

Ethical Best Practices for Design Competitions / Contests

RGD

DESIGNERS
SUPPORTING
DESIGNERS

Community engagement, saving money, raising awareness. These are just a few of the reasons organizations and companies give for organizing design competitions. But there are many more reasons why holding competitions that ask the public to create graphics for your organization are not in your best interest.

1. They don't save money.

Getting the message out for a design competition is incredibly time-consuming and people are already distracted with multiple messages begging for their attention. You may find that the community is not interested in spending their limited free time creating something original, especially if their work will likely never see the light of day. Most of your entries will be of amateur quality and will require a professional designer to ensure the winning design can be effectively applied across a range of print and digital media.

2. The public doesn't have design experience.

Community engagement is extremely valuable and, with social media, there are amazing opportunities to reach out to target audiences and involve them in the design process. Some people like to draw, sure, but others write, take photos or make movies. Asking the public to participate in such a limited, specific way is exclusionary, not to mention insulting to professional designers, who are trained at the very task competitions ask the public to undertake.

3. Designers have a process that works.

Most graphic designs aim to raise awareness, whether it's the logo for a town, a graphic on a t-shirt or a mascot for a local sports team. Professional designers are trained with specific skills to ensure their creations not only generate awareness but are also remembered and offer, in the case of a logo, instant recognition for the organization, place or business the logo represents. They are trained to engage their client throughout the design process and develop a full understanding of the organization, place or business they are working with.

The Association of Registered Graphic Designers (RGD) offers three alternatives to the traditional and exploitative "design competition" model that save money, offer opportunities for community engagement and ensure a design that is memorable, recognizable and sellable.



Ethical Options for your Consideration

OPTION 1 – Public Feedback “Express your Feelings about X”

Create a standard brief or a series of questions that an organization could give to a designer to coordinate this sort of “competition” (this could even be done by an in-house designer).

Based on consultation with a designer, your organization could invite the public to express their feelings about the organization, city, team, etc. publicly on social media (or through direct submissions) using whatever media they prefer. It might be original drawings, photography, video, writing.

This material would then be provided to your designer who would develop a story and ultimately graphic expression from the material provided. Credit would be provided to all those individuals whose work contributed to the final result.

Alternatively, have the designer create 2-3 options which the public would then vote on.

OPTION 2 – Standard RFI/RFP Process with public voting

Invite professional designers to submit existing examples of their work for consideration.

Make it clear from the outset what the ultimate compensation for the selected designer will be and what will be required.

Select 2-3 designers who would create something for a modest compensation that would then be presented to the general public for voting (designer would receive recognition in this stage of the process).

Selected designer would receive additional compensation for rolling out deliverables for the final result.

OPTION 3 – Participate in a Designathon / Education Curriculum (Only acceptable for non-profit clients)

Designathons are organized by RGD and involve students collaborating in creative teams for non-profits. You can also contact your local college or university about incorporating your project into their curriculum.

www.rgd.ca/for-students/designathon