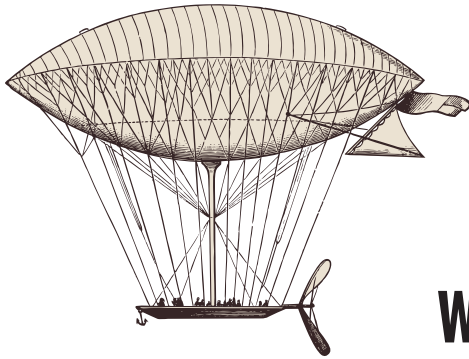# ATTACK OF THE 7 DESIGN ZEPPELINS

The top seven areas retailers will find inflated costs for design procedures that, in all honesty, didn't really take that long.

Oh...and how to avoid them.

WE KNOW YOU'RE ALWAYS LOOKING TO PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE IT WILL DO THE MOST WORK, AND YOU ARE NEVER HAPPY TO SEE A BILL THAT'S FLYING HIGHER THAN YOU PREDICTED.

That's why we've compiled this insider's guide to the seven areas where you can shave and save on some of the most common surprises and deflate that bill before it soars out of control.

Here are the top seven areas we see causing inflation, day in and day out. Take the steps listed in this guide and you should see your way clear through each of these areas with ease.

DESIGNING FOR THE DESIGNER'S SAKE. NOT YOURS.

Some designers or design firms are more interested in developing a portfolio piece than actually solving the problems/needs/goals of the retailers. It looks nice, but it's not what you asked for.

YOUR MOVE: MAKE A GROCERY LIST.

Many design firms will punish you for making changes by charging extra, even when the work they've created isn't what you've asked for. Make sure you protect yourself up front, by printing a checklist of what the design must accomplish before you'll pay for it. And make "looking great" just ONE of the items on that list (designers sometimes think this is the ONLY item). Make sure the list includes things you think would be common sense, like appropriate colors, usability, and legal issues. When the list is a checklist of goals rather than just a blank check for beauty, the designers will stay on track and have something solid to measure their efforts against. This helps ensure you don't see anything until it makes sense, and everyone will be happier. If the design doesn't make sense, you have a checklist that allows you to point to objective areas where the design fails and reasons why you should not be charged for changes.

THERE IS A BIGGER FISH ON THE LINE.

Sometimes you feel like you are competing for your designer's or design firm's attention. He or she might even be putting you on the back burner for one of your competitors.

YOUR MOVE: ASSIGNAH DESIGNAH.

Have the design firm assign a designer to you. Make sure that designer is someone you approve and can work with. If you are a fan of a certain designer or firm and don't mind waiting, simply be clear with the firm what your deadlines are and ask them to be honest about when they can devote the most time to your project to get the best work from them. Sometimes it's better to wait to get 100% of their time, rather than rush the project and get their "after work" ideas.

BILLABLE HOURS. A BILLAGIBLE DIRIGIBLE.

Billable hours often feel like the most fair way to pay for project work. In reality, however, the billable hour pool can be one big foggy body of water. Without a doubt, it's often the leading birthplace for some of the scariest cost zeppelins.

YOUR MOVE: WRITE A BILLABIBLE.

If you decide to take the billable hours route, make sure you sit down beforehand and determine exactly what counts as a billable hour. Is a three-minute phone call a "billable hour"? You may be surprised. Many firms determine that for every departmental function there is a percentage of administration time that multiplies the time automatically. Make sure your estimate is broken out into where the hours are going, so you can determine if the estimate is realistic. Designers often underestimate the amount of time something will take, and you pay the price for their miscalculation. Make sure you are given updated progress reports as to how many hours you have left, and determine up front how many times you will receive these reports. Finally, determine up front what happens when you go over the estimated hours. Do rates increase? These steps will help you avoid the feeling that you have no idea how much designs will cost you until you get the bill.

X FILES: YOU WANT TO BELIEVE.

Production files are necessary for any project. Designers and design firms often add the time to create production files to their quotes, but do not itemize it, so as not to call attention to it. Even when the client knows about the charges, they may not realize the files have to be reconfigured by the manufacturers, at additional cost, for their machinery.

YOUR MOVE: STOP SEEING DOUBLE.

Ask the designers to send the design files to the manufacturer in a workable format, and ask the manufacturer to itemize the setup time on their invoice. It allows you to better understand what you are getting for your money.

Better yet, utilize a vendor that can handle both the design and manufacturing to eliminate double charging.

KNOCK KNOCK: THE SILENT TREATMENT.

How quickly are designers getting back to you when you need to make a change? If you are waiting around for days on minor changes to colors or font, you're waiting too long. It obviously depends on the scope of the change, but you should hear back from the designers immediately with a confirmation and a timeline of when they can expect changes to be complete and resubmitted.

YOUR MOVE: MAKE AN APPOINTMENT.

Set expectations for response time up front. It's common for busy, in-demand creatives and designers to assume "someone else" within the firm is talking to you, especially if you are in contact with several people regarding the same project. Request that a single production manager or representative be appointed to your project who can act as a gatekeeper and creative translator for your requests to at least keep you posted on where things stand.

If you're working with several designers on a project, consider using software like Basecamp or yammer to keep up with progress and facilitate communication between contributors.

OVERCHARGING

Are you working with a designer or a professional athlete? When you see the bill, you might think the latter. Retailers are often heard saying, "these design firms charge more per hour than our legal council."

YOUR MOVE: GO SHOPPING.

Finding the right balance of design value vs. design cost can be complicated, and its often only achieved through trial and error.

There is a definite element of "you get what you pay for," but if you're not a "top" client at that "top" design firm you love, it's possible that the creative crew assigned to your account are not the rock stars you signed up for. Often, it may be a junior team that could be outdone by a more creative, but smaller, shop without the famous folks at the top.

Trying out some of these design firms on low-pressure "warmup projects" will help you find great designers that speak your language and stay in your budget. This takes time and more than a few hits and misses, but if the team you discover in the end is a perfect match for you, then it's well worth the effort.

OVERWHELMED BY YOUR OWN HELM.

Sometimes your new project isn't getting the attention you want because your firm is too busy paying attention to...well, you. Or, more specifically, another one of your projects.

YOUR MOVE: DIVIDE AND CONQUER.

If you find yourself in competition with your own work for your design firm's attention, plan ahead for this possibility by having other firms in your stable of players. This is achieved using the same process as #6. It may be a little painful and slightly more expensive on the front end to have different firms working on some small test projects at the same time, but the payoff can be huge when the big projects roll in and you need to know who your real wing-men are.

We hope you found these tips helpful. We welcome questions and suggestions, and get them every day. Give us a call at 800-237-3944 or drop us a line at sales@southeasternproducts.com