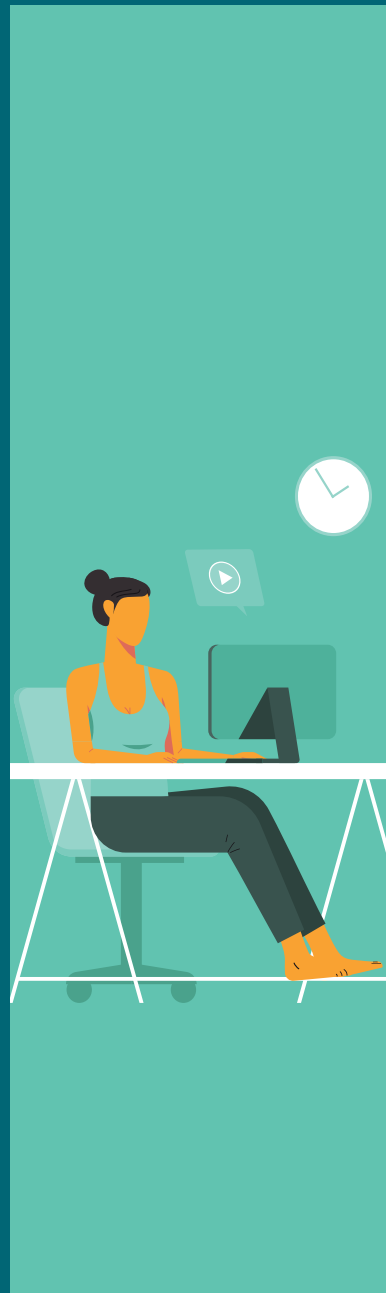
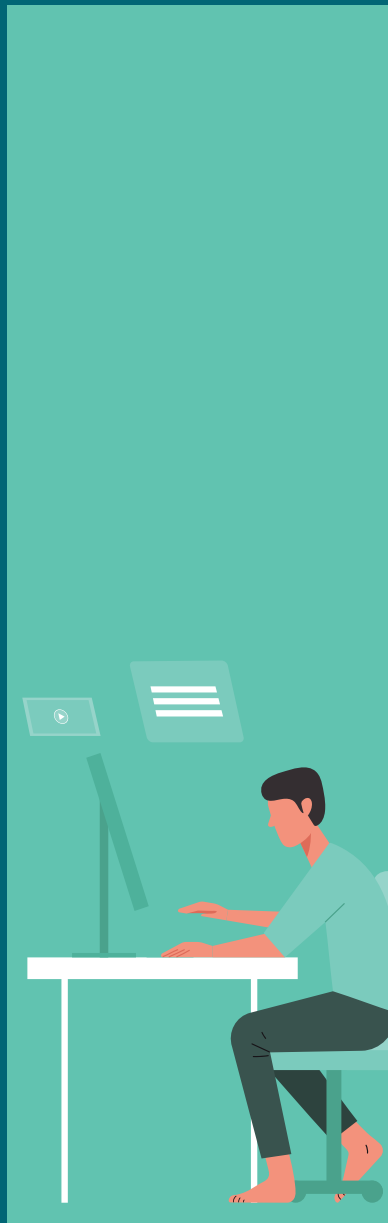
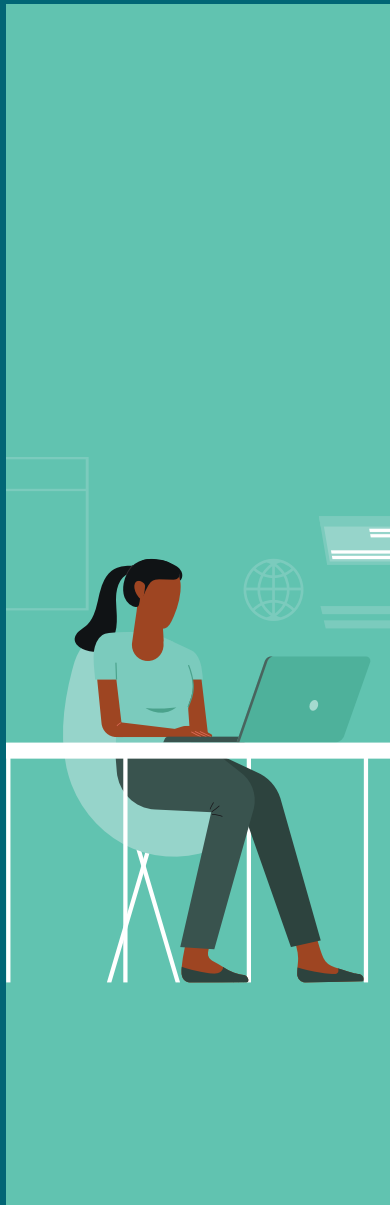


How to choose the right designer for you?

KEY QUESTIONS EVERY BUSINESS SHOULD ASK?



How to choose the right designer for you?

The first thing I recommend anyone looking for a graphic designer to ask is “what do you want?” Sounds obvious, I know. But are you just looking for someone who can create a one-off item or are you looking to form a working partnership/relationship with a regular supplier?

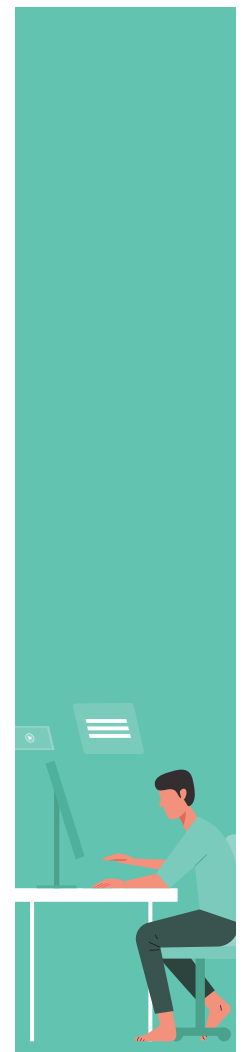
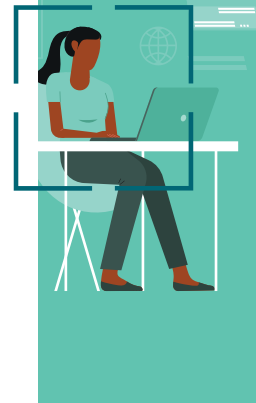
If the former, then there are plenty of really cheap options (as long as you don't want to think too much about the ethical implications of paying people in developing countries a tiny fee for them to create work for you!)

If the one-off approach is something you want to pursue take a look at Fivrr, People-per-hour, or the host of other similar options which you'll find with a quick Google search.

However, if you are looking for more of a long term relationship, with a trusted partner, then there are important questions that need to be asked.

1. What do you want the relationship to look like?
2. What is the designer's attitude and approach to their role?
3. Do you like the work they produce?
4. Does their work deliver results?
5. Do you like them as people?

Let's unpack those questions a little further...





What do you want the relationship to look like?

Graphic design is now the term we use to cover a raft of disciplines and services. We used to have different terms for some of those roles that seem to have waned from general use - commercial artist, artworker, concept designer, visualiser, creative designer to name a few.

If you want someone to simply create your own vision and 'do as they are told' then you need to find someone willing to work in that way! But note, not many designers are willing to simply execute instructions these days. Most have many years of training and experience and wish to help their clients navigate the complexities of creating effective communications designs.

At the other end of the spectrum, if you want someone who will help drive your communications strategy and who will act as an adviser and consultant then that is a very different set of skills needed. It requires an open and transparent working relationship. To really deliver impact for you your designer needs you to be painfully honest and open about your business. Not every client is happy to do that, so it's worth asking yourself if you can and if you want to be that transparent? This type of working relationship can be very effective but you'll need to trust your designer and have confidence that you are happy to build a long-term relationship of openness and trust. I'd suggest investigating if they have a history of this type of working partnership first, and then spending some quality time forming a strong partnership of mutual respect.

Your designer is not a mind reader. To truly make an impact for your business they need to understand your business intimately. To know the issues you face, how you like to work, how you compare with your competition and various other details about your business.

Linked to this openness of relationship and sharing information I would suggest is the designer's perspective on their role.

After all the statistics and calculations are formulated, the one element that breathes life into marketing is good design.

Steve Jobs, Founder and CEO of Apple



2

What is the designer's attitude and approach to their role?

There are three common schools of thought that you'll historically encounter from designers.

If you think good design is expensive, you should look at the cost of bad design.

Ralf Speth, CEO of Jaguar Land Rover

- i** **The artist-designer** - these typically have a 'style'. Their work often looks a certain way and they are hired to deliver that style for work for their clients.

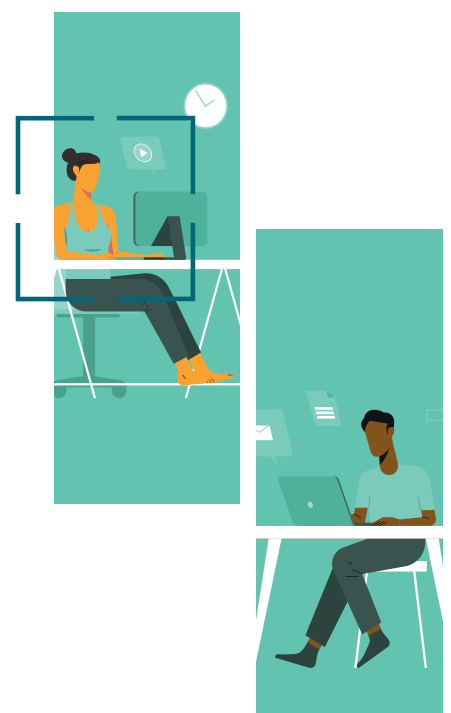
These designers will do what they do regardless. Their creative vision is paramount to them. They view what they do as 'their art' - imposing their view onto the project in hand. Thankfully, from my perspective, the artist-designers are few-and-far-between.

- ii** The second group I call the '**decorators**'. (Sorry, I know that might offend some! It's just a quick shorthand term I find helpful for quick reference). The 'decorators' are the designers who are primarily concerned with making things look pretty. Creating visual impact is obviously the prime reason you work with a designer - but this type of designer, at their worst, deliver style over content.

In my book, attractiveness and effectiveness are not the same.

From my observations, these designers are also dying out. They are generally more the 'fast turn around' designers. Which is logical as the time frames they are working to don't really allow for a more rigorous, in-depth, or considered approach.

Thankfully, the business world has generally realised that user experience, customer journeys and evocative communications, all of which drive the customer to take action, are intrinsic elements to a good communications strategy. And are therefore key elements to any effective business model. Exterior polish is never enough for effective communication, the varnish quickly wears thin and the lack of depth becomes painfully evident.





The third school of thought is where I'd place my own firm and is indeed where most modern graphic designers tend to exist.

Such designers primarily see their role as **problem solvers**, delivering the most effective design solutions possible (within the scope and limits of the brief). But there is still a vast variation within this group.

It's worth saying here that I'd also advise anyone looking for a designer to apply the mathematical and scientific mantra - 'Correlation does not imply causation'. What do I mean by that? Well, any one of the different stated design approaches may deliver some results for you. If your designers are even half-decent at their jobs then someone somewhere will likely be attracted to the work they create - and you may well see some upturn in both enquiries and sales.

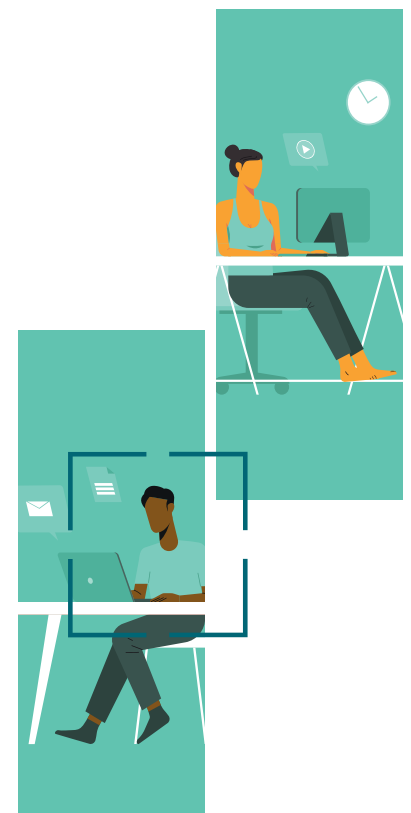
But the more fundamental question is whether there is a consistent 'cause and effect' relationship when you really examine the data? (Assuming you have reliable data - but that's a very different question and too complex for me to enter into here).

Good design begins with honesty, asks tough questions, comes from collaboration and from trusting your intuition.

Freeman Thomas, Automotive designer

Design is as much a matter of finding problems as it is solving them.

Bryan Lawson,
Architect and Psychologist





Do you like the work they produce?

By this I mean more than mere aesthetics. Is it the best, most effective design? Is it delivering the correct impact and connecting with your desired target customer profile?

Is it repeatable? Anyone can get lucky once, but has your designer repeatedly and consistently delivered results for several clients? Does their methodology create work that drives their clients business forward?

Let's not forget that you are looking for a designer, so it is obviously important that you like their work. But be careful not to be duped by style over content.

Don't just look at a portfolio hoping that something there will be appealing to your own visual sensibilities. It's better to be a critical viewer.

Remember, it's not about what you like ... it's about what works.

Does the design answer the brief?

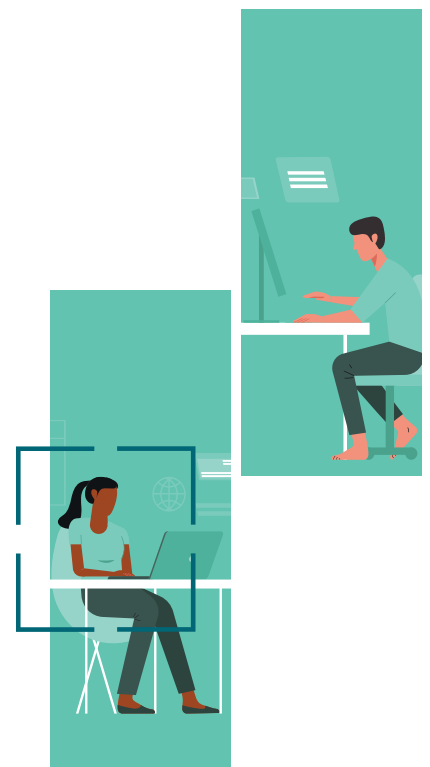
Is there even info available about the brief?

**Good design can't fix
broken business models.**

Jeffrey Veen, author of
The Art and Science of Web Design

**Design is not just what it
looks like and feels like.
Design is how it works.**

Steve Jobs, Founder and CEO of Apple



4

Is there evidence of the impact resulting from their design work?

Good design is good business.

Thomas J. Watson
Chairman and CEO of IBM

Have an open mind. You might not personally like a particular design yourself - but if it connected with the target audience and drove the business forward for the client then it met the specific brief, and the objective. If the designers work does that consistently over a sustained period of time - then I'd argue and you are likely looking at a designer who could deliver similar results for you.

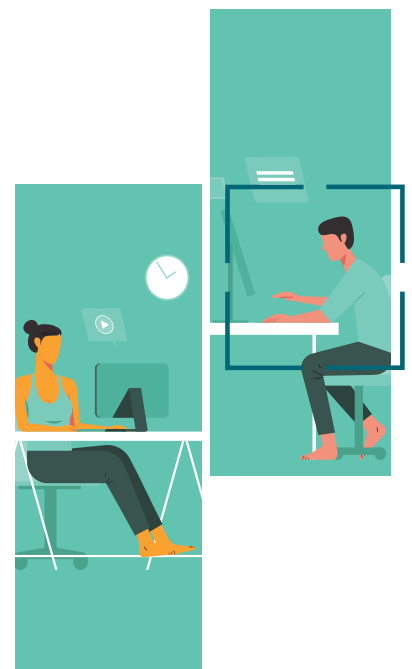
As important as liking (or recognising the value of) the work itself, there is also a related consideration of liking 'how they work'. Are their client testimonials available? Do those testimonials give you insight into not only the effectiveness and outcomes of the project and also an idea of the working relationships?

At my own firm, S2 Design and Advertising Ltd, we are advocates of developing collaborative relationships, throughout our teams, and with our clients. We like our clients to view us as an extension of their team - to view us as their design partners. The fact we have some client relationships dating back well over 20 years, is something we are very proud of, and is a strong testament.

This leads me to my final question...

Design must reflect the practical and aesthetic in business but above all... good design must primarily serve people.

Thomas J. Watson
Chairman and CEO of IBM





Perhaps believing in good design is like believing in God, it makes you an optimist.

Terence Conran, founder of Habitat

Do you like them as people?

If you are going to enter into a long-term, collaborative relationship, it's probably a good idea to like who you are working with. It's not essential, I'll grant you that. I've seen some fantastic partnerships of very different people, who definitely do not naturally fit together, but they tend to be short-lived teams. Tensions will out... eventually.

Anyone running a business will have heard the well-worn trope that 'people do business with people' and you may even have heard the full quote that 'people do business with people they know, like and trust'.

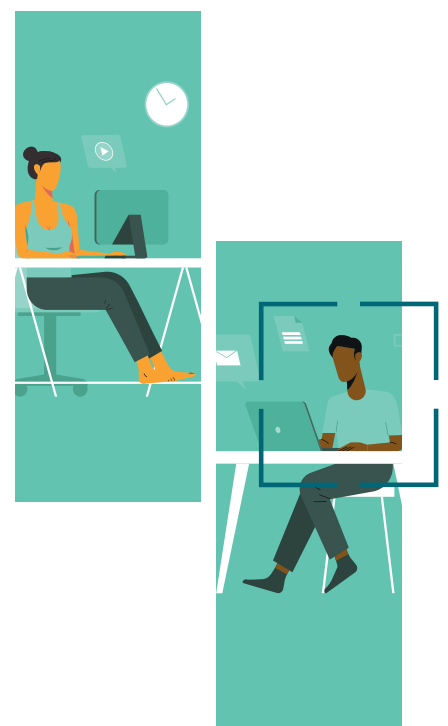
A good brand designer is looking to build those 'know, like and trust' elements, for your business, into all your communication material. If you can't build a strong sense of 'know, like and trust' between you as people then, I'd suggest, it's probably not the best idea to ignore the significance of that sign.

Good brand design is all about connecting to and building 'a tribe' - finding a designer that fits (or, at the very least, understands) your tribe is a good place to start.

Choosing a designer to work with can be a difficult decision. I hope this brief guide helps you think through some of the questions that are worth thinking through.

A graphic designer is a machine that turns coffee into beautiful, functional imagery.

Brand strategist Lisa Manson



About the author

This paper was written by Andy Stonehouse, founding partner and Creative Director at S2 Design and Advertising Ltd. A Graphic Designer and Brand Designer with over 30 years of experience in this field.

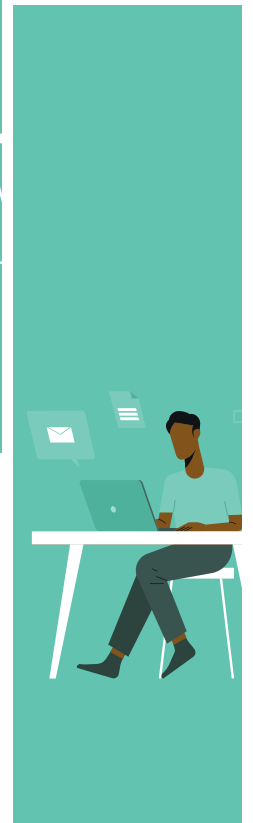
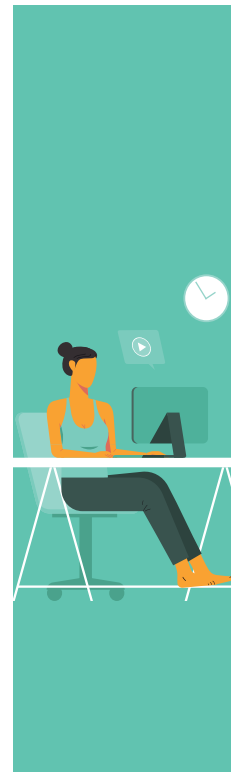
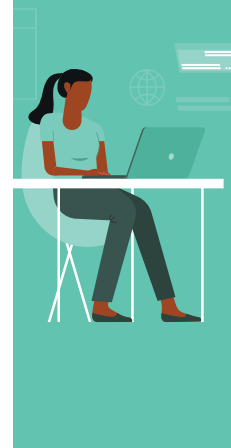
Andy started his career in the late 80's, working as a freelance designer in the midlands. He is that rare find of an 'old school' designer who has embraced new technology and who is still working hands-on in the industry crafting creative communications.

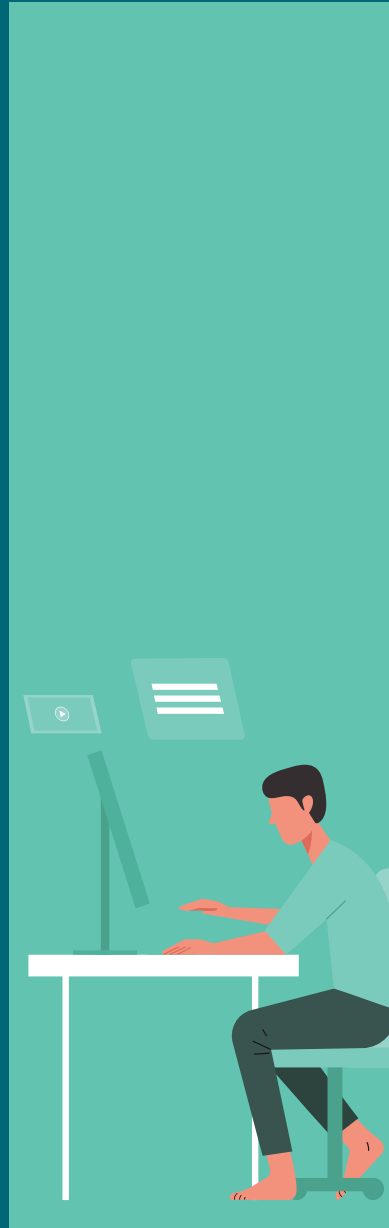
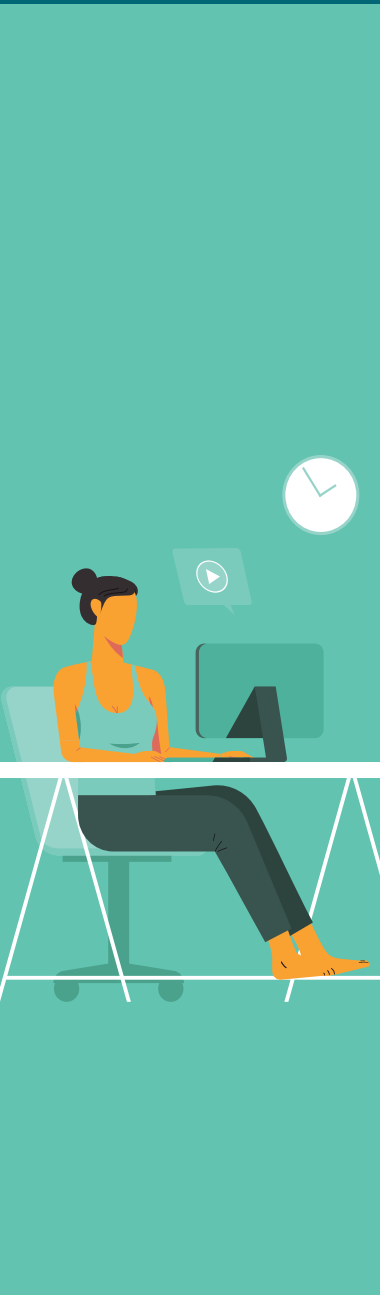
His career has been spilt between the charity and not-for-profit sector, and the design agency world. Andy is fascinated by the reasons behind our actions, the motivators that drive our responses to any given design. Why a certain turn of phrase can motivate people to take action, how a particular colour can make us feel and even create a physiological response.

For Andy, psychology is a key weapon in the designers' arsenal. He has developed a formula that marries market-research and data insights, design methodology and theories from psychology, to create more impactful communications materials. Design and data combined to deliver results!

Andy now specialises in brand identity and positioning as that's where good design can have the biggest impact.

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