

Objectives

The Rules of Professional Conduct, a bylaw of the Association of Registered Graphic Designers (RGD), prohibits its members from engaging in speculative (spec) work.

What is spec work?

Doing work on spec amounts to providing design work for free (or for a nominal fee) as part of a pitch for new business. Some people mistakenly believe that requiring spec work as part of their search and selection process for a graphic designer or design firm is a good business practice. However, spec work is universally condemned by responsible designers and design organizations around the world as being an unethical business practice – see www.no-spec.com.

Why is spec work harmful?

Spec work:

- is exploitative and unethical, a demand for free design work without guarantee of compensation,
- offers no future economic potential,
- can lead to infringement of intellectual property rights (copyright and moral rights),
- devalues the profession of graphic design and leads to negative competitive practices,
- is also discouraged by allied professions such as the advertising industry, and
- is unlikely to meet a client's marketing and communication objectives.

Spec work threatens the integrity and work ethic of the graphic design profession. Neither the designer nor the client benefit from spec work. Because they have no guarantee of remuneration, designers who work on spec cannot do justice to the design brief and are unlikely to engage in the normal full design process and conduct the research and analysis needed to produce their best work. Because spec work often means that there is no provision of or opportunity for a client briefing, the designers' abilities to act as professional consultants, partners or members of the client's strategic communications team are not used.

Recommended guidelines for selecting a graphic designer or design firms

- Develop and advertise* a Request for Proposal (RFP) to include information about the project background, your objectives, the scope of the work, time requirements, and proposal mandates. The respondents should be asked to provide information about the design process and tasks, the deliverables, the designated team members, timing and budget details, examples of similar or relevant work or experience, and client references.
- If you are certain you require a presentation of creative ideas in order to make your selection from one or more graphic designer or design firm, we recommend that you pay a fee to each competitor. The amount paid should be equivalent to what a reasonable design fee and expenses would be for a similar project under normal circumstances. Such payments do not entitle you as potential client to the right to use any of the creative ideas presented unless separate agreements are reached.
- If such payments cannot be justified for your project, or if you do not wish to go through an FRP process, then choose a graphic designer or design firm by obtaining referrals, reviewing portfolios and checking client references.
- The selection guidelines apply to both for-profit and non-profit business entities, and for both paid and pro bono projects.

* (RGD is pleased to post your RFP on the association's website free of charge.)

Let us help you

RGD can offer you assistance with your search for a graphic designer or design firm – please visit www.rgd.ca/hireADesigner. We can help you develop a search process or RFP that is spec-free. Please contact info@rgd.ca.

“ Thanks for your reply and concerns. I agree with your points. I have just fired an email off to our Director of Marketing with a few suggestions on how to rectify this.” – 2010 Legacies Now