17 Questions

You Must Ask During a Design Consultation

Be the expert, not another order taker.

Each client has a unique project, budget and goals, so it's important to find out *why* they need help—not just *what* they need help with. Asking these questions will position you as an expert, not an order taker, because it takes the focus from the *goods* (i.e., a logo or brochure) to *results* and what they're *really* looking for (i.e., to look modern and professional, so they stand out from competitors and get more sales). It will also help you understand better who you are designing for and add to the value of what you deliver.

If it's a new prospect, start with finding out more about who they are and what they offer.

Client Background

- ☐ What does your business or organization do? What services or products do you offer?

- ☐ What is the greatest challenge in your position? (i.e., Are there more competitors in this space now? Is fundraising difficult?)

- ☐ Who are the main contact and decision maker(s) for this project?

- ☐ Have you worked with a graphic designer before? If yes, how was your experience?

Asking these questions to new prospects demonstrates your interest in learning about them and helping them. It also could lead you to suggest ways to achieve their goals beyond this particular project—now or in the future.

It's important to find out if you're talking to the decision maker. Dealing with the decision maker whenever possible makes it more likely you'll get the work. Otherwise, you rely on someone else to convey your passion and your expertise.

Project Goals

☐ What are the main goals for this project? What are you hoping to achieve? (i.e., to look more professional, to get an increase in sales, to make people aware of a product or service, etc.)

☐ Why are you looking for your help with your project at this particular time?

☐ How will the work be used/distributed (e-mailed, printed, printed on demand, mailed, etc.)?

Understanding the goals and how the work will be used often allows you to create a better solution than the client is requesting—positioning you as an expert, not an order taker.

The answer to the second question may reveal underlying needs.

Understanding how the work will be used or distributed leads to other considerations, such as: for something being e-mailed, smaller file size will be important; for something being printed on demand, there are usually set pages sizes and specific parameters set by companies such as Lulu; for digital printing, there will be limitations to the paper size.

Target Audience

☐ Who is your ideal customer, client, member, etc.? How old are they? What gender are they? What is their job title? What is their education level?, etc.

☐ What motivates them to make a decision? What prevents them from taking action?

☐ Are there any cultural sensitivities to consider?

You must understand their audience, so that you can design an effective solution. The design is not about your or the client's personal preferences, taste or style. All design decisions should be objective, keeping this information in mind.

Design and Strategy

Brand

☐ How do you want people to feel when they interact with your brand? (i.e., safe and secure, edgy and excited, exclusive and cool, etc.)

☐ Do you have a brand/identity guide? Are there existing materials this needs to have a cohesive look with?

The answers to these questions will be the basis for all design decisions you make.

Competition

☐ What is your unique selling proposition? Why should someone choose your organization/company's product or service over your competition?

☐ Who are your competitors or other businesses or organizations in this space?

☐ What are they doing that you think is working?

The answers to these questions will help you better understand how to help your client and ensure you don't create anything in the likeness of the competition.

Timeframe

☐ When are you looking to have the work completed?

A tight timeframe may be grounds for a rush fee or the work may not be doable at all, in which case, you need to let them know what's reasonable.

Budget

☐ What budget have you allocated for this? If no particular budget, what is your expectation of cost? $500, $5,000 or $50,000?

It's important to discuss money up front, so that you appear professional and you can assess whether or not you want to spend time providing an estimate or proposal.

Their answer to this question can serve as a guide as to whether or not you can do the job and be profitable. If not, let them know what it typically costs (a range is fine) and ask how that sounds.

If it's just not doable, you may suggest reducing the scope to reduce the cost to what might be doable. But never reduce the fee without reducing the scope.

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