is essential when you are handing over your wallet and your image to someone else.

If you find yourself wondering whether all of this is really necessary, ask yourself how seriously you want to compete in the marketplace. Because that is exactly what a good designer will help you do.

#### **Top 10 questions**

1. How does the firm like to work?
2. Who are its clients?
3. How knowledgeable is it about them?
4. How is it viewed by them? By its peers?
5. What is its design process?
6. What kind of design experience does it have?
7. What kind of results has it achieved?
8. Who will work on your project?
9. Does the firm understand the business?
10. Do you like the people you've met?

**What about design competitions and spec work?**

There are differing views on these two closely related subjects. Some designers are absolutely opposed to design competitions and speculative work. Period. Others are open to them, provided they are compensated fairly for their work (i.e., according to the market value of the work).

The design competitions being discussed here are those that require design firms to do original work for a company in an effort to get that company's business—not the kind held by nonprofit professional organizations, such as AIGA, for the purpose of recognizing design excellence.

Consider this real-world scenario: A multibillion-dollar, publicly held global corporation with huge brand awareness surveys the work of several dozen graphic design firms for the purpose of selecting one to design its annual report. After narrowing the field to a half-dozen candidates, the company offers each design firm \$25,000 to provide it with a mock design of the report, issuing well-defined design parameters. Assuming the compensation reflects the effort required (it did), this isn't an unreasonable way to approach the selection process. And many designers would opt to participate. Yes, speculation is involved, but so is reciprocal value—up front. Real though it is, however, this scenario isn't the norm. There aren't that many multibillion-dollar companies, for one thing. For another, few companies cast such a wide net in search of design. The more common speculative scenario includes noncompensated competitions and work that's commissioned but paid for only upon approval. In either case, the situation is the same: little or no value is placed upon the designer as a professional, as someone whose purpose is to give trusted advice on matters significant to the company.

### **Egalitarian or just too eager?**

A typical design competition can be drawn from experience with the International Olympic Committee, the United States government or even business enterprise, and it usually goes something like this: A competition is announced for a new logo and identity. No creative brief outlines the communication challenges or objectives from the perspective of the client. A jury will select the winner and a prize may be given (recent examples include a color TV and stipends of \$15 and \$2,000). Often the client indicates one of the “rewards” will be the use of the design by the client—i.e. exposure. The rules of competition include granting the client ownership of the selected entries. (In one recent competition, the client asked for ownership even of designs that were not selected.) Once a design is chosen, development of it may or may not involve the designer.

A competition like this prevents the client from having the benefit of professional consultation in framing and solving a communication problem. The client receives artwork at a cost below market value, owns the intellectual or creative property and can exploit the work without involvement from its creator. Who loses?

The designer, the client and the profession. The designer gives up creative property without a fair level of control or compensation. The client fails to get the full benefit of the designer’s talent and guidance. The profession is misrepresented, indeed compromised, by speculative commercial art.

Unpaid design presentations are fraught with economic risk—risk that is absorbed entirely by the designer. Why, then, do some design firms agree to participate?

Sometimes a new firm or a firm without strong design abilities will offer the excuse that this is the only way for it to get work or exposure. A slump in business might make a designer more willing to gamble. Whatever the reason given, this short-term approach to hiring a design firm is not in the best interests of either party.

But the issues go beyond economics. The financial burden borne by the design team translates into risk for the client. To protect their “investment” in a design competition, competing firms often play it safe, providing solutions that don’t offer fresh, new ideas—in which case, the

client gets what it paid for. You wouldn't ask a law firm or management consultant to provide you with recommendations prior to hiring them. A design firm, no less than a law firm or management consultant, has to know its client thoroughly if it's to give valid advice. This takes time and commitment from both sides. Design competitions—even paid ones—just don't allow for this level of participation.

Comparisons sometimes are made with design competitions held for the purpose of selecting architects or advertising agencies. Where these analogies fall short is in the initial effort required versus future potential. Architects and advertising agencies typically present design alternatives in order to win assignments that represent substantial future billings and ongoing consulting

services to the client. The "product" comes at the end of a long engagement (in the case of architecture) or is the cumulative effect of a long engagement (as in advertising campaigns). Either way, initial design represents only a small part of the project's total value to both client and architect or agency. Not so with graphic design. The design approach represents the real value offered by the design firm, and the bulk of the work may well be completed at the front end of a project.

## The design brief

A design brief is a written explanation given by the client to the designer at the outset of a project. As the client, you are spelling out your objectives and expectations and defining a scope of work when you issue one. You're also committing to a concrete expression that can be revisited as a project moves forward. It's an honest way to keep everyone honest. If the brief raises questions, all the better. Questions early are better than questions late.

### **Why provide a design brief?**

The purpose of the brief is to get everyone started with a common understanding of what's to be accomplished. It gives direction and serves as a benchmark against which to test concepts and execution as you move through a project. Some designers provide clients with their own set of questions. Even so, the ultimate responsibility for defining goals and objectives and identifying audience and context lies with the client.

Another benefit of the design brief is the clarity it provides you as the client about why you're embarking on a project. If you don't know why, you can't possibly hope to achieve anything worthwhile. Nor are you likely to get your company behind your project. A brief can be as valuable internally as it is externally. If you present it to the people within the company most directly affected by whatever is being produced, you not only elicit valuable input, but also pave the way for their buy-in.

When you think about it, the last thing you want is for your project to be a test of the designer's skills. Your responsibility is to help the design firm do the best work it can. That's why you hired the firm. And why you give it a brief.

### **How to write one**

A brief is not a blueprint. It shouldn't tell the designer how to do the work. It's a statement of purpose, a concise declaration of a client's expectations of what the design should accomplish. And while briefs will differ depending upon the project, there are some general guidelines to direct the process. Among them:

- Provide a clear statement of objectives, with priorities
- Relate the objectives to overall company positioning
- Indicate if and how you'll measure achievement of your goals
- Define, characterize and prioritize your audiences
- Define budgets and time frames
- Explain the internal approval process
- Be clear about procedural requirements (e.g., if more than one bid is needed from fabricators, or if there's a minimum acceptable level of detail for design presentations).

In the final analysis, design briefs are about paving the way for a successful design effort that reflects well on everyone involved.

## Budgeting and managing the process

If the briefing effort is thorough, budgeting and managing a project is easier. It takes two to budget and manage a design project: the client and the designer. The most successful collaborations are always those where all the information is on the table and expectations are in the open from the outset.

### **Design costs money**

As one very seasoned and gifted designer says, "There is always a budget," whether it is revealed to the design team or not. Clients often are hesitant to announce how much they have to spend for fear that if they do, the designer will design to that number when a different solution for less money might otherwise have been reached. This is a reasonable concern and yet, it's as risky to design in a budgetary vacuum as it is to design without a goal. If your utility vehicle budget stops at four cylinders, four gears and a radio, there's no point in looking at Range Rovers.

If you have \$100,000 to spend and you'd really like to dedicate \$15,000 of it to something else, giving the design team that knowledge helps everyone. Then you won't get something that costs \$110,000 that you want but cannot pay for. The trust factor is the 800-pound gorilla in the budgeting phase. Without trust, there isn't a basis for working together.

The ideal approach is to bring in your designer as early as you can. The design team can then help you arrive at realistic cost parameters that relate to your objectives in lieu of an arbitrary budget figure. At this stage it is quite feasible to put together a budget range based upon a broad scope of a project or program. Individual estimates can be provided, for example, for design concepts, design development and production, photography, illustration, copywriting and printing for a print piece (or, in the case of a website, estimates for programming, proprietary software and equipment).

The more informed you are as a client about what things cost, the more effective you can be in guiding a project. You should know, for instance, that if your design firm hires outside talent such as writers, photographers and illustrators and pays them, it is standard policy to markup (generally, 20 percent) the fees charged by these professionals. You can choose to pay these contributors directly to avoid the markup, but this should be addressed at the time they're hired. Printing, historically, has been treated the same way.

You should also be aware that photographers, illustrators and writers are generally paid a “kill fee” if a project is cancelled after work has started. That’s because talent is in constant demand and accepting one project often means turning other work away. In the case of photography, expect to pay when a photo shoot is cancelled. And remember that unless you stipulate otherwise, you are buying one-time usage of the photographs—not the work itself—and that copyright laws are in force the moment the shutter trips. If you want unlimited use, you will have to negotiate and pay for it.

**Who leads? Who follow?**

It is the client’s responsibility to lead a project and the designer’s to design and manage the design process. Don’t confuse leadership with involvement. As the person representing the client, you might want a great deal of involvement, or very little. If you provide leadership, your participation can be whatever you want it to be.

“The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you.”

*Max DePree, CEO, Herman Miller, Inc., Leadership as an Art*

There are countless volumes on the subject of leadership, so we won’t presume to give leadership lessons here. The same general principles apply. In a design project, leadership requires that you give clear direction at the outset. You must be available when needed by the design team and ready to make decisions in a timely manner. You should understand how the design supports your objectives (so you can sell it). And you’ll need to monitor major delivery points and be prepared to get the necessary approvals. On this last point, some designers are excellent presenters, and, in fact, like to present their work to the final authority. But while they can be persuasive, they are not the ones to get the final sign-off. As the leader of the team, you are the deal-maker, the closer.

If you identify and articulate your objectives, establish your process early, see that the design team has access to what it needs from you, have a detailed budget and schedule to measure progress with, and lead the process from beginning to end, there is no reason that you won’t be able to enjoy the design process as much as the end product.

At least, that’s how many of our members and their clients see it.

## Standards of professional practice

A professional designer adheres to principles of integrity that demonstrate respect for the profession, for colleagues, for clients, for audiences or consumers, and for society as a whole.

These standards define the expectations of a professional designer and represent the distinction of an AIGA member in the practice of design.

**The designer's responsibility to clients**

A professional designer shall acquaint himself or herself with a client's business and design standards and shall act in the client's best interest within the limits of professional responsibility.

A professional designer shall not work simultaneously on assignments that create a conflict of interest without agreement of the clients or employers concerned, except in specific cases where it is the convention of a particular trade for a designer to work at the same time for various competitors.

A professional designer shall treat all work in progress prior to the completion of a project and all knowledge of a client's intentions, production methods and business organization as confidential and shall not divulge such information in any manner whatsoever without the consent of the client. It is the designer's responsibility to ensure that all staff members act accordingly.

A professional designer who accepts instructions from a client or employer that involve violation of the designer's ethical standards should be corrected by the designer, or the designer should refuse the assignment.

**The designer's responsibility to other designers**

Designers in pursuit of business opportunities should support fair and open competition.

A professional designer shall not knowingly accept any professional assignment on which another designer has been or is working without notifying the other designer or until he or she is satisfied that any previous appointments have been properly terminated and that all materials relevant to the continuation of the project are the clear property of the client.

A professional designer must not attempt, directly or indirectly, to supplant or compete with another designer by means of unethical inducements.

A professional designer shall be objective and balanced in criticizing another designer's work and shall not denigrate the work or reputation of a fellow designer.

A professional designer shall not accept instructions from a client that involve infringement of another person's property rights without permission, or consciously act in any manner involving any such infringement.

A professional designer working in a country other than his or her own shall observe the relevant Code of Conduct of the national society concerned.

**Fees**

A professional designer shall work only for a fee, a royalty, salary or other agreed-upon form of compensation. A professional designer shall not retain any kickbacks, hidden discounts, commission, allowances or payment in kind from contractors or suppliers. Clients should be made aware of mark-ups.

A reasonable handling and administration charge may be added, with the knowledge and understanding of the client, as a percentage to all reimbursable items, billable to a client, that pass through the designer's account.

A professional designer who has a financial interest in any suppliers who may benefit from a recommendation made by the designer in the course of a project will inform the client or employer of this fact in advance of the recommendation.

A professional designer who is asked to advise on the selection of designers or the consultants shall not base such advice in the receipt of payment from the designer or consultants recommended.

**Publicity**

Any self-promotion, advertising or publicity must not contain deliberate misstatements of competence, experience or professional capabilities. It must be fair both to clients and other designers.

A professional designer may allow a client to use his or her name for the promotion of work designed or services provided in a manner that is appropriate to the status of the profession.

**Authorship**

A professional designer shall not claim sole credit for a design on which other designers have collaborated.

When not the sole author of a design, it is incumbent upon a professional designer to clearly identify his or her specific responsibilities or involvement with the design. Examples of such work may not be used for publicity, display or portfolio samples without clear identification of precise areas of authorship.

**The designer's responsibility to the public**

A professional designer shall avoid projects that will result in harm to the public.

A professional designer shall communicate the truth in all situations and at all times; his or her work shall not make false claims nor knowingly misinform. A professional designer shall represent messages in a clear manner in all forms of communication design and avoid false, misleading and deceptive promotion.

A professional designer shall respect the dignity of all audiences and shall value individual differences even as they avoid depicting or stereotyping people or groups of people in a negative or dehumanizing way. A professional designer shall strive to be sensitive to cultural values and beliefs and engages in fair and balanced communication design that fosters and encourages mutual understanding.

**The designer's responsibility to society and the environment**

A professional designer, while engaged in the practice or instruction of design, shall not knowingly do or fail to do anything that constitutes a deliberate or reckless disregard for the health and safety of the communities in which he or she lives and practices or the privacy of the individuals and businesses therein. A professional designer shall take a responsible role in the visual portrayal of people, the consumption of natural resources, and the protection of animals and the environment.

A professional designer shall not knowingly accept instructions from a client or employer that involve infringement of another person's or group's human rights or property rights without permission of such other person or group, or consciously act in any manner involving any such infringement.

A professional designer shall not knowingly make use of goods or services offered by manufacturers, suppliers or contractors that are accompanied by an obligation that is substantively detrimental to the best interests of his or her client, society or the environment.

A professional designer shall refuse to engage in or countenance discrimination on the basis of race, sex, age, religion, national origin, sexual orientation or disability.

A professional designer shall strive to understand and support the principles of free speech, freedom of assembly, and access to an open marketplace of ideas and shall act accordingly.

## Business expectations for a professional designer

In today's information-saturated world, where an organization's success is determined by the power of its brand, professional designers become even more important in ensuring that companies communicate effectively—an imperative with bottom-line impact. Furthermore, a professional designer's ability to execute communications projects efficiently and economically is more critical than ever.

When a client invests in the services of a professional designer, he or she hires an individual who aspires to the highest level of strategic design, ensuring a higher return on investment. If a designer meets the following criteria, he or she will demonstrate the integrity and honor of the professional designer.

**Experience and knowledge**

A professional designer is qualified by education, experience and practice to assist organizations with strategic communication design. A professional designer has mastered a broad range of conceptual, formal and technological skills.

A professional designer applies his or her knowledge about physical, cognitive, social and cultural human factors to communication planning and the creation of an appropriate form that interprets, informs, instructs or persuades.

**Strategic process**

A professional designer combines creative criteria with sound problem-solving strategy to create and implement effective communication design.

A professional designer solves communication problems with effective and impactful information architecture.

A professional designer becomes acquainted with the necessary elements of a client's business and design standards.

A professional designer conducts the necessary research and analysis to create sound communication design with clearly stated goals and objectives.

A professional designer will submit an initial communication strategy to an organization's management for approval and meet with a client as often as necessary to define ongoing processes and strategy.

**Compensation and financial practices**

A professional designer provides the client with a working agreement or estimate for all projects.

A professional designer will not incur any expenses in excess of the budget without the client's advance approval.

A professional designer may apply reasonable handling and administrative charges to reimbursable items that pass through the designer's account with the knowledge and understanding of the client.

A professional designer does not undertake speculative work or proposals (spec work) in which a client requests work without providing compensation and without developing a professional relationship that permits the designer sufficient access to the client to provide a responsible recommendation.

**Ethical standards**

A professional designer does not work on assignments that create potential conflicts of interest without a client's prior consent. A professional designer treats all work and knowledge of a client's business as confidential.

A professional designer provides realistic design and production schedules for all projects and will notify the client when unforeseen circumstances may alter those schedules.

A professional designer will clearly outline all intellectual property ownership and usage rights in a project proposal or estimate.

*Clients can expect AIGA members to live up to these business and ethical standards for professional designers. Through consistently professional work, AIGA members have documented substantial bottom-line contributions to corporations and organizations. For more information and case studies about how professional designers have produced excellent business results, visit [www.aiga.org](http://www.aiga.org)*



### **About AIGA**

AIGA, the professional association for design, is the oldest and largest membership association for design professionals engaged in the discipline, practice and culture of designing. Its mission is to advance designing as a professional craft, strategic tool and vital cultural force.

The organization was founded as the American Institute of Graphic Arts in 1914. Since then, it has become the preeminent professional association for communication designers, broadly defined. In the past decade, designers have increasingly been involved in creating value for clients (whether public or business) through applying design thinking to complex problems, even when the outcomes may be more strategic, multidimensional and conceptual than what most would consider traditional communication design. AIGA now represents more than 19,000 designers of all disciplines through national activities and local programs developed by more than 55 chapters and 200 student groups.

AIGA supports the interests of professionals, educators and students who are engaged in the process of designing. The association is committed to stimulating thinking about design, demonstrating the value of design, and empowering success for designers throughout the arc of their careers.

Through conferences, competitions, exhibitions, publications and websites, AIGA inspires, educates and informs designers, helping them to realize their talents and to advocate the value of design among the media, the business community, governments and the public.



Adobe Systems, Inc. is the Official AIGA Sponsor for Design Solutions and is proud to be the Presenting Sponsor of the AIGA Design Business and Ethics series.

Together with AIGA, Adobe is creating innovative programs that give members a voice, nurture young designers and actively engage the creative community in dialogues about the important issues in the fields of design and technology.

The alliance between AIGA and Adobe is a long-term partnership dedicated to advancing design and the use of technology across creative industries as well as understanding and highlighting the impact of design on the economy and society.

Adobe has been an active participant in the design community over the past 25 years and looks forward to an ongoing conversation and dialogue – listening closely to designers and their needs.

**About Adobe Systems Incorporated**

Adobe revolutionizes how the world engages with ideas and information.

The company's award-winning technologies and software have redefined business, entertainment, and personal communications by setting new standards for producing and delivering content that engages people anywhere at anytime and through any medium.

For more information, visit [www.adobe.com/aboutadobe/](http://www.adobe.com/aboutadobe/)

**“A Client’s Guide to Design: How to Get the Most Out of the Process” is one topic in the AIGA Design Business and Ethics series, a range of publications dealing with ethical standards and practices for designers and their clients. New topics will be added to the series periodically. Additional copies can be downloaded from [www.aiga.org](http://www.aiga.org). For more information on solving communications design problems or hiring a professional designer, visit [www.aiga.org](http://www.aiga.org).**

**To join AIGA or to review the purpose and benefits of AIGA, visit [www.aiga.org](http://www.aiga.org).**

AIGA | the professional association for design  
164 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10010  
[www.aiga.org](http://www.aiga.org)

1

