

Ask the right questions to speed the design phase

Communication is the key to getting your designs approved

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When it comes to finalizing a design for your clients—whether for their sign, truck lettering or logo—the sooner you can get it signed off and approved, the better. So much is dependent on getting that approval. Without it, you're paralyzed. You can't order materials or move on to any other phase. To increase your production, and decrease the time it takes in the design phase, it's important to first understand what the client is looking for.

Since so much of our work here originates with the logo design, there's little that can be done until it's approved. We can't start their stationery design, Web site, brochure or lettering sketches. It's become more critical that we shorten the timeline necessary to arrive at a final, approved logo. This doesn't mean that we don't invest considerable time and

effort into the design work. We put a lot of time and research into logo design.

We used to have more revisions on our logo concepts. More revisions meant more time and more delays. When I stopped and really examined why this was sometimes happening, I found a few areas in which we needed to improve. The issues all boiled down to communication.

Communication is key Since we have several designers working on logo designs, including myself, it's important that the designers understand the mission of the logo. As the creative director for my agency, I usually speak on the phone or meet with the client to discuss the logo design and branding project. Then it is my responsibility to interpret the needs of the client and translate that to my



The creative brief for this high-end, full-service bridal and evening wear salon said, "Our current customers are affluent young brides, mothers and special and social event goers. We want to invoke these feelings with the logo: progressive, exclusive, trendy, expensive. Maybe perhaps a blue butterfly in the logo—not cartoonish."



The creative brief for this landscape firm said, "Portray exclusive, serious, established, I would like to attract the private estates for contracts. Definitely do not want American flag."

designers and illustrators.

I will offer some ideas about how to best accomplish the goals of the design. The downside of this arrangement is that neither my designers or illustrators ever speak directly to the client. I may think I know exactly how we should approach the design, but perhaps I haven't asked the right questions, or interpreted the goals for the design correctly.

There is a balance between listening to what a client is asking for, and what our experience has taught us. The client is coming to us because we know what to do. They're not looking to art direct or tell us how to design the logo. If so, they would have designed it themselves. But you'd be surprised how missing a little piece of information can sometimes wreak havoc on the design process. Sometimes it's as simple as not knowing the client hates a certain color. Or you may start by developing a beautiful icon, only to discover the client specifically doesn't want a symbol like that.

Since the illustrator or designer is not directly speaking with the client, I want to convey as much as possible about the job before they begin the work. Even if you are the one designing the logo or the sign, the more information you know upfront, the more likely you'll be able to deliver what the client is looking for.

Develop a comprehensive client questionnaire

As a result, we've developed a tool to help us



VACATION RETREAT *Management*

The creative brief for this vacation home property management firm said, "Something fun, cute, catchy and more of the look of a franchise."



The creative brief for this landscape firm said, "We'd like the logo to be able to be read from a distance. We'd like the logo to show that we are a respected, reliable company that provides top-quality work and excellent customer service. We also want Evergreen trees with a sun in the horizon."



The creative brief for this party supply indicated, "Nothing cartoony or funny, I would like to convey elegance and professionalism with a hint of fun."



The Creative Brief for this landscape irrigation firm said, "Logo will be used on title page of all designs and will be included in title block. Some designs will be color and some in pure black and white. The look and feel should be bold, serious, established. I definitely want water and a compass element."

ask all the right questions: a client questionnaire, or creative briefing document. Since so much of our work is done with clients out of state, we use an online form through our Web site that our clients must fill out at the start of every project. They simply fill out all the fields and submit it to us. Now I have a working document that I can forward to the illustrator or designer.

Below are some of the key points and questions we address on our online form for our logo design clients. You can modify it to use for signage and truck lettering projects.

- Enter the exact name you would like to appear in your design or logo. (*This seems obvious, but don't assume anything!*)
- Does your company have a tagline that you would like to see integrated into your logo? If so, enter the exact wording you'd like to use.
- Describe the nature of your business and/or your products and services.
- Who is the primary target audience and/or demographics for your product or service?
- Is there something specific that you don't like about your current identity?
- What are some of the important applica-

tions you anticipate for your new logo? (business cards, signs and/or truck lettering, Web sites, brochures)

- Select some adjectives to describe the image you want your logo to convey: bold, modern, trendy, retro, serious, established, playful, traditional
- Identify any color preferences you may have, or colors which you definitely do not want to use. (*This is an important question because competitors may have distinct color schemes that you'll want to avoid.*)
- Which of the logos from our portfolio, or from elsewhere, do you especially like?
- Which logos from our portfolio do you especially dislike?
- Is there something specific, in terms of a symbol or icon, that you would like us to avoid in your design? (such as trees, apples, cartoons, etc.)
- Is there something specific in terms of a symbol or icon that you would like us to consider using in your design?

By engaging your clients in this important communication process upfront, they'll feel their contributions to the process are important to you and your team. And we've found that it has indeed shortened the time it takes to come to a final, approved design. Customize the form to suit your needs, and give it a try. You'll see by asking the right questions initially you'll finish the job that much quicker. •SC



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