

Before You Hire a Designer

A few odd questions that will
help your design not suck

from
David Billings
(who actually cares that you don't suck)

Whether you're starting a new biz or you're already moving right along, you can benefit from having a little heart-to-heart with yourself about your image. Take some time with these questions. They'll help prepare you for a conversation with a designer – or maybe just help you feel more solid about your existing stuff.

Oh, hey – can we have fun with this? Yes. We can, really. I'm just going to ask you some questions you may not have asked yourself before. You can't find the answers in a Google search or on Wikipedia. The answers are *somewhere inside you*. Possibly on your left side, near your spleen. It's different for everyone.

Try not to kill any brain cells or lose sleep over the questions. This is not a Federal tax form, there are no government agencies reviewing your responses. It's just us. Are you in?

Awesome. But you knew I would say that.

The Questions

Who am I trying to reach?

Who do you want showing up at your door? The girl in the fishnets and lip piercings or semi-retired, golf-watching grandpa?

A marketing expert can guide you in answering this question and I highly recommend finding someone (I have several experts helping me in this area).

The answer to this question is the foundation for any kind of design you're creating. *Who am I talking to with my web site? Who do I want calling me when they look at my logo?*

What kind of music does my business sound like?

Okay... seriously?

Yes. Come on, I thought we were gonna have some fun here.

Lawrence Welk or Red Hot Chili Peppers? Somewhere in between?

You can always expand on this question. If my business were a movie...

If you ever watched Ally McBeal, you'll know what I mean when I say "Theme Song." If not, don't get hung up on a TV show. You can still answer the question.

What's the theme song for your business?

Do I already have people flocking to me? Are they the right people?

Word of mouth is awesome, I think you'll agree. If you have a flock, you may want to consider who's showing up at your door. Is it 1-800-Flowers or a survey about the environment? Do your current customers make you want to open the door or hide in the kitchen?

How do I like what I have now?

When you look at your stuff do you feel a little sick? Or do you keep a business card taped to your monitor so you can admire it all day?

Do you ever tell people, "Don't pay attention to my web site. It's not really done yet?" Ouch. That's promising, huh?

Don't ignore that feeling. That acid reflux is trying to tell you something.

If there were no limits, what would my logo/web site/biz cards/project look like?

I love slushy categories, don't you? Whatever your thing is, what would you love it to be?

Don't hold back. Do you want your business cards to be a Dr. Seuss storybook? Could your email campaign be as awesome as the Ellen show? What if your logo was a photo of Johnny Carson's face?

Don't think limitations here. Realities aren't important right now. Fantasies are good. Let fly.

Who is someone I trust but doesn't love me so much that they can't tell me my pants are too short?

Hint: not your mother.

Say you're in the school play. You trip and fall flat on your face. The entire audience gasps. A stagehand comes and picks you up. The rest of the cast is thrown off and it takes a full minute for the play to get back on track.

Afterwards your mother says, "You tripped? When? I didn't see you trip. I'm sure no one noticed."

See, the people who love us have these super goggles that see us as perfect. Even our imperfections are perfect. So you need to find the kind of person who will tell you that your speech ran too long. You have garlic breath. There's toilet paper hanging off your shoe.

And don't wait until you hire a designer and ask them. They don't want to tell you that your logo sucks, either – even if they want your business. Um, *especially* if they want your business. You can hire someone specifically to give you some truth, but that's different.

How much can I set aside for a new design? When will I have it?

I'm sure you've done this before. You want a new Macbook. You don't go out and buy a calculator because it's cheaper. You save up for the Macbook. Same thing.

Who do I want to create my new design? Why?

Yes, you have to say **why**. Sorry.

How do you know who? Ask around. Look at designs you like and ask who did them. Simple.

That's it. We're done.

That wasn't so hard was it? Okay, maybe it was. It's totally worth it, though. If you do your homework before you look for a designer you just might:

- Save some damn money for a change
- Get what you want instead of what you'll settle for
- Attract the kind of people you want to help instead of drunks and ex-Presidents

Doesn't that sound awesome? Of course it does. My mom said so.

Have you already hired someone and you're in the middle of designing awesomeness? I've created a series of blog posts that will help you understand what to expect during the process. It's here: [What to Expect When You Hire A Designer](#)

What do you do when you just need to talk to someone about how your stuff looks with no sales pressure or commitment to get something designed?

Easy. Talk to me for an hour and get on track with my [Graphics Rescue Package](#).

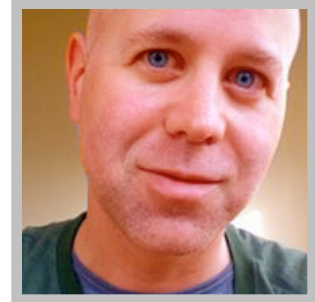
About this Strange Man Who Just Asked You Odd Things

David Billings runs **Sparky Firepants Images**, a communication circus disguised as a design firm.

David works with successful small business people who have grand visions but need help putting fire in the pants of their graphics.

A professional illustrator and animator for over ten years, David's clients include MTV Networks, Highlights Magazine, Sesame Workshop, and Nickelodeon. His work has won an Emmy and most recently, an animation award created specifically for his unique way of delivering results. He also trains lots of smart people how to make arty stuff, too.

He lives in Portland, Oregon with his wife who was expecting to be in a circus when they met. They have three children now appearing under the big top.



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