

# What Makes A Great Designer?

**9 Keys To Pick Awesome Designers (Presented by Folyo)**

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# ABOUT FOLYO

[\*\*Folyo\*\*](#) helps you find the best freelance designers for your project.

Post your project on Folyo, and you'll be contacted from freelancers from all over the world interested in working with you.

What's more, every Folyo designer has been individually vetted for their skills and experience, to ensure that you only receive replies from the best designers.

And by the way, trying out Folyo is risk-free: if you can't find a designer, the \$99 posting fee will be immediately refunded!

[\*\*Try out Folyo now\*\*](#)

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# INTRODUCTION

How do you know if a designer is any good before hiring them? And even if they have the skills, how do you know if they're the *right* person for your project?

This short guide will walk you through **nine key areas** to help you find out.

## **A Note For Designers**

Although this guide was written from the perspective of a client, it can be useful even if you're a designer yourself.

Read it to find out what areas should you be focusing on, and what criteria potential prospects will use to evaluate your profile.

# VISUALS

Recognizing good visual design can be tricky for non-designers, but there are a few key elements to look for:

- Does the text have enough breathing room?
- Is the page laid out on a grid?
- Do the visuals match the content's message?

After browsing a couple design galleries, you should start having a better feel for what constitutes a good design.

*"You shouldn't worry about experience, or what school [a designer] went to, but you should be very impressed with his portfolio. Otherwise, I would keep looking." –*  
**Aaron Patzer, [mint.com](http://mint.com)**

In the end, it's mostly about trusting your instincts and going "wow!" when you see somebody's work.

## To-Do:

- Ask another designer to help you evaluate the designer's work
- Look for someone who pays attention to small details
- Compare their work with other well-designed sites

# STRUCTURE

Good designers establish a strong visual hierarchy. The most important things on a page should pop out. After all, design is not just making things pretty, it's also making them work well.

A great way to evaluate a design is to check it against each of [the elements of design](#).

*"My first filters are information priority, information organization, intuitiveness, and clarity of copy" – Jason Putorti, Votizen*

## To-Do:

- Look for clear call to actions that tell the user what to do next
- Look for a strong information hierarchy throughout the page

# INSIGHT

Design is not just about the "how", but also about the "why".

It's important that a designer be able to justify every design decisions they make, and be aware of these decisions' consequences for users.

This is a hard skill to quantify, but is very important especially for sites or apps with lots of interactions.

*"[Designers should have] a rational, thoughtful design process that balances business needs with user needs—and empathy with those users." – Jason Putorti, **Votizen***

## To-Do:

- Read previous projects' case studies
- Ask the designer to analyze your current design
- Ask them to justify their choices for a previous design

# STYLE

Style is often overlooked when picking a designer, and that can often lead to trouble down the road.

Sure, some designers will be happy to adapt their style to match your project, but you shouldn't count on it.

*"I cannot stress this enough: designers don't morph their style to match yours." – Jason Cohen, A Smart Bear*

So if what you need is a glossy, gradient-heavy mobile app, don't hire someone who specializes in minimalist typographical layouts, no matter how beautiful their work looks.

Instead, pick someone whose current style is already a good fit for your needs. If you find yourself wishing you could just take their previous work and stick your logo on it, you're on the right track.

## To-Do:

- Make sure the designer works in the right field (i.e. print, web, mobile, etc.)
- Ask yourself which style (i.e. retro, grunge, minimalist, etc. ) the designer's work evokes
- Think of a few adjectives that describe their work and see if they apply to your project



# COMMUNICATION

Good communication is very important for any project, and even more so when working remotely.

Just like in romantic relationships, most problems in a work relationship can usually be traced back to a lack of communication.

And since interfaces are mostly text, it's absolutely vital for user interface designers to have a good grasp of language.

*"[Good writing] is extremely important. A cover letter will help you determine this, but also look for the copy in the designs." – Ryan Singer, 37Signals*

## To-Do:

- Evaluate the copy inside the designs
- Check out the designer's blog
- See if they ask a lot of questions about your project

# EDUCATION & EXPERIENCE

Past experience is not a fail-safe indicator of design skills: after all, some newcomers have outstanding talent – and you'll have no trouble finding experienced people that still suck.

And a lot of designers are autodidacts anyway, so you don't want to discard someone just because they didn't go to design school.

*"Get references! There are great designers out there that are terrible to work with and miss deadlines." – **Sheel Mohnot, FeeFighters***

Of course, that doesn't mean having a degree is not a plus. Education and experience are things you want to consider, if only to get a feel for a designer's background.

## To-Do:

- Ask if they've worked on similar projects in the past.
- Ask for references from past employers
- Check if their portfolio is filled with real client work, or mostly personal projects

# PASSION

It's always nicer to collaborate with someone who's passionate about their work, and luckily most designers are.

You want someone who's not afraid to take risks and come up with ideas by themselves, and who really cares about the work they take on.

*"Have you designed projects in your spare time? Have you lead projects before? Both big plusses for me." – **Daniel Burka, Milk***

## To-Do:

- Find out if they've launched personal projects.
- Find out their motivations for taking on past client projects.

# PERSONALITY

Working with a designer is often a long-term commitment, so you don't want to hire someone if you don't get along with them.

Although working mainly through email or project management software can be convenient, it won't bring you the same personal contact as a real-life or even Skype interview.

At least for the first contact, getting some face-to-face time in is worth it.

*"Are you a cool person to work with? This sort of thing can come out in a personal interview but it can also come through blog entries, [or] tweets."*

**– Mike Davidson,  
Newsvine**

## To-Do:

- Read what they're saying on Twitter.
- Make time for an interview on Skype or in real life

# WORK SAMPLE

Nobody said you had to take the big leap right away. Why not start out small, by hiring the designer for a couple hours to work on a side project?

But don't make the mistake of asking the designer to work for free: if you expect them to do their best, it's only fair to compensate them for their time.

*"We generally just try lots of people. [...] Paying for a couple hours of work is the easiest way to see how they work in practice." – **Steve Huffman, Hipmunk***

## To-Do:

- Have the designer do a 2-hour redesign of your homepage.
- Hire them for a smaller project (blog theme, slides, banner, etc.)

# CONCLUSION

Picking the right designer is by no means an easy task, and you might very well have to try out two or three different people before you find the right fit.

But hopefully, this guide will serve as a starting point and make the task a little bit easier!

And by the way, don't forget to [\*\*check out our other guides online!\*\*](#)