



## Art Quest

Written by [Deborah Sexton](#)

### **Tips for choosing and using freelance artists.**

There is no way to place a price on the value of good artwork. Whether you're a custom decorator or specialize in preprinted apparel, your image, perception, and even your reputation, are judged by the quality of the designs you produce.

Decorated apparel companies have an added challenge when looking for an artist: They need to find someone who is familiar with the screen printing and embroidery processes. Without this knowledge, freelancers are likely to create artwork that cannot be reproduced on a shirt, jacket, or cap.

Knowing what questions to ask and how the process works can make finding and using a freelance artist easier. The same principles apply in choosing a freelance artist as they do when hiring any new employee. Find out all you can about the person, his experience, and work; and choose the one who best fits your needs.

### **Getting Started**

Before you make your first contact with a freelance artist, determine as best you can what you want. This helps the process go more smoothly. To give you a price estimate, the artist will want to know as many details as possible about the job. It is helpful to the designer if you can provide examples of the type of artwork you're interested in.

When looking for a freelance artist, Julie Jorgensen, E Palatka, Fla., advises, "Take into consideration whether people can draw. There's so many people graduating from graphic art schools who think they're artists and they don't have a clue." She has been designing T-shirts, book covers, souvenirs, and logos for more than 13 years.

"A lot of times, clients don't know what to look for. They're afraid to come up with something on their own. I tell them to look for something they like such as brochures, business cards, logos, ads in magazines, etc. Then when I get together with them, they've narrowed down the style they're looking for," says Rick Williamson, Rix Design Studio, San Antonio, Texas.



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Once the art style or look is determined, Williamson asks for any other design elements that need to be included such as copy, icons, logos, or other types of graphic elements.

Armed with an understanding of what is wanted, the artist goes to work creating comps or sample sketches to show the client.

"I usually do everything via e-mail so I can organize each step," says Shannon Lucier, Monster Graphics, San Diego, Calif. "The starting point is the reference material. Then I discuss how many comps I'm going to present, and then I lay out a composition. I like to stick to one or two comps, the less, the better."

The client approves a final comp and signs off on it. At this point, Lucier also provides the customer with an adjusted estimated cost if necessary. When the final art is done, she gives the customer a large image and shows it on different color T-shirt bodies. The final artwork and separations are sent via e-mail, burned to CD, or separated and output on films.

How many sketches or ideas are presented by the artist to the client is another issue that should be discussed upfront. Williamson's approach is to do his homework and really spend time with the client and come up with one concept.

"A lot of artists will do 30 rough sketches, but I've found if you work with a client and listen to what he wants, it's easier to incorporate that information into one sample. It narrows it down for the artist so he doesn't go off on too many tangents."

Alice Flynn, Bozeman, Mont., always specifies the number of sketches in her service contract that are included in her price estimate. "I will do up to three sketches before the decision is made to make it final. If there are more sketches required, I specify a dollar amount per hour to generate more sketches."

Julie Jorgansen, E Palatka, Fla., likes to find out the client's ideas and any graphic elements and do a sheet of pencil sketches. "I e-mail those and they pick what they like," she says. "By taking what they like and getting rid of what they don't, we come up with a design."

She renders the final design in colored pencil or acrylics and e-mails it for final approval. Once approved, she outlines the design in pen and ink to make a crisp, reproducible image. "I tell people up to the point of inking that they can make changes. After that, I charge \$50 an hour."

She then provides a hard copy of the original. "They take it to whomever does the separations so the work can be done from the original. There are no second or third generations."

## **Pricing**

At some point in the process between contacting a freelancer and receiving the final artwork, price must be discussed. Every artist has his own way of determining a price. Some charge a straight hourly fee, some charge a flat fee, and others prefer to give a quote on each job individually.

When negotiating with a freelance artist, ask how many sketches or comps they will do for the estimated price. "I will do up to three sketches before the decision is made to make it final. If there are more sketches required, I specify a dollar amount per hour to generate more sketches," says Alice Flynn, Bozeman, Mont.

"I try to work with each client based on his budget," says Jorgensen. "For example, if I am designing shirts for a bar, there might not be a very big budget for the artwork. However, if a large quantity of shirts will be sold over time, I may charge a royalty over the life of the design. This can make up for the lack of money that the bar can afford upfront."

Flynn specializes in designing artwork for apparel preprint lines with wildlife and nature themes. For most of her preprint design work, she charges a flat fee per design. "When I do preprint work, other companies share what they have paid other artists so I have a ballpark figure to work from. Generally, I quote a price per design plus a 5% royalty.

"I have worked on a retainer basis for some companies. One company was just starting up and had no money to hire an art staff. They needed to put together some samples for an upcoming show. I came up with artwork that fit their niche and was paid a monthly retainer fee plus 5% royalty on sales. Within reasonable time constraints, I did as much as they needed each month rather than getting paid by design. On work that sold, I received royalties and on work that didn't sell, they weren't out a whole lot of money."



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One important point to understand when negotiating price is artists have no accurate way to determine exactly how long a project may take. They use their knowledge and past experience to come up with an estimate. Oftentimes, as a project gets underway, situations arise that could not be anticipated. Sometimes this means that the original estimate is off. So keep in mind when you get your first price estimate that it may need to be adjusted.

"Artwork evolves," says Williamson. "I tell people right upfront it's a \$100 an hour, and I give them an estimated time. Sometimes there are a lot of changes involved. I had to change a logo three times once because the customer could not decide what the company's icon should be. If there's going to be changes, the customer has to allow that in his budget."

The best way to keep the cost down is to do as much research as possible before meeting with the artist. The more specific you can be about what you are looking for, the less time the artist has to spend helping you figure that out and produce it.

"My best advice is to come up with your ideas and examples of the type of look you want. Figure out how much you want to spend, and then find a freelance artist to produce it," says Williamson. "The more you handle yourself, the less expensive it will be."

## Copyrights

One of the most important issues to get in writing whenever you use a freelance artist is who owns the rights for what usage. This is a key negotiating point that can dramatically affect the final price of the art.

Copyrights for artwork usage need to be negotiated with every artist. Shannon Lucier, Monster Graphics, San Diego, specializes in T-shirt graphics and only licenses the rights for the artwork to be used on T-shirts. Other usage of her artwork is negotiated separately. This design was done for the Screen Printing & Graphic Imaging Show in St. Louis, which opens October 30.



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"People are not buying original artwork," says Flynn. "They are buying the license to reproduce the art." With help from the Graphic Artist's Guild and a handbook it publishes (see sidebar), Flynn came up with a licensing agreement that she requires all her customers to sign.

"One negotiating point when you're discussing price is the time period of the licensing agreement. It's important to be flexible. For example, if a client needs more designs, he may be willing to drop the time period down to fewer years, which brings down the value of the license."

"I learned from experience to spell everything out in writing," adds Flynn. "Even if it's for a small shop. If someone steals the design, I, as the creator of the work should have something in writing showing what rights were sold to that shop."

Williamson does not get anything in writing, but he is comfortable with his customers using artwork he has created without limitations.

"I tell my clients, this is your stuff. I would never tell them they can't reproduce it. I'm selling my ability. I don't look at it as a product like I would a painting. I only want a sample to put in my portfolio," he says.

Jorgensen's policies are similar. "If I do custom work, the person who pays for it owns it all," she says. "I just ask for permission to use it in my portfolio." However, this does not apply to everything she does. "Things I feel strongly about, I don't give up the rights to. When I do designs that are generic wildlife, I release the rights for the T-shirt printing, but I maintain the rights to everything else. I should have paperwork, but I handle it verbally right now."

Lucier, who specializes in T-shirt graphics, only licenses the rights for the artwork to be used on T-shirts. Other usage of her artwork is negotiated separately. She likes to divide her costs into two parts: the concept/production and the licensing rights. "If the customer wants to use the artwork for a business card, poster, or banner, I negotiate a fee for the additional rights since the execution has already been paid for. Art services are charged only if I need to change the format or make it black and white friendly or something like that."

## **Get It In Writing**

The importance of putting everything in writing cannot be stressed enough. From the service and copyright contracts to ongoing communication as projects evolved, having the information on paper serves as protection against miscommunication, which can result in ill will.

"Everything needs to be negotiated before the artist puts the pencil to paper," says Flynn.

"The first thing I do is send them my service agreement," says Lucier. "They must sign it and give me a PO number. It makes everybody more comfortable. My clients know I'm not going to be discussing their designs or cutting-edge ideas with anyone else."

"It also specifies shipping. I deliver Fed Ex on the client's shipping account. If the customer doesn't specify that he wants it shipped another way, that's my standard." Her agreement also covers topics like providing samples of the finished product, revisions, and turnaround. "This way everybody knows what's going on," she says.

"Keep all of your e-mails," recommends Jorgensen. "Communication is key. If something gets miscommunicated, things get out of hand really fast."

## **Choosing An Artist**

There are many factors that go into choosing which artist you want to use for your business.

Flynn, who was once an art director for a major preprinter, says, "When I was hiring an artist, I would always look for someone who had a degree in art. Then I knew I wouldn't have to explain myself and define terms they should have learned in school. Plus, when people have put in the time and effort to get an education, you know they were serious about it.

You have to look at a portfolio. Everyone has their portfolios online, which makes it easy and quick," Flynn continues. "One thing I looked for in someone's portfolio was whether or not they had personal work they had created from their own life's experiences or if everything was just a school assignment. Someone who is more mature and who has had wider life experiences will have more interesting and original approaches and ideas."

Another point Flynn makes when choosing an artist is identifying the difference between an artist who knows how to draw and someone who is proficient in graphics and/or separation software. "Some people can take artwork and create separations, but they're not able to create anything original from scratch. Having the ability to draw and not just use the computer is really important. Make sure the artist has had training in drawing and is proficient at it," she advises.

"Take into consideration whether people can draw," agrees Jorgensen. "The computer is a tool. For me, it's easier to draw a triangle than to do it on a computer. There's so many people graduating from graphic art schools who think they're artists and they don't have a clue."

Williamson offers this advice on finding an artist: Word of mouth is the best promotion. If someone's work is good enough for someone else to talk about, that's the kind of artist you want to go after."

## **Resources for Artists & Art Buyers**

### **The Graphic Artist's Guild**

90 John St. Suite 403  
New York, NY 10038-3202  
(212) 791-3400  
(800) 500-2672  
Fax (212) 791-0333  
[www.GAG.org](http://www.GAG.org)

This association for graphic artists offers information on pricing, standards, ethics, copyright and legal information, job referrals, and much more. It can help educate art buyers about the process of purchasing artwork and industry policies and practices. For the artist, it is an invaluable source of info on how to run a profitable business. The Web site offers a job bulletin board where potential employers can post positions for free. Contact Jobline News at [jobline@gag.org](mailto:jobline@gag.org) for more info.

"I joined the Guild last year when I purchased a page in its directory," says Alice Flynn, a freelance artist located in Bozeman, Mont. "I have found the people of the Guild to be generous in sharing information. They provide tremendous support for free to help educate people. It is the number one source for artists and art buyers."

### **Graphic Artists Guild Handbook**

#### **Pricing & Ethical Guidelines**

This is considered the ultimate reference book for design and illustration professionals. It includes the latest pricing information based on current industry surveys and a complete guide to professional ethics and business standards. It also includes explanations about copyrights and legal issues. For the art buyer, it will give you an idea of the range of fees that are paid in different parts of the country for everything from hard cover book art to artwork for gift items for regional, national, and international distribution. For decorators looking to hire an artist, it also includes salaries for various positions such as staff artist or art director in companies ranging from a small graphic design studio to corporate ad agencies.

### **The Business Side Of Creativity:**

#### **The Complete Guide for Running a Graphic Design or Communications Business, By Cameron Foot**

This book is a business companion for those just starting out or expanding in the design field. It furnishes freelance graphic designers, art directors, illustrators, copywriters, and design-shop principals with

the tools needed to move ahead in the design business. From getting launched to running a multiperson shop to retiring comfortably, this book covers it all and includes sample business forms

## **Interview With A Freelancer**

When you are choosing a freelance artist, it is similar to interviewing anyone you would consider to hire in your company. You want to see a portfolio and talk about her experience. Here's a checklist of questions to ask.

- \* How many years of experience do you have?
- \* What is your background?
- \* What art styles do you specialize in?
- \* Do you have any references?
- \* What is your turnaround?
- \* How many comps or sketches to you normally do?
- \* What media do you work in? (Pen and ink, computer, colored pencils, etc.)
- \* In what formats can you deliver the finished artwork? Can you supply a computer disk?
- \* Do you ever make changes to artwork without the customer's approval?
- \* What licensing rights are you willing to sell?
- \* Do you do separations?
- \* What is your policy on making changes?
- \* What is your policy on project cancellation?
- \* How do you deliver final designs?
- \* Do you offer any discounts in exchange for being given regular work?
- \* What are your payment policies? COD, net 30, etc.?

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