

The Value of Design is in the Relationship with the Designer

Cotswold Style met with **Fiona Huck** of **Wabbey Design** based in Cheltenham

When you need to appoint a graphic designer, what should you look for? With the number and range of options available it can be a daunting task. From freelancers based 5,000 miles away to internationally acclaimed design agencies based in major cities and everything in-between, the choice can sometimes be overwhelming.

Yet those who select a graphic designer, generally do so based on the following criteria and in this order of importance:

1. Budget
2. How quickly the job can be achieved
3. Portfolio
4. Sector experience
5. Testimonials

Whilst all of these are important, it is perhaps interesting to note that the single most important criteria about hiring a graphic designer is overlooked time and time again, personality and relationships.

When organisations are looking to make a permanent hire, they rigorously focus on a 'personality fit' to the organisation, yet any criteria they use when successfully adding people to their team can be completely overlooked when it comes to hiring a freelance designer. Inexplicably they use a different set of rules.

But personality is so important. Yes of course budget has to be matched and the designer needs certain skills, but accepting those are a given, the success of any design project comes from the relationship between designer and client.

It is something that is not lost on Cheltenham based designer, Fiona Huck. The owner of Wabbey Design feels that the relationship between designer and client is key, "Rapport and understanding is incredibly important and can actually be



seen in the final designed artwork. Working closely with your designer and having a great relationship will always lead to a better result than

would otherwise be achieved." It starts at the hiring process. "I'm always amazed that people seldom pick up the phone before awarding a job, preferring to rely on email" says Fiona, who has over 15 years' experience. Yet this is a fundamental flaw.

Some of the most important things about your relationship with a designer is do they understand your ideas, can they translate that into design and can they appreciate your views during the refinement process? "This can only be judged if you speak to a designer and get the mark of them before awarding them the work," clarifies Fiona.

The anecdotal evidence is strong. Fiona explains, "Wabbey Design has procured many clients who have been disappointed by their previous choice of designer. This ranges from the client who got a cheap deal with a freelancer in a different continent but they didn't understand the instructions, they design for a different culture and are never available during the working day, through to clients who have turned from the London agencies who want to design for themselves and not the client, who charge exorbitant rates and though technically have excellent designers, they were found to have a lack of commercial acumen."

Having worked for the in-house design team of a corporate blue chip company for 9 years, Fiona not only has the technical experience but the insight and understanding of what clients really want. She inherently grasps the constraints of in-house departments and the time



sensitive nature of the work. She is also used to working with people who have competing objectives and who may not be available at the designer's convenience.

Above all, Fiona, who founded Wabbey Design over 5 years ago, understands something else. "A Marketing Manager or Director is judged by their employer and wider organisation on the output they oversee. I work with them as an extension of their department and not in isolation, approaching their

project with as much enthusiasm and importance as they do. This can only be achieved if there is a strong working relationship." Wabbey Design also works with a lot of owner managed businesses and start-ups, "They want someone with commercial appreciation and who can hold their own in a conversation. They don't want 'yes' people," explains Fiona, "But they need someone who will listen and react."

Graphic designer options are many and varied. In the same way you wouldn't select a builder to construct an extension based on pictures of their old work and the price quoted without speaking and meeting them, the same should be applied for your choice of graphic designer. Relationships, trust and personality are every bit as important. As Fiona says, "Wabbey Design has the portfolio and pricing structure right but where we make a tangible difference is through relationships. By truly partnering our clients, we develop designs that not only work artistically but more importantly work commercially and that is reward in itself." ■

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