



How to work with an illustrator

Ready to start your project? Here are four steps to help keep your illustration project on track and running smoothly. Whether you have your own illustrator or WWD helps you find one you should be thinking about all of these things to get the most out of the process.

1. Choose your illustrator

You should have seen the illustrators work before you hired him, so you know what style and level of detail to expect. You couldn't expect Rembrandt to paint like Van Gogh, so make sure you're comfortable with the illustrator's portfolio. It's the best indicator of what you'll get on your own project. Interview him and talk about your project. Make sure that you discuss work schedule. Some processes take longer than others and you need to keep deadlines in mind.

2. Read the fine print

If the illustrator supplies you with a contract, make sure you read it so you know exactly what it includes and doesn't include. This is the best way to avoid surprises at the end of a project. Don't forget to ask who owns the copyright of the work when it's done. Some illustrators and photographers retain the copyright on their work and you just license the use of the work for your particular project.

3. Define your expectations

Illustrators should know their job and what constitutes the standards of their industry. They want you to be happy with the work they did for you and will typically be accommodating of changes, particularly if those happen early on in their process. As a customer, keep in mind that the more information you give them, the better they can create a graphic that meets the need. In particular, let them know:

- Physical dimensions of finished art and how it will be printed. In the case of digital raster artwork (as opposed to a vector graphic, which can typically print well at any size) they need to know these particulars so that they can match the pixel dimensions and density (reso-

lution) to the printer. Otherwise, you could get a pixelated graphic, and that's not good at all.

- Color accuracy (may be critical, or not so much). It depends on your subject matter and how finicky you are. If you expect a perfect color match, be prepared to wait –and pay – for match prints. The illustrator may choose to charge more if a match is critical. Sometimes a perfect match between your corporate color and process printing is impossible...but it should be close.

Have an idea what things should cost. Get a few estimates to compare. Discuss with your illustrator any budget constraints or concerns that you have. Your artist may have some alternatives to the initial approach that could save time in execution but still deliver the impact you want. You should also consider your time line. Some things take more time, so get time estimates along with cost estimates.

4. Pull everything together

Do you have any photo references? Is there any particular aspect of the image you need to focus on? What is the mood you're trying to evoke and what is the context the image will be presented in? Are there professional, commercial or social-sensitive issues that need to be addressed or avoided? Make sure that any files you provide to the illustrator are in a format that he can easily use. Consider in advance what other information will help the illustrator with this project, such as information about your company, other materials you like or don't like, resources from your competition, etc.

Basically what it comes down to is this – the more prepared you are for your project, the smoother it usually goes.

Karin Wilson owns Wild Woman Design, LLC, a graphic design firm. She can be reached via her Web site, www.wildwomandesign.com, where you can also sign up for her monthly "Graphically Speaking" column – full of tips to help make your graphic design a success. Copyright 2010 Wild Woman Design.