

What Professional Design Services Cost

Design is a rogue industry. Service providers range from ambitious seven-year-olds to outsourcing wholesalers to small expert teams to corporate giants, and from the customer's point of view, they can be difficult to tell apart.

This can easily leave the customer feeling overwhelmed and a bit lost, especially in trying to establish a project budget.

A massive industry-wide disparity in qualifications and experience has yielded a widespread lack of understanding of what design is actually worth (on a monetary scale). Customers are largely misinformed when it comes to market value for professional design. A web search immediately yields a selection of companies offering logo design for \$99, so that must be the going rate, no?

No.

For several reasons, pro designers do not like to discuss their rates in public. There are some concerns that such discussions may be misconstrued as price-fixing, which opens up a big stinking can of legal worms. There are others who are concerned that competitors will see their rates and undercut them, or that clients will be scared off by an hourly billable twice as high as a competing designer (who might take ten times longer to do the same work). And of course there remains the simple fact that every project is different, which means that pricing will differ according to client needs – as it should.

Frankly, I think **every designer should publicly advertise their rates**, so long as they are clear and honest about what the numbers represent. Publishing a range per service area is a good way to give your customers an idea of what you charge, without making any false promises.

In few other industries are vendors intimidated into keeping their prices a closely guarded secret. It seems the only people consistently and openly advertising their prices are crowd-sourcing sites, generic stock art sites, and contest-model/outsourcing wholesalers. As a result, these are the only numbers that customers are seeing, creating a false impression that ALL design services are represented by this handful of bottom-of-the-barrel vendors.

People who see a necklace at the dollar store don't go into Tiffany's and expect to pay a buck for any necklace in the shop, yet because the bottom end are the only prices being consistently advertised, this is the phenomenon we are dealing with in design.

Thankfully, GDC (Graphic Designers of Canada) and RGD (Registered Graphic Designers) conduct a biennial national survey on project fees and billing practices in the Canadian graphic design industry. AIGA does a similar review in the United States, though their survey is limited to salaries – useless data, from the customer's standpoint.

Having worked in both the Canadian and American design industries for several years now, it has been our experience that the market rates in our countries are near interchangeable, with rates in the USA being only slightly higher than those here in Canada.

Averages for Project Fees

Respondents were career professionals with post-secondary education (95%) and an average of 10 years experience. They were asked to indicate fees for the projects described, excluding any reimbursable or out-of-pocket expenses. Note these are not our rates, they are **averages** that have been reported across our entire graphic design industry.

Large Scale Corporate Identity Design

Number of Responding Firms: 275

Average Project Fees: \$33,340

Includes comprehensive research, consultation and audit of company's existing identity, design of an integrated identity system including links to divisions and affiliates, presentation of 2 to 5 concepts, applications to stationery, website and other communications formats, graphic standards manual and client consultation.

Stand Alone Corporate Identity Design

Number of Responding Firms: 321

Average Project Fees: \$5,620

Includes research and design of primary logo identity; presentation of 2 to 3 concepts, design of stationery set (business cards, letterhead, envelopes) and client consultation regarding other applications to corporate materials.

Package Design

Number of Responding Firms: 225

Average Project Fees: \$16,430

Retail package design for one food/beverage product. Includes a design audit, 2 to 3 concepts, art direction and coordination of illustration or photography; comprehensive layout, final art and supervision of production.

Magazine Design

Number of Responding Firms: 254

Average Project Fees: \$19,530

Initial design of a new general interest 4-colour consumer magazine of 40 to 50 pages. Includes 2 to 3 concepts showing layout of major design elements and consultations with editors/publishers to establish creative and workable design solutions for the publication.

Newsletter Design

Number of Responding Firms: 304
Average Project Fees: \$3,900

Initial design of a corporate in-house newsletter of 4 to 10 pages. Includes 2 to 3 concepts, art direction and coordination of illustration and/or photography; comprehensive layout, final art and supervision of production on a per issue basis.

Brochure Design

Number of Responding Firms: 318
Average Project Fees: \$5,560

Design of a 4 to 10 page corporate brochure. Includes 2 to 3 concepts for a 4-colour design with art direction and coordination of illustration and/or photography, comprehensive layout, final art and supervision of production.

Website Design

Number of Responding Firms: 274
Average Project Fees: \$11,830

Includes presentation of 2 to 3 concepts, art direction and coordination of illustration and/or photography, comprehensive layout, final art, and production of a static corporate site.

Annual Report Design

Number of Responding Firms: 251
Average Project Fees: \$21,980

Design of an annual report of 30 to 40 pages including 10 pages of financial information, photographs and text. Includes presentation of 2 to 3 concepts, art direction and coordination of illustration and/or photography, comprehensive layout, final art and supervision of production.

Presentation Design

Number of Responding Firms: 257
Average Project Fees: \$5,000

Design of materials for a presentation including a main theme design and 20 to 25 slides. Includes art direction and coordination of illustration and/or photography and production of the final presentation.