

Questioning the Design Experts

Following are a few tips to help you begin the design firm selection process.

ASK OTHER PUBLISHERS

- Was this designer open to your ideas as well as providing their own? If you provided any initial cover design ideas, were they built upon or discarded?
- If you asked for specific revisions, how did he or she react to your requests?
- Was your deadline ever in jeopardy because of the designer? Why? What was done to fix the problem?
- Did you ever feel uncomfortable working with them?
- Would you hire this design firm again?

ASK POTENTIAL DESIGNERS

- How many years of experience do you have designing books, specifically?
- How many books have you designed? (You want to find someone with plenty of experience.)
- Do you work with a contract? (Insist on this!)
- Ask about both the fixed and potential additional costs and payment schedule in advance.
- If your cover design firm will be different than your interior layout firm, be sure they're willing to work together to ensure a cohesively-designed book.
- How many front cover ideas will I receive?
- In what format will my design proofs be delivered? (PDFs are standard.) What if I want to see hard copies?
- Do you provide press-ready files to the specifications of my printer?
- What types of elements are important to you when designing a book's interior? (Good answers should include: typefaces, leading, kerning, margins, widows and orphans, following the cover's branding, and readability. Also avoiding common typing errors such as: using double spaces after sentences, using proper dashes, using curly or smart quotes instead of straight quotes, using proper ellipses.)

- Are you able to convert the print files to ebook files?
- Do you have service providers to recommend or do you provide: Illustration, printing, editing, etc.)
- Who retains the copyright to the design? You should expect to gain copyright and final files. The designer, however, should have full usage of the cover and/or interior images for their promotional use.
- Will I receive a production schedule? Mention any reasons why you might need your front cover design or finished books in-hand by a specific date.
- Will you be available to design promotional materials once the book is finished?

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- A good designer will want to know about your company's goals as well as your book and should ask you questions about both.
- If you and a potential designer don't "click" during your initial conversation, move on. There are plenty of good book design firms out there and at least one is right for you and your project.
- Good book design is not cheap. You should expect to pay \$1,800-\$3,000 or more for a saleable, well-designed cover and the interior is often as much or more, depending upon page count and genre. Skimping here can jeopardize your entire publishing efforts. Doing it right the second time costs time and even more money.
- A good firm will recommend another design firm if their schedule is full or if they feel your book does not fit with their style or capabilities.
- Remember that you're hiring this person/firm not only for artistic talent, but for their industry expertise. Trust their instincts and advice.

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