5 things I want clients
to know about designers

by: Esteban Pérez-Hemminger, Design Director

1 We care about your bottom line

Do designers care about quarterly reports, projected sales and market shares? Well, kind of. As creatives, we partner with you to solve communication challenges and tell your story better, faster, more simply. We uncover and distill what your organization does, whom it does it for, why it does it, and where new opportunities lie. That means caring about what analytics say about your users, making sure your team's expertise is showcased in a way that builds trust, and presenting your services/products in a way that engages your current and potential customers. Designers stand by their work. We only want to show good work in our portfolios, agency websites and award entries. And nothing speaks better about the quality of our creative work than a happy client. If you're successful, we're successful. Bottom line.

2 Our process is not random

Process is not a word we use to make our work sound fancy or mysterious. Great designers work to develop long-lasting, meaningful experiences—we don't throw spaghetti on a wall. The steps we take to generate, scrutinize and implement ideas have a purpose: to present only thoughtful and tailored solutions that make your time (and money) worthwhile.

> For every polished concept, design or prototype you see, there were a dozens of prior discarded attempts.

Strategic design—not trendy decoration—comes from immersing ourselves in discovery, idea generation and collaboration. Quality work takes time. When you're wondering why the schedule looks lengthy, know it is because we're working hard to develop something that explains your Who, What and Why in a way that's unique to you.

3 Personal biases can derail a project

Subjectivity is innately human and it makes us unique. But it can also blur the ability to make decisions rooted in project goals. Our brain devotes most of its energy to processing the information our eyes capture every second of every day. So, by nature, it's difficult for people to disregard visual elements, such as shape, color and imagery. In other words, it's hard to be objective.

> However, a client's overreliance on personal tastes and biases (insert favorite color comment here) hinders a designer's ability to pinpoint the approach that is appropriate to your users' needs and expectations.

When providing feedback to your design team, work against the temptation to say things like "I don't like green." Instead, tell us what jumps out at you first: is the call to action prominent enough, does the hierarchy feel correct, does the tone feel authentic and on-brand? If you engage in a dialogue with your designers, we will have a better chance of providing alternatives that meet your practical needs and make your subjective side happy as well.

4 We keep your users in mind

You have one true audience: the people you're trying to reach. Your audience is not your staff, family or direct competitors, but the people who browse your website, enter your store, use your app, read your print materials and attend your marketing events. What works for your employees, board of directors or shareholders might be a departure from what your audience wants and needs from you. Designers navigate the gray area between making your stakeholders happy and ensuring that the experience of interacting with your product, service and brand is worthwhile. That's why user experience, testing and validation have become such hot topics (and careers) in the last few years. Companies are realizing that economic success is correlated to providing value to your users' lives. That's something to keep in mind.

5 We don't do magic, we do work

Designers are not magicians, nor are we artists; and whoever says otherwise is lying to you. We are strategic, rational and thoughtful people who communicate through

words and visuals, and work hard to help you solve your design challenges. Many creatives have been glorified with awards, big-name clients and published books. Although recognition is not intrinsically a bad thing, it has elevated the creative process to a mystical status and diminished our focus on the designer-client relationship.

> Designers might officially work 9–5, but our brains don't have a shutdown function.

We're always researching, analyzing and working hard (physically and mentally) to create useful things and better experiences for our clients on a daily basis. Many of the designers I admire are not famous. You haven't seen them in tutorials, lectures or TED talks. They're working behind the scenes, putting in the effort that enables them to produce consistent quality work for their clients. What we do is not magic. Some call it talent, others inspiration. I call it having a strong work ethic.

*Bonus

Much has been publicized about the alleged client vs. designer animosity.
I don't believe this clash exists, at least not when partnerships are built on respect, understanding and a collaborative spirit. As designers, we understand the impact our work can have on economics, culture and communities. Thus, we value (and expect) our same level of passion, commitment and strategic thinking from the clients we work with. In essence, we're here and invested in your success.

Final thoughts

These are just five of the things I'd love clients to keep in mind when working with any creative partner. Remember, designers are not vendors, but champions of your brand and advocates of your mission, vision and goals. We want to help you build meaningful experiences/products that surpass your business goals and translate into long-term relationships with your audience. ///