

Top 10 Lies told to Naive Artists and Designers

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1 "Do this one cheap (or free) and we'll make it up on the next one."

No reputable businessperson would first give away their work and time or merchandise on the hope of making it up later. Can you imagine what a plumber would say if you said "come in, provide and install the sink for free and next time we'll make it up when we need a sink." You would be laughed at! Also the likelihood is that if something important came along, they wouldn't use you.

2 "We never pay a cent until we see the final product."

This is a croc, unless the person is leaving the door open to cheat you out of your pay. Virtually every profession requires a deposit or incremental payment during anything but the smallest project. Once you have a working relationship, you may work out another arrangement with a client. But a new client should not ask you to go beyond an initial meeting and, perhaps some preliminary sketches without pay on the job!

3 "Do this for us and you'll get great exposure! The jobs will just pour in!"

Baloney. Tell a plumber "Install this sink and my friend will see and you'll get lots of business!" Our plumber friend would say "You mean even if I do a good job I have to give my work away to get noticed? Then it isn't worth the notice." Also the guy would likely brag to everyone he knows about how this would normally cost (X) dollars, but brilliant businessman that he is he got it for free! If anyone calls, they'll expect the same or better deal.

4 On looking at sketches or concepts: "Well, we aren't sure if we want to use you yet, but leave your material here so I can talk to my partner/investor/wife/clergy."

You can be sure that 15 minutes after you leave he will be on the phone to other designers, now with concepts in hand, asking for price quotes. When you call back you will be informed that your prices were too high and Joe Blow Design/Illustration will be doing the job. Why shouldn't they be cheaper? You just gave them hours of free consulting work! Until you have a deal, LEAVE NOTHING CREATIVE at the client's office.

5 "Well, the job isn't CANCELLED, just delayed. Keep the account open and we'll continue in a month or two."

Ummm, probably not. If something is hot, then not, it could be dead. It would be a mistake to *not* bill for work performed at this point and then let the chips fall where they may! Call in two months and someone else may be in that job. And guess what? They don't know you at all.....

6 "Contract? We don't need no stinking contract! Aren't we friends?"

Yes, we are, until something goes wrong or is misunderstood, then you are the jerk in the suit and I am that idiot designer, then the contract is essential. That is, unless one doesn't care about being paid. Any reputable business uses paperwork to define relationships and you should too.

7 "Send me a bill after the work goes to press."

Why wait for an irrelevant deadline to send an invoice? You stand behind your work, right? You are honest, right? Why would you feel bound to this deadline? Once you deliver the work and it is accepted, BILL IT. This point may just be a delaying tactic so the job goes through the printer prior to any question of your being paid. If the guy waits for the job to be printed, and you do changes as necessary, then he can stiff you and not take a chance that he'll have to pay someone else for changes.

8 "The last guy did it for XXX dollars."

That is irrelevant. If the last guy was so good they wouldn't be talking to you, now would they? And what that guy charged means nothing to you, really. People who charge too little for their time go out of business (or self-destruct financially, or change occupations) and then someone else has to step in. Set a fair price and stick to it.

9 "Our budget is XXX dollars, firm."

Amazing, isn't it? This guy goes out to buy a car, and what, knows exactly what he is going to spend before even looking or researching? Not likely. A certain amount of work costs a certain amount of money. If they have less money (and you *can*) do less work and still take the job. But make sure they understand that you are doing less work if you take less money than you originally estimated. Give fewer comps, simplify, let them go elsewhere for services (like films) etc.

10 "We are having financial problems. Give us the work, we'll make some money and we'll pay you. Simple."

Yeah, except when the money comes, you can expect that you will be pretty low on the list to be paid. If someone reaches the point where they admit that the company is in trouble, then they are probably much worse off than they are admitting to. Even then, are you a bank? Are you qualified to check out their financials? If the company is strapped to the point where credit is a problem through credit agencies, banks etc. what business would you have extending credit to them. You have exactly ZERO pull once they have the work. Noble intentions or not, this is probably a losing bet. But if you are going to roll the dice, AT LEAST you should be getting additional money for waiting. The bank gets interest and so should you. That is probably why the person is approaching you; to get six months worth of free interest instead of paying bank rates for credit and then paying you with that money. Don't give away money.

Now, this list wasn't meant to make anyone crazy or paranoid, but is designed to inject some reality into the fantasy.

You are GOING to be dealing with people who are unlike yourself. Their motivations are their own and their attitudes are probably different than yours. There are going to be demands, problems, issues and all the hassles that go with practically ANY work/job/money situation. Too many times I see the sad example of someone walking in to a situation with noble intentions and then getting royally screwed, because what they see as an opportunity and a labor of love, the other party sees as something else entirely, not at all romantic or idealized, but raw and simple.

How can you deal with this stuff and still do good creative work? Good question. THIS is why an education is important. You learn, out of the line of fire, how to deal with the art at it's own level and also how to deal with the crap that surrounds it. You may have tough teachers and think that it can't be worse, but wait until a businessperson has a hundred grand riding on your art! Then you will know what "demanding" means. You will then thank all those tough teachers for building up the calluses that enable you to enjoy the job rather than just feeling like it is all a big waste of time!

In the end, working commercially, being a terrific artist is about 25% of the task. If that is the only part of the task that you are interested in, do yourself a favor. Don't turn "pro."