

Many businesses and organizations turn to graphic designers for help in creating their identity and marketing materials. But the actual costs may involve more than just the designer's fee. Learn what you need to know before considering a graphic designer for your next project.

Do You Really Need a Graphic Designer?

by Karin Nead

Marketing is the cornerstone to any business' ability to grow their client base. Promotional displays and marketing brochures for products and services, distinctive logos, and signs and signage systems all come into play when trying to promote a company. Many times, businesses turn to graphic designers for help in creating the solutions to these communication issues. This involves the use of a variety of print, electronic, and film media and technologies to execute a design that meet a company's communication needs.

But, is it really necessary to hire a graphic designer for this purpose? The first part of finding the answer to this is to define what a graphic designer is. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, graphic designers plan, analyze, and create visual solutions to communications problems. They consider cognitive, cultural, physical, and social factors in planning and executing designs appropriate

for a given context. This sounds complicated and may convince you that a designer would be a great person to have on your side when planning your marketing initiatives. However, the reality is that many graphic design services can be very expensive. While creativity is key, many firms only hire graphic designers that hold at a minimum of a bachelor's degree, and candidates with a master's degree are highly sought. While this seems like an even better deal for clients of such designers and their firms, this also raises the price of the services. In addition, designers often use expensive computer software to develop their designs, thereby increasing the cost to their clients.

Many businesses fall into this expensive trap of using graphic design services for their communication needs. However, many times this cost extends beyond just the fees for design services. Trying to develop a company identity is difficult when the person doing the designing

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doesn't understand the ins and outs of the company itself. No one knows better than the principals in the company what they stand for, their ideals and goals, and in what way they want this communicated. No number of meetings and brainstorming sessions will allow a designer to really understand your business the way you do. Positive images and branding are essential to any company. No amount of experience a design firm brings to the table will guarantee that their design will work for you; and, if it doesn't, it may be too expensive to change.

Even free design services can come at a cost. A commercial cleaning company in Indianapolis took their clients' needs very seriously; however, the overall attitude of the company was one of friendly, easy-going service at the best possible price. The company didn't have a logo and thought that having one professionally designed would give them a bit of an edge and would compliment any printed materials they distributed. They were also in need of informational brochures to give to potential clients that included a professional overview of their services, but also communicated their light-hearted attitude toward their business. The owners of the business had friends in the graphic design industry and entrusted them to create the logo and develop the layout and design of the brochure. It seemed like an inexpensive route and they figured their friends knew enough about their business and their attitudes to be effective. However, after weeks of meetings, and multiple mock-ups, they just didn't see any real prospects for their designs. Every logo was either too complex or too cartoonish; the brochure didn't have the professional feel they wanted while still exuding the attitude they carried. But, in the weeks of waiting they were losing out on the opportunity to promote their

business to potential clients. So, they decided that something was better than nothing and finally resigned themselves to a logo and brochure design. Things only got worse when they took the design to a printing house. The paper the designers had recommended for the brochure was very expensive and the number of colors in the logo design would put the cost for printing it way out of their budget, something they had clearly relayed to the designers as a consideration. Bottom line—they couldn't use any of it.

Another company wasn't so lucky. They relied on a graphic designer to create a large graphic to be used on an eight by five foot sign for advertising. After relaying what they wanted to the designer, and approving the design, they went to print. When the sign was posted there was a major problem—one of the words was misspelled. This was a very large, very obvious mistake that turned out to be a costly one. The sign needed to be reprinted and, although the designer discounted their fee for the mistake, the ad was not up at a crucial time and the company may have lost potential business.

These scenarios happened because the companies decided that a "professional" would be better suited to design their materials. Had the first company relied on their own creativity, there would have been no long delay in the design and they could have gotten exactly what they were looking for. Even though they got the services for free, it cost them more in wasted time and potentially would have busted the budget when it came to printing. The better option for this company would have been to consult with the printing house to find out what their options were for paper and colors, based on cost. This would have allowed them to use their own creativity and ideas of their business

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to design something that worked well for them and was less expensive. For the second company, ownership of the ad guarantees that you are going to be responsible for any mistakes, and much less likely that you'll make a basic one—like a spelling error. In both cases, doing the work themselves would have enabled them to easily make changes later in the instance that something didn't work well.

Again, the key to graphic design is creativity. What many businesses and organizations don't realize is that they likely don't even need a graphic designer—just their own imagination and knowledge of their business. Most printing companies will give you whatever information you need to help determine what weight of paper you should use, how much it will cost to print in two or four colors versus black and white, what format the file should be in and any other information needed to create your own design. In addition, they can look at your final design and tell you, from their experience, whether it's going to work or not. They see designs on a weekly basis and can readily tell you if a design is too complicated or would require special materials or techniques to print properly.

In addition, many printers have in-house design services that usually cost a lot less than using a separate designer. They want your business, and they are willing to discount such graphic

design services in order to get the print order. If they don't have an in-house designer, and you are determined to use a professional, they usually have designers that they work with on a regular basis and can recommend one to fit your needs, both in design and budget.

The other caveat to using a graphic designer is you may end up paying more for the printing services than if you did it yourself. Often times, when designers coordinate the printing for you, they tack on a service charge for "handling" the printing. So, even if you utilize a designer's services, be sure to get quotes from several printing companies on your own so you can be sure you're getting your money's worth.

In the end, it all comes down to cost. It may seem convenient and more professional to have someone else do your design work for you. But that convenience may end up costing you more than you realize. Delays in design, expensive color and paper options, service fees, mistakes and redesigns all add up to more than the cost of your own time and energy. Only you know your business well enough to convey your ideals to the world. Consulting with your local printer and utilizing their in-house design services, or simply designing the materials yourself, will go a long way towards saving time, money and headaches while still getting out an effective message.

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