

SPECIALIZED
for small business!

Get Great Design GUIDE

Condensed version:

- Flying Solo: DIY tips
- The Prep Questions

You can get great design for your projects
without losing your shirt or your sanity

BONUS
Worksheet
inside!

created by
Sparky Firepants

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Introduction

Condensed Version

Welcome, you smarty-pants entrepreneur you. I call you smarty-pants because by simply considering these questions I know you're someone who cares about getting great design for your project.

This is the *condensed version* of a much larger guide. If you look at the table of contents you'll get a sneak peek at what's included in the full version of the guide.

As a special reward for signing up to get this free chapter, I'd like to offer you the **complete Get Great Design guide at 25% off**. Just use the discount code "prepquestions" at checkout (without the quotes).

[Click here to get the complete guide now.](#)

The prep questions I've included here are still greatly helpful in determining the direction of any design project. The **Flying Solo DIY** section below is just an added bonus.

As a designer, I feel it's my responsibility to help you understand the process so you can make better decisions for your business. It's your money and your time. Spend it wisely and enjoy the process.

Cheers,

David Billings, aka **Sparky Firepants**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dil". The letter "D" is large and stylized, with a vertical line extending downwards from its base. The letters "il" are written in a cursive, lowercase style to the right of the "D".

Flying solo: knowing when to DIY

As someone who provides design services, you might think I would try and talk you out of doing it yourself. Surprise! I think it's a great idea. I really do.

I'm not just an artist, I'm a businessman. I'm also a fan of 1980s Valley bands. I digress.

Sometimes it's like, you know, you "just gotta."

I recognize that there are going to be times when you've got to get a project done at the lowest cost and in the shortest time possible. You don't always want to spend time explaining your project and waiting for results to come back. You're giving a workshop in two days and you'll be on a plane for half that time.

You'll have to punt. Er... DIY.

You can do this. But before you buy Adobe Photoshop Elements and start learning what kerning means, there are a few things about your project you'll want to think about.

One thing to consider is how much impact the project will have on your business.

For example, creating a flyer for a free workshop is something many people can handle pretty well. Even using Microsoft Word, you can create something decent that gets the word out – even if it's not fancy.

Do you really want to invest a lot of money in something that's so temporary?

On the flip side, your logo is going to represent your business for a very long time. Many times it's the first thing people see when they find you. Can you afford the risk of doing it yourself and sending people away because it looks unprofessional?

Getting your logo done by a pro is worth the investment. I have too many clients who did it themselves in a hurry or had a high school student do it on the cheap and regretted it later.

But I still can't afford/don't have time/feel like working with a pro. Now what?

Okay, I get it. You have your reasons.

At least you can avoid completely flocking it all up. My advice to you intrepid adventurous soul, you? Stay simple.

Forget about all those fancy effects and super crazy fonts. They're fun to play with, but they might get in the way of your message. Look at these two versions of the same logo:



Maria's Sweet Cafe

Admittedly, the second design is not going to win any awards. It's about as basic as it gets. But it's definitely not going to turn your customers away. The first one is so ugly it hurts my feelings. And I created the damn thing.

Also, the effects in the first design may not translate to print media very well. This is something to consider, especially if you're trying to save money. If you take a low-resolution raster file to a sign shop, they're going to charge you design time to recreate your logo at a decent reproducible size. In my first design job at a sign shop, I used to do this every day. And I watched our client's faces fall when they realized what it would cost after they had done it themselves.

Do I mean to scare you? Yes. This is your business. You mean to profit from this business, right? Take it seriously.

Be brutally honest about your design skills. This isn't the time to pump yourself up. If you find yourself thinking, "Well, that's not too bad," you are already in trouble. And I haven't even seen what you did yet. Sure, your wife/husband/mother/best friend is going to tell you it's great. Remember, these are the people who tell you how great you still look in that stonewashed denim from 1992.

So if you really need to DIY, just keep it simple. You can always go back later with a designer and amp it up. But it's impossible to change a first impression. If it's bland, you'll do okay. If it's horrible, you'll put out signals that you're unprofessional. Which you're not. You're a force to be reckoned with. Don't risk appearing otherwise.

End of DIY lecture.



Indubitably: checking in

I've given you a lot of information to chew on.

So now that I've given you a bunch of answers, it's your turn. I've created a list of eight questions that get to the heart of your design project.

These are questions that I can't possibly answer for you. They're the same basic questions I ask my clients every time we work together. This is what makes my job fascinating, because I get to learn how other people think about their businesses.



The Prep Questions:

Weird yet simple

So here they are, the famous questions. You can get their autograph later. For now, spend some time mulling these over. Really. Even if they seem silly, there's a purpose. I swear. You're going to give your noggin a workout, but try and have fun with this. If there's no fun in running your own business, there's always working for someone else. Ahem.

At the end of this guide you'll find the questions all by themselves, without my commentary. You can either print them out and write your answers in tried-and-true ballpoint pen, or you can fill them out using the PDF form I've provided.

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. This tells the designer: Who am I talking to with this web site? What kind of person do I want this logo to attract?

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...

Pick a theme song. I know you have one somewhere way deep inside, even if you can't hear it right now. What's the theme song for your business?

Okay, so most designers aren't going to ask you this question (I might if we work together). If you tell any random designer that your theme song is "Superfreak," they won't have a clue what you're talking about.

In a chat with a designer, the answer to this question will help you figure out if you're a good match personality-wise. This is important. If you are rocking a Superfreak kind of business, you probably don't want a Lawrence Welk design.

P.S. Don't skip hiring a designer just because they have the complete Fleetwood Mac collection in iTunes. I'm not saying I do. I'm just saying... okay. I do. I have a lot of Fleetwood Mac here. Wanna be startin' somethin'? Yeah, I have a lot of Michael Jackson, too. Don't you love P.S. digressions?

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 now. Is it the flock you want or do you want them to go the flock away?

A great designer will love to hear about this. If your current flock is retired schoolteachers and you want more biker chicks, your designer will be able to suggest more appropriate fonts, colors, etc. It takes a lot of the guesswork out of the process.

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.

When you chat with a designer and share your honest feelings about what you have, you're giving them the opportunity to be free with creative suggestions. Hey, maybe it's not as bad as you think.

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

I love slashy 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.

When you chat with a designer, don't be afraid tell them your ultimate dream. If you're excited about sharing what you think would be cool, chances are they will be, too. Wait. Scratch that. They should be excited, too.

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 help them view 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.

Find someone in your network who will give you an unbiased opinion of your marketing materials. Ideally you'll find someone who is in your target market. Try not to lead their responses, just ask them to give you their honest reaction.

When you chat with a designer, you'll be armed with information about what's working and what isn't. Valuable stuff.

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.

So it kinda sucks to realize you don't have the budget for the design you want right now. Hey, at least you know what to shoot for.

This helps tremendously in your initial chat with a designer. Because they're going to ask. Having a number in mind helps the designer to find a

solution for you. Maybe you can work in phases. Maybe you can work on high priority stuff now and save up for the "extras." Many things are possible when you're prepared with a budget.

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

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

You can also go back and reread the chapter on "Hire the right person." Or... read it. Were you skimming again?

And yes, you do have to say why. At least to yourself.

That's it. We're done.

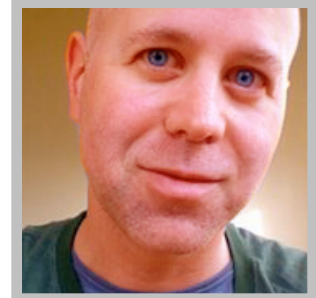
That wasn't so hard was it? Okay, maybe it was. It's totally worth it, though. If you do your homework before you look for a designer you just might:

- Save some damn money for a change. Buy more lattes.
- Get what you want instead of what you'll settle for. Choose the fancy underwear.
- Attract the kind of people you really want to help instead of drunks and ex-Presidents.

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

About this Strange Man Who Just Asked You Odd Things

David Billings runs Sparky Firepants Images, a visual design firm specializing in illustration. **When you need unique illustration in your design, he's the one you call.**



David works with successful small business people who need to rock their marketing materials so they can sell more products and services.

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 some other awards you probably wouldn't recognize.

He lives in Portland, Oregon with his wife and three children. They drive a Volvo, unschool, use Macs, have 2.1 alpacas, and follow a vegan diet. Mistaking them for unambitious hippies would be a mistake, though. They are world adventurers and creators with lofty goals. You're welcome to jump on their supersonic train to Amazing. Bring a big sandwich and a can of soda wrapped in aluminum foil.

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Snail Mail: Attach mail to snail. Hope for the best.

Extra Resources

Book Yourself Solid

by Michael Port

If you have trouble answering those funky questions I threw at you, this book will help you figure out the answers. I highly recommend it to any entrepreneur who needs to get clarity on their business.

<http://michaelport.com>

Finding a Designer

The people at youthedesigner.com have put together an excellent list of online sources for graphic and web designers. If you can't find someone in your own network, this is a great place to start.

65 Places to Find a Graphic Designer

Fresh & hot small business insights

From yours truly, Sparky Firepants. I post regular articles and insights about design for small business and resources for entrepreneurs. If you found this guide helpful and even slightly amusing, you'll love the blog.

Sign up to get the posts in your email + extra goodies

Design Prep Questions Worksheet

Sans-commentary, ready for you to fill out. Lather, rinse, repeat.

Who am I trying to reach?

What kind of music does my business sound like?

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

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