

Before the partnership: 3 questions to ask yourself before hiring a strategy and design firm

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Most of us have been there. You have a strategic design project, the timeline is tight, and you know you ought to work with a great firm.

So you put out an RFP (or you don't). You go to a handful of firms you know or think you know. You ask the right questions and you vet their websites to be sure you like their work. You pick the firm, sign the contract and you're off and running. But as soon as you're into the project, you regret it. The team that sold you on working with the company is not the same team that's doing the work. You feel like you're repeating yourself, and the design team isn't able to give you what you want. Every step of the project is labored and you find yourself relieved when it's over.

So what happened and could it have been avoided?

At Suka, we think so. Beyond the technical questions (budget, timeline, etc.), we believe there are some other mission-critical things you should ask yourself before you hire a strategy and design firm:

1. Do you like the people?

We realize this probably sounds a bit obvious, but design is a big investment – not just of money, but of time. You'll spend weeks, if not months, working alongside your design team. So you want to make sure your agency will be a good partner.

Make sure you like them and feel like you can work happily with them. Make sure they like you, too! A good relationship between client and agency is essential to producing the best and most creative results. Have lunch with your design team, share ideas, ask questions and get to know each other. That way, when something happens along the way (and something always does), you will feel comfortable picking up the phone and having an honest conversation.

2. Do you get the sense that they love what they do?

We believe that a simple equation is the foundation for this thought:

Passion + Energy + Talent = Great, Innovative, Strategic Design

As with most of us, when you have passion and excitement for the work you do, the outcome is of a higher caliber. Similarly, you want your designers to really love what they do so you can end up with the best visual solutions for whatever your business need is. Their passion and energy, combined with their talents, will yield dramatic results. So learn about your design team – read their website bios and check out the firm’s Twitter feed – and make sure you feel their passion for design.

3. Do you think they can understand your business needs and translate them into great creative solutions?

A great firm will bring you the best and most strategic visual (and other) solutions they can muster – but they have to understand your business and audience needs to do so. You want to make sure you choose a firm that limits the number of engagements they take so they can dedicate themselves to you and your project. If they’re spread too thin, they will not achieve the deep level of understanding needed to generate thoughtful designs. And thoughtful design is what you should be after.

At the end of the day, you need to make the right decision about hiring a strategy and design firm. A great design team will challenge your thinking and push to create the most innovative and best designs possible in service of your business goals. But, in order to do this, you must want a collaborative partnership – founded on mutual

respect, passion, energy and understanding. And asking these questions up front will help ensure that you not only arrive at the final destination happy, but that you enjoy the journey along the way. ///

Suka is an award-winning strategic marketing and design firm based in New York City. A thought leader in corporate branding and design for over 20 years, the Suka team has engaged clients in longtime partnerships to deliver annual reports and interactive solutions for a wide range of industries, including Fortune 100 companies, financial firms, nonprofit organizations, and institutions of higher education. For more information about Suka Creative, please visit www.sukacreative.com or contact Susan Karlin, President, at skarlin@sukacreative.com or 212-219-0082, ext. 123.

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