



FINDING THE RIGHT DESIGNER FOR YOUR BOOK

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WHY DO I NEED TO HIRE A PROFESSIONAL?

Think about some of the people you know. When considering a bookstore shelf or a book's sales flyer, how many seconds does it take for them to decide which titles to peruse further? Probably just two or three.

A book's cover and spine have a great deal to do with whether potential buyers investigate a particular title further. As a result, a good cover design can be critical to your book's sales success.

Because cover design is so important, you'll want to be sure you work with an experienced designer who specializes in covers. Where can you find that person? What information do you need to provide to ensure the design efforts' success?

DESIGNED FOR BOOKS

Just as engineers specialize in different fields such as "electrical" or "mechanical" design, graphic artists often have more experience with one kind of project than another. Be sure to work with someone who specializes in cover design.

While most graphic designers could help you with at least some aspects of book design, one who specializes in book design will be able to guide you through the whole process and provide you with experience and knowledge that can save you time, hassle and money.

THE RIGHT ONE FOR YOU

How do you find that perfect designer to add to your publishing team? Ask other publishers whose covers you admire. The Internet has many sites focusing on self-publishing, graphic design, and locating freelance designers. A few places to start include:

- Publishers Marketing Association (PMA): www.pma-online.org
- The Tool Shed (offered by Cat's Paw Press): <http://hometown.aol.com/catspawpress/ToolShed.html>
- Small Publishers Association of North America (SPAN): www.SPANnet.org
- Small Publishers, Artists, and Writers Network (SPAWN): www.spawn.org

Look at many samples of a designer's work. If you can't visualize your book within that work, don't hire that designer. Most designers have a range of abilities, but won't be comfortable drastically changing their style for one project.

Talk to the designer and listen to your gut feeling. This may seem obvious, but if you don't click with the person right away, don't hire him!

Talk with other clients. Ask specific questions such as: Was your deadline ever in jeopardy because of the designer? Why? What was done to remedy the prob-

lem? How many front cover designs were you given? If you provided any initial ideas, were they built upon or discarded completely? (A good designer will do at least one layout using your idea and several more with his own.)

Find out how many years of experience the person has and how many books she has designed. Does she know the elements of a book cover or interior? Does she know how designing a hardcover book cover is different from designing the a paperback?

Make sure the designer also has production experience. Can he handle getting the files off the computer and into pre-press properly? Ask to speak with printers that have worked with the designer you are considering.

Keep in mind that designers are not usually illustrators. Illustrators draw or paint the pictures to be used on a book cover or within the text. Designers pull together all the elements of a cover or page — this could include a drawing, a painting, a photograph and all text — to create an overall design that is visually pleasing and saleable.

Ask about the designer's professional network. Can she recommend a photographer or an illustrator? How about the right editor, proofreader or printer for your project?

Sign a written contract with the designer. It is not wise to work with a designer who does not use a

contract. The contract should cover exactly what will be produced for you, the timeline for production, and the agreed-upon cost. Expect to pay a flat fee of roughly \$800 to \$1,800 for a cover and between \$8 and \$20 per page for interior layout. Unless the contract specifically states that ownership is being transferred (and this is rare), the designer will automatically own the design he creates. If you want to hold the copyright, you will usually have to pay a much higher fee and it's really not necessary. Do make sure that you have unlimited rights to use images of the cover and interior pages for your promotional purposes at no extra charge.

A note about working locally versus long-distance. With the prevalent use of e-mail and the Internet, it is no longer necessary to work with a local designer. Proofs can be presented via e-mail or on a web site and are received much more quickly in this fashion than by setting up a face-to-face meeting. Revisions can be sent out quickly, too. Your selection of designers is immense when not limited by geography!

MAKING A GRAND APPEARANCE

In all, you'll get better sales results with a good cover. And a good cover becomes a sure thing when you provide a carefully-selected, experienced designer with the right tools and information.

ADVICE FROM A SELF-PUBLISHER:

I just went through the process of hiring a cover designer. When I started, I saw a few designers whose work was excellent and put them on my short list. I wondered how I was going to choose a designer from so many talented professionals. However, when I looked at the sample covers again I realized that many of the covers I loved were beautiful, but they weren't *my* book.

Make sure the designer you hire does books that have the look and feel you want for your book. After looking through many web sites, I found one site showcasing two covers that called out to me that the designer knew my book. These books were not on the same subject as mine, and I didn't want my book cover to look exactly like the ones I saw; however, both covers evoked the feeling I wanted for my book.

I called the designer and felt comfortable with her immediately. The gorgeous cover TLC Graphics designed for *The Mystery Shopper's Manual*, in the words of a Barnes & Noble rep, gives the book "curb appeal." People not only "ooh and aah" when they see the book, they pick it up and buy it!

My advice to other publishers is to look at portfolios, ask other publishers for recommendations, check references, and trust your instincts. I'm glad I did!

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