

Six Reasons to Hire an Outside Design Firm

by Lauren Smith

Effective communications design is much more than colorful brochures or eye-catching logos—it's also good business. Innovative design gives a face to a company, conveys important information to its various audiences, and reinforces its brands. But as important as it is, it can be expensive, so it's important to consider how to get the most value from the communications design process. Many companies reason that it's more cost-effective to add staff to accomplish these ends but is it really the best value?

1. Flexibility

Having an internal design staff is in some respects convenient, but it also has its limitations. When the work load increases it is often difficult to increase staff quickly enough to meet the demand. And in fact, it may not be advisable to add internal staff to handle what may be a temporary increase in workload. Making use of outside contractors provides the flexibility to increase your resources to meet demand without increasing overhead.

2. Economy

At first glance, hiring outside design firms may seem prohibitively expensive. In fact, they are usually very cost-competitive and may even be less costly than handling the work internally. When all costs of internal staff—salaries, benefits and overhead—are taken into account, studies show that the costs of outside creative vendors result in a savings of as much as 5%. It is also important to consider that creative fees are often only a small part of the overall production expenditure—often less than 1% on a major corporate brochure or annual report.

3. Efficiency

Because an internal staff is limited, it is easy to become overwhelmed by the demands of servicing the needs of an entire company. This can lead to missed deadlines and a substandard work product. Working with a number of outside creative firms can keep the work load even and the quality standards high.

4. Expertise

Utilizing the same designers on an ongoing basis may result in consistency but in situations where a particular expertise is required, it may be beyond the skills of an internal staff. For example, your staff may be very good at creating brochures or presentations but are they also experts in direct mail or web design? Having the flexibility to hire outside consultants based on their particular areas of expertise will often result in a better product.

5. Control

While it may seem to be easier to manage internal employees, this is not always the case. Assigning difficult deadlines, making unpopular changes or dispensing unwelcome criticism can be difficult with people you work with every day. Even in the best run organizations office politics can seriously diminish the amount of control one can exercise over staff. With outside vendors, on the other hand, it is generally easier to control costs, deadlines and conceptual objectives because as independent businesses they are highly motivated to obtain and keep your business.

6. Objectivity

As professional as an internal design department might be they are still deeply immersed within the culture of the company. While this familiarity with the company, its products and marketing objectives can certainly be an asset, an outside design firm can bring an objectivity to the process that can lead to new and innovative ideas.

They can look at your organization with a fresh set of eyes. Internal employees, over time, tend to develop routines that result in work that is functional but predictable. If you want a fresh approach you're often better off going outside.