

THE DESIGNERS' ADVISOR

POLLY WILLIAMS, FOUNDER, CAMBERYARD, TALKS ABOUT
THE EVER-RELEVANT SUBJECT, **FEES AND PROPOSALS**



Fees, and the negotiations surrounding them, are a recurring theme with my interior design clients.

With differing methods, from fixed fees to daily or hourly rates, as well as varying expectations between client and designer, it can be a tricky conversation for both parties.

Working out your fee proposal is as much about psychology as about how you will charge.

HOW DO I KNOW HOW MUCH TO CHARGE?

Recognise your value and price your services accordingly. You are a talented designer with specialist skills. Your services are unique, and your prices should reflect this.

To work out what to charge, start with what you need your annual profit to be, then take into account overheads. You can then pro-rata to get a desired monthly projected net-income. You'll need to account for factors like working for yourself with no employees or office rent. If you are running a studio, your fees will reflect the higher outgoings.

Then there's the personal element; ask yourself what the project is worth to you, personally and professionally. You may be pitching for a dream project that could offer opportunities down the line, so you may decide to adjust your fee accordingly.

All of these factors give you a baseline fee from which to then create your proposal.

HOW DO I WORK OUT A FEE PROPOSAL?

Communicating the fee can be one of the hardest, but also one of the most empowering parts of the process. Before you start: stop, breathe, contemplate and slow the process down. Do not be a designer who rushes in with a quote without pausing to think through what the project entails as well as how you will deliver it.

Lay the groundwork before discussing money: build relationships, take time to properly understand the brief and scope, establish client budgets and run your own financial analysis. This preparation allows you to determine the right level of fees in proportion to the project's scale and amount of work required. It also helps establish fees that are at the right level for the sort of design you'll be offering. Crucially, it allows you to go into it confident you have created a proposal that meets both your and your client's needs.

SHOULD I NEGOTIATE?

My advice is always avoid reducing your design fee after you have sent in your fee proposal. Use other methods to negotiate, like implementing a strict timeframe or a payment schedule to improve cash flow. Try, where possible, to discuss fees in person and on neutral ground, your client is buying into you and your skills, communicating via e-mail can weaken your position.

I'M CONFIDENT WITH THE FEES I CHARGE, BUT HOW DO I AVOID TIME SLIPPAGE

AND CLIENT UNPREDICTABILITY?

As The Designers' Advisor, I am in a unique and privileged position to see how my clients are charging. It never fails to surprise me that some designers are not actually making money once they look at the fees versus time slippage and client unpredictability. Managing your business to ensure you are in profit requires time, understanding, dedication, and, quite often, advice from third parties.

You can start by putting in place some sort of time allowance. It might be setting a fixed number of client-driven brief changes or getting responses within a specific timeframe, whatever parameters fit the project. If this time allowance is breached, it then gives you an opportunity to raise it as an issue and take appropriate action.

If you are running a studio and employing staff, assess your team to ensure they are working efficiently and to their skill set. Keep a timesheet, for yourself and for your staff. I urge clients to remember that busy does not always equal time efficient and this can be apt for both staff and business owners alike!

Time management doesn't have to be a bore. Working reflection and proper planning into your schedule can give you an opportunity to be mindful, to stop and think clearly about how your previous week has gone and consider what you have coming up over the next week.

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