

What is "Speculative" Work?

We strongly discourage the practice of requesting that design work be produced and submitted on a speculative basis in order to be considered for acceptance on a project.

There are several reasons for this position:

1. To assure the client receives the most appropriate and responsive work. Successful design work results from a collaborative process between a client and the designer, developing a clear sense of the client's objectives, competitive situation and needs. Speculative design competitions or processes result in a superficial assessment of the problem and can only result in a design that is judged on a superficial basis. Design creates value for clients as a result of the strategic approach designers take in addressing the problems or needs of the client and only at the end of that process is a "design" created. Speculative or open competitions for work based on a perfunctory problem statement will not result in the best design solution for the client.

2. Capable and professional designers do not work for free. While there will always be some designers who are willing to create designs in response to an open call for work, without any assurance of compensation, the buyer immediately relegates his or her choices among those designers who are least likely to be experienced. Knowledgeable designers, who are in demand among clients, work according to the professional standards of the profession. Quite often, this choice of a less-experience designer results in a client eventually having to bring a more experienced designer into a project in order to execute it. Of course, this change results in additional expenditures that impact your return on investment in design services.

3. Requesting work for free demonstrates a lack of understanding and respect. Requesting work for free reflects a lack of understanding and respect for the value of effective design as well as the time of the professionals who are asked to provide it. This approach, therefore, reflects on your personal practices and standards and may be harmful to the professional reputation of both you and your business.

There are few professions where all possible candidates are asked to do the work first, allowing the buyer to choose which one to pay. Just consider the response if you were to ask a dozen lawyers to write a brief for you, and you would then choose which one to use and which to pay. Or ask several dentists to work for free until you decide which one you like. We realize that there are some creative professions with a different set of standards, such as advertising and architecture, where billings are substantial and continuous after you select a firm of record. In these cases, you are not receiving the final outcome (the advertising campaign or the building) for free up front as you would be in receiving a communication design solution.

There is an appropriate way to explore the work of various designers.

A more effective and ethical approach to requesting work is to ask designers to submit examples of their work from previous assignments as well as a statement of how they would approach your project. You can then judge the quality of the designer's previous work and way of thinking about your concerns. When you select a designer, he can begin to work on your project by designing strategic solutions to your criteria while under contract to you, without having to work free on speculation up front.

If you would like us to work with you in developing a process that will benefit you most and maintain the high business standards we would expect of you and your firm, please do not hesitate to give me a call. Our goal is to provide you with solutions that will far exceed your expectations with respect for an appropriate budget and schedule. In the end, this approach ensures a more effective, professional and profitable process for everyone involved.



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