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Your Business Coach

A

"HOW TO CHOOSE"

*GUIDE FOR 8 OF THE MOST IMPORTANT
SERVICES YOU NEED FOR YOUR BUSINESS*

by

Linda Conn, 'Your Business Coach'

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"How to Choose A Web Master"

In writing this, I am taking for granted that you wisely understand the importance of not putting up a static online brochure style website, that you will need regular maintenance and upgrades of content to give your (current and future clients?) readers a reason to keep visiting your site.

I will begin and end this article with Trust. You want to be able to trust that your web master will...

- be reliable and easy to work with, consistent in the quality of the work they produce for you - time and time again.
- a good listener and able to translate what you say to a visual design.
- skilled technically...sure maybe they can design but can they do the 'back end coding' and search engine optimization that you will need.
- charge you a fair rate - it doesn't much matter if it's by the contract or by the hour if you trust in the price they are charging for services rendered.
- experienced. Hire a professional - this is their only business not just their hobby ('but my nephew said he can do it')

Let me tell you a little secret I have learned about web techies: *They very rarely know everything you need so they ask another techie or outsource parts of your service.* That's OK - but they need to be transparent in what they can and cannot do and where else they will seek solutions to your needs.

You want to be very confident in your webmasters skill and the longer you work together the more you will know their strengths and specialties.

At the 'end of the day', would your web master say that YOU: were easy to deal with, provided content on time, paid your bill promptly, let them know how much you value their work?

It takes consistency over time from both of you to build trust.

What would you do if they left you high and dry with little notice to find someone else? A word to the wise, always have another web master in mind just in case the relationship for a number of possible reasons - with your current one - ends.

What about if you want to do your own? Be very clear how much skill and training it takes to design and do regular maintenance on a web site. Ask a webmaster how many courses they've taken and the special training they have. Be honest about how much time you can take away from your home and work life to spend sitting at a computer to do your own web work.

Tips on How to Choose

1. shop around and compare at least 3
2. ask for references from their clients in just the last 6 months

3. they should of course have a website themselves with a large portfolio of satisfied customer designs.

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“How to Choose A Virtual Assistant”

My own company has had 3 Virtual Assistants over 2 years with our present one with us the longest - and we hope will continue with us for many more years to come! Virtual Assistants are like doctors, web masters, and bookkeepers - do not stop until you find one you are comfortable with!

I hope we can give you some food for thought on the question of what they are and whether or not you need one. Think of a secretary working in their office not yours. You will be surprised just how much of your office work can be done off site.

In writing this I am taking for granted that you wisely understand the importance of not trying to wear all the hats in your office, spreading yourself too thin and courting burnout. I will assume you are considering getting more help with routine office and marketing tasks.

I will begin and end this article with Trust. You want to be able to trust that your Virtual Assistant will...

- be compatible with your personality, someone 'you can work with'.
- have values that match your own.
- have strong computer skills
- have abilities that compliment ours.
- be organized and able to multitask
- have a positive attitude and willingness to do what you need.
- be reliable and easy to work with, consistent in the quality of the work they produce for you - time and time again.
- a good listener and able to translate what you say to a visual design.
- experienced. Hire a professional - this is their only business not just their hobby or something they are doing part time.

Let me tell you a little secret I have learned about Virtual Assistants: *The attitude you appreciate the most from a Virtual Assistant is that they share and understand your marketing goals- able to give you suggestions and ideas that you hadn't thought of.* Two heads are better than one!

You want to be very confident in your Virtual Assistant's skill and the longer you work together the more you will know their strengths and specialties. At the 'end of the day' would your Virtual Assistant say that YOU: were easy to deal with, provided content on time, paid your bill promptly, let them know how much you value their work? It takes consistency over time from both of you to build trust.

What would you do if they left you high and dry with little notice to find someone else? A word to the wise, always have another Virtual Assistant in mind just in case the relationship for a number of possible reasons - with your current one - ends.

Be creative in assigning tasks to a Virtual Assistant. Find out what they shine at and figure out how to maximize their talents for you and your clients. We jointly designed a promotions service for business owners with just this value added bonus in mind.

Be honest about how much time you can add to your home and work life when you are spending less time on office work. One of the most important tasks our Virtual Assistant does is to maintain our main database and segregated lists as part of our marketing plan. What jobs can you give away that would add some consistency to your marketing this year? What could they do month after month for you to increase your marketing image? Something as simple as sending in regular press releases on your behalf.

If you trust that you are being charged a fair rate, it doesn't much matter if it's by the hour or a monthly contract rate. As long as you believe you are not being taken advantage of your relationship will have smooth sailing. Keep the lines of communication open. This is a relationship like any other that has to be founded in honesty.

Tips on How to Choose

1. Shop around and compare at least 3
2. Ask for references from their clients in just the last 6 months
3. Align your needs to your VA's specialties

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How to Choose a Business or Personal Coach

'Or what do you want and how do you get there?'

Suddenly the **popular media is abuzz** with coaching. Entire daytime television shows are devoted to it and big-name authors are adding coaching to their repertoires. **But just what is it?**

CoachVille's definition of coaching is simple: **Coaching is inspiring an individual or team to produce a desired result through personalized teaching, expanding awareness and designing environment.**

With roots in the personal development work of the **last 30 years, coaching has evolved** into a profession that straddles many disciplines and enhances existing modalities. Coaching is an ideal add-on to training and consulting and is finding its way into corporations and churches.

The **greatest source of growth** in coaching is actually in the non-coach sector, meaning that managers become more coach-like in their dealings, ministers weave in coaching skills to their professional skill set, even accountants round out their style to including a coaching approach.

Founder Thomas Leonard developed a vision of growth that included specific, measurable outcomes **by 2005 that included a predicted 100,000 members**. At 2005 his Coachville website claimed 67,201 Members and 3,946 Coach Trainees in 139 Countries. There are now dozens of Coach Training universities and 2 main credentialing bodies.

WHY DO PEOPLE HIRE A PERSONAL COACH?

It's important to recognize why people hire a personal coach.

There are 3 primary reasons;

first, they either want to reach a goal, make a change or solve a problem. Almost all coaching comes down to those 3 things.

The 2nd reason is that they feel a coach can help them do this faster.

Then, 3rd, they want to find a partner to help them with whatever they're working on. People love synergy, support, etc.

The whole coaching thing got popular from personal trainers. People want to go beyond what they can do by themselves. Many coaching clients put large challenges on themselves, and they think that if they hire a coach they have a better chance of solving the problems, reducing the risk, etc. (Thomas Leonard)

Business Coaching works for several reasons:

- the **synergy** between you and the Business Coach creates momentum.
- by working together you **gain greater clarity**, making it **easier to find solutions**.
- you **no longer suffer from the isolation** of the business owner.
- you **develop new business skills**, which translate into **greater success**.

- **goals are set that 'naturally pull' you** rather than require you to 'push yourself'.

Personal coaches help people: adopt healthy lifestyles, make wise career decisions, improve relationships, and plan for their future. Coaches vary in their methods, but most ask tough questions, brainstorm and nudge clients into remaking themselves. They help clients formulate plans of action, then break them down into specific steps with deadlines.

Ideally, the coach **follows up with phone calls or e-mails** to make sure the client has stayed on track and to provide encouraging but objective feedback.

Accountability is big. They frequently asks clients: "What are you going to do? By when will you do it, and how will I know you've done it?"

Coaches are careful to **distinguish themselves from therapists**, coaches often have similar access to the most intimate concerns of their clients. They say they refer clients to therapists when they sense a serious psychological problem. (P.W. Biederman)

Tips on How to Choose a Business or Personal Coach

There are many benefits to working with a coach, and finding the right one to work with is crucial. Before you invest your precious time, energy and money...

Take the time to do your research. Spend some time learning about coaching. Find out about coach credentialing and decide what qualifications you want in a coach.

Ask someone who has worked with a coach, ask about their experience and ask their opinion about coaching as an option for you.

Know your objectives for working with a coach. Jim Doyle, author of the book, "The Business Coach A Game Plan for the New Work Environment", stresses the importance of holding yourself accountable when working with a coach, and recommends setting realistic goals. Don't pretend to know more than your coach does. Listen to your coach and be willing to learn, change, and adapt to the new skills, attitudes and behaviors that you are acquiring. Be ready to put them into practice.

Determine what you are willing to invest in time and money. The average cost is approx \$150. an hour. Some are less, some are more.

Shop around to find the best coach for you, **Interview at least 3** coaches.

Possible Questions to Ask a Business Coach:

How many years of corporate or business experience do you have?

Do you have any experience negotiating **commercial leases**?

What is the **largest staff** you have ever worked with?

Do you have a **personal sales track record**?

What industries do you have experience in?

Do you have any **samples of any startup, marketing or expansion business plans** that you have written?

What are **your business coaching specialties**?

Do you **collaborate with any other coaches** with other expertise?

Do you work with any **companies outside of Victoria**?

Can you provide **references**?

Other Questions to ask

What training programs have you participated in?

Do you attend conferences for coaches?

Are you credentialed?

How can I contact you between sessions?

How would you handle this scenario? (Give the coach problem that you are challenged by and ask how they would coach you on that issue).

When making your decision, it is important to **trust your "gut" feelings**; you need to feel comfortable with the coach you select to work with. It's like hiring a doctor or accountant, do not stop until you find the one you are comfortable with.

More and more people are using coaches. But it's not just for working out or training for a sport. People who have worked in a variety of fields--from money management to career counseling, from teaching to homemaking--are offering their services as coaches. Their **clients? People who need to learn life skills.**

When you hire a coach you are making an investment in your business AND yourself.

Linda Conn launched VictoriaBusinessTalk.com in January 2004 after a year of research into current trends in marketing - and the coaching industry .

Linda's business coaching practice now includes corporate contracts as well as startup and expanding companies both in the Victoria area and on the mainland.

Linda combines over 12 years of self-employment with a previous teaching career of 18 years. Clients work with her on all aspects of their business planning - idea viability, personal branding, developing a niche specialty, marketing and staff training strategies.

"How to Choose A Networking Venue"

Do you struggle with

- why do I have to go to Networking events when all my business comes from referrals?
- why should I continue to go to a networking venue that has never brought me a new client?

Business people who seek networking venues are challenged by....

1. - making themselves attend a networking venue even when they can't see any solid business coming from regular attendance.

You will quickly run out of steam for networking if you are looking for a measurable 'return on investment'. We recommend you do some research on the topic of relationship marketing to understand the best that networking can offer you. We invite you to listen to the free 1/2 hour audio at Part 2 #3
http://www.victoriabusinessstalk.com/teleclass_free_audio.htm

'What is Relationship Marketing' - hard-to-track, messy-to-test, difficult-to-justify...Now the good news: It absolutely works! It's hands down the most effective marketing strategy on the planet. (Michael Katz).

2. - just how to describe themselves when asked or if they have the opportunity.

There are many resources on how to craft 'an elevator speech or audio logo'. I believe the best formula is this: Have a one-line opener that you use first whenever you have the chance. Try to make it sound fresh and not memorized. The next line can be tailored more to the person or the group and the 3rd line should give an example, paint a picture of you working with someone similar to your audience. If you still get more time, take it back to the listener and ask questions about THEIR specific problems - any more and YOU may be talking too much!

3. - finding the best networking venues to invest their money and time.

Finding the right networking venues is a challenge and we invite you get a free copy of '**Networking Venue Reviews**' for Business people in the Victoria Area found at <http://www.victoriabusinessstalk.com/archive.htm>

You can also find association and club listings at the public library and watch the events section of the daily newspaper. When you find one networking venue you enjoy, ask the other attendees what else they belong to. You may find you enjoy the same ones they do.

I recommend at least 3 venues a year. Be careful what you choose. Are you going to enjoy a 7 a.m. breakfast or an evening meeting? You will be budgeting your time and money - you will want to get involved as much as you can.. so perhaps start with a budget for dues and events and a 'budget for that time commitment' too!

We don't always attend venues to find our ideal clients - sometimes we have other motives for our particular choices in a year.

Consider some of these:

- meeting **new faces in new places?**
- getting involved in a favourite **Charity**
- or a Professional industry **Associations**
- or **Business Support Groups** like clubs or a chamber of commerce

How about a venue chosen **For Fun** - or one that is part of a hobby?

Will you choose a venue based on **your customer demographic or your industry interests?**

How about simply for **social value** or to enhance your companies' **credibility** and image....?

Whatever reasons you have for choosing your networking venues, 'If it isn't fun, if it becomes a chore, it is time for a change'.

Summer is a good time to evaluate last years networking and make plans for those venues that start again in the fall. Is this the year you consider an executive position or is this the year you phase out of a past membership?

Summer is also a good time to 'freshen up that spiel' or what you say when you describe your business. The world of business is changing. We can no longer hold the floor at a gathering by just describing the features and benefits of what we offer. Change your perspective from "Here's what I do" to "What do you need?" The networker of today understands personal and relationship marketing.

Remember...*Relationship marketing is about building close relationships over time - and that has to include networking!!!*

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"How to Choose A Bookkeeper"

Bookkeepers are like doctors, web masters, and Virtual Assistants - do not stop until you find one you are comfortable with!

In writing this I am taking for granted that you wisely understand the importance of not trying to wear all the hats in your office, spreading yourself too thin and courting burnout. A business owner's time is far too valuable to spend on making journal entries! Right?!

So, I will assume you are considering getting your 1st bookkeeper or trying to decide if you should keep the one you've got and that you are a solo-entrepreneur or small business.

The actual process of keeping your books is easy to understand when broken down into three steps.

1. receipts are kept (or other acceptable records) of every payment to and every expenditure by your business.
2. income and expenditure records are summarized on some periodic basis (daily, weekly, or monthly).
3. summaries are used to create financial reports that will tell you specific information about your business.

Some common questions I hear in my business coaching...

- *Is my business too small for a bookkeeper?*
- *Where does bookkeeping end and accounting start?*
- *Can't I have just an accountant?*

Is my business too small for a bookkeeper?

That can only be answered by a bookkeeper who has looked at your needs. Lets put it this way: if they are willing to do 3 hours a month, that's small and is still very worth the less aggravation in your life.

Where does bookkeeping end and accounting start?

Bookkeeping is the recording of a business's financial transactions. It's the first step of the accounting process, which also includes classifying, reporting and analyzing financial data.

Bookkeepers are responsible for organizing and tracking receipts, canceled checks and other records generated by financial transactions. Bookkeepers chronologically record all transactions - cash disbursements, cash receipts, sales and purchases, and others - in a journal and post the journal entries to a general ledger of accounts, which are used to prepare monthly financial statements.

So an accountant takes the data and analyzes it in ways that give you useful information about your business. They can advise you on the best systems needed for your bookkeeping.

Can't I have just an accountant?

Sure you can if you are doing your bookkeeping yourself and still bringing the accountant standardized statements to interpret and do your taxes. BUT if you are thinking of taking shoe boxes of receipts to that accountant - Stop! You do not want to pay the hourly rate for an accountant to just make entries that a bookkeeper can do at a fraction of the cost. I think the ideal is finding an accounting firm that has its own in-house bookkeepers.

When starting out to find a bookkeeper you must **start at the end** not the beginning. You are choosing a bookkeeper for 2 main reasons. **To end up with** records that the tax department will recognize, and **to end up with** numbers you can relate to, numbers that will tell you what is happening with your business.

Some tips on choosing a bookkeeper:

Very few businesses today still do bookkeeping by hand on ledger sheets. So ...when you are choosing a bookkeeper - you unfortunately these days are also choosing a software system. You are agreeing to be happy with the reports the system they are using generates. Make sure you see and understand samples of the reports that a bookkeeper routinely will provide you with before you choose them. Talk to your business bank. Do they have a download available for your monthly statements? This could save you some (not all!) bookkeeping costs and help determine which software (bookkeeper) you want. For example my TD bank offers monthly statements downloaded to several software options like Microsoft Money and QuickBooks. **Choose a bookkeeper that uses the software that you want.**

Choose a bookkeeper that is willing to give you references.

Do they have any other clients in your industry? Ask for those names and numbers to call. Ask friends and other associates who they use and ask for an interview appointment.

It is also going to take time and money to get your books set up to start with. Expect to spend anywhere from \$300. to \$1000. for most small businesses. You then pay an hourly fee on a monthly basis and after a few months will be able to predict what this regular cost will be in your cash flow.

Do a little research into the range of prices bookkeepers charge in your area. Here you can find bookkeepers from \$15. - \$50. per hour. Watch out for an overpriced bookkeeper who will want to give you more statements and meetings than you need to justify their price. You need just the basics: monthly entries and reports.

Make sure your new bookkeeper agrees to your payment schedule. If you want monthly invoices from them, make sure you get them - don't let them rack up a large bill and then surprise you with it! **Choose (keep?) a bookkeeper that you trust is charging a fair and timely rate for their services.**

Give your bookkeeper your receipts and statements within 2 weeks of the following month. DO NOT JUST trust that the entries are being made and 'things are unfolding as they should'. **Choose (keep?) a bookkeeper that is willing to**

report to you monthly. Ask for a download of your records to a disc every month that is returned to you with the previous month's envelope or folder. File those paper records so that they can be accumulated and stored for at least 7 years. Keep a backup disc.

Choose (keep?) a bookkeeper that will give you the level of involvement in your business you want. Do you want a relationship with someone who has opinions about how you are running your business or someone who just makes the entries and gives you the reports.

Choose (keep?) a bookkeeper whose personality compliments yours. For example...you are not paying them to make you feel like a bad child! You must feel comfortable with them AND be absolutely sure they do not talk about your business to others.

And lastly choose (keep?) a bookkeeper who rolls with the punches, who doesn't abandon you when a month of entries isn't quite the usual. Been there, done that.

Oh - and when you find a bookkeeper that you can live with, remember to find ways to show them that you appreciate them - beyond just having your records and their payment ready.... in a timely manner!

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"How to Choose A Business Partner"

This could be a short article. In a word? DON'T!

The *best* partnerships evolve between people who have come to know, like and trust each other first. Read next month's article on Strategic Alliances PLEASE! *before* you wade into the treacherous waters of partnerships. Ever heard the expression 'A partnership is a ship that should sail?' - we have all heard more bad stories about failed partnerships than good ones with happy endings.

Startups often give in to the allure of a possible partnership. Why not they chant?! We can share the load, financing and marketing with the credibility of two instead of one, it is more exciting and less scary for two than one!?

When the excitement wears off and the fears grow, a startup partnership that didn't begin with the know, like and trust factor first is often doomed.

OK. So what if you are reading this because you are an established business owner with the need or opportunity to take on a partner.

Is there anything you can do to insure some success before you begin?

Having a good rapport and a shared vision isn't enough. The most successful partnerships I have worked with were between two people who were almost mirror opposites!

- young/older
- inexperienced/experienced
- single/family oriented
- even tempered/unpredictable
- dreamer/practical
- tough/soft
- visionary/systems focused
- good with numbers/not good with numbers
- calm/high energy

Perhaps use this list to start to look at the strengths and weaknesses you each bring to the table. What business skills are you weak in that a partner could balance you off in - and vice versa?

Haven't found that perfect someone yet? Colleen DeBaise (March 30, 2006) has some tips to speed up the process...

Strategies

Think of yourself as a recruiter, looking to fill a job. Figure out exactly what you need in a partner and look for people who are able to fill the gaps in your own skill set.

Put the job description in writing

Detailing what you seek in a partner serves many purposes. Not only does it force you to pinpoint the qualities you want in a business mate, but it also helps you sift

through interested parties who don't meet the criteria. A written job description also makes it easier to "explain to your sister whose husband has been unemployed for four years that he doesn't fit the bill," says Laura S. Hill, a career coach who founded the firm Careers In Motion in New York. The description can also be emailed to interested parties and your network of friends, family and business contacts. That way, "people will know who to refer to you," she says.

Pound the pavement

Not only do you email the job description to everyone and anyone you know, but check with alumni associations and industry groups who might be able to place the posting on listservs or job boards. Attend networking events and confess to everyone you can!

Take it slow

Keep in mind, once you've found a potential partner, the process of cementing your relationship — much like in romance — can't be hurried along. Spend time getting to know a potential partner before diving in.

If you find that person you are willing to risk a partnership with, make sure you have a legal partnership agreement in place that clearly spells out how this partnership is going to end. A good partnership agreement leads to realistic estate planning that covers each partner and their families.

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"How to Choose A Strategic Alliance"

First and most important: One good strategic alliance can launch a new company or revive an existing one. If you do only one thing to market your business, seek one good strategic alliance.

Second most important? Try to have MORE than one!

Strategic alliances can:

- enhance brand identity
- connect with more customers
- attract better employees
- enhance competitiveness
- develop new products
- help keep up with technology
- save time and money

What is a Strategic Alliance? Quite simply 2 companies who share the same target market. *But that's competition you say?* Not in the new world of doing business...

One of the fastest growing business trends is the increasing number of strategic alliances - given the pressures companies are facing today, many have been forced to admit this just may be the answer to staying competitive.

'Business eCoach' tells us: On an average, fast-growing companies are engaged in 5 different types of strategic alliances that result in as much as 18% of their revenues.

So before we talk about how to choose a strategic alliance - lets look at **some different types**. Joint marketing & promotion are the most common.

Other types are partnering with a brand leader, a former employer, a key customer, joint production, joint research and development - or forming a cross-sector alliance. A synergistic alliance is with a company that improves on your core weaknesses or recognizes the value of your core strengths.

(If you want to know more about the different types of strategic alliances and how to take care of them, listen to our Part One #2 at <http://www.LindaConn.com/audiolibrary.htm>)

A very simple example of a marketing alliance would be complimentary businesses partnering to produce a 'Life Makeover' Seminar - sponsored by a makeup artist, professional organizer, nutritionist, personal trainer, personal chef and a fashion expert.

How to choose:

- Look for complimentary assets - the skills, resources, contacts and reputation each company can bring to the table.
- How available are they? Ideally, try to meet or work together weekly.

- You cannot create an alliance without trust. You must have a sufficient degree of trust in order to be able to create value together. How well do you know them?

Tips:

- This is business - do not make it a personal friendship or source of advice for other areas of your business.
- Treat your alliance like your best customer, return their calls first.
- Aim to deliver twice as many referrals for them as you expect back.
- Be transparent in what you want from the alliance.
- Keep focused on the intent of the alliance, but be prepared to modify your agreement and processes if necessary.
- Acknowledge that the value of the alliance will someday diminish and be prepared for a painless ending. This is true whether the agreement is based upon a handshake or a well-drafted contract.

Where to look:

- Support a cause or event where you can meet like-minded businesses.
- Public speaking is one of the best ways to increase your visibility rapidly.
- Be in a trade show and aim to have a conversation with as many other booths as you can.
- Finding a local strategic alliance is best done through networking.
- Listen for other businesses who seem to think and operate the same way you do - then get creative on how you can work together.

In his book, [The Luck Factor](#), Richard Wiseman suggests that people who are lucky are skilled at creating, noticing, and acting upon chance opportunities. Look and listen for possible alliances - everywhere you go and remember - finding and growing strategic alliances can be the most rewarding part of your marketing plan.

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How to Choose a Graphic Artist

The first mistake people make is in thinking they are choosing a Graphic Artist for the style of their design. **Yuh? You say! Let me explain:**

- Graphic Artists or Designers are easy to find. You won't have to look too far to find one. (Translation for Artists? Your industry is very competitive and you need to make it easy for a new client to choose you...more on this later...Translation for clients? It's a buyers market, you can expect value added top service and competitive pricing).
- choosing a design style is very intuitive, you either like what you see or you don't. Ask to look at various samples of their work. Try to point out 'I like this one because' and 'I don't like this'... Think fonts and colours. Have some collected samples of your own ready of other designs you like - and don't like....more on this later...
- what Designers know and will never tell you is that you can hate or love a design from an experienced Designer just as easily as a novice. Your next door neighbour's nephew may be able to give you something you like more than the busiest design firm in town.

So where do you start? Start with embracing this idea that you don't need an experienced Artist, what you need is great service and demanding that great service is what will make your design experience a success NOT the actual design! The quality of the actual design is a given, controlled by YOU! You will say yes or no to it *intuitively* to match what YOU want.

So this article will focus mostly on how to choose a Graphic Artist or Designer based on good value added customer service.

Before I do that, I CAN offer you a few of my personal biases about design:

Be very careful incorporating a symbol into a design:

- it is often meaningless and confusing to others. 'It was the symbol on a church door I saw on a great trip to france....'?????
- it is often a nightmare (therefore expensive) to reproduce, think polo shirt logos and fax covers.

Seriously consider using a topographical logo (all words) and even better just your own name...I call that triple branding....an easily recognisable business name, colours AND your name. Makes business name protection cheaper and easier too, but that's for another topic!

Be very careful choosing colours:

- 1st of all, if you were my business coaching client I would be giving you a choice of '2 plus 1' colours only. A maximum of 2 main colours and one optional

one. The optional one is intended to be used as an accent, think like home decorating with a coloured toss cushion in a room that is basically two other main colours.

- check how the colours you want will translate to a website 1st. You can save yourself a lot of grief if you fall in love with internet colours 1st, rather than trying to make website colours match what you already have used in print. They are not always the same. I can tell you from experience my perfect Revlon red on my print materials was difficult to match when it came time for web design!

How to Choose a Graphic Artist or Designer based on good value added customer service, some tips:

Before you start:

- if they tell you they are busy and will fit you in...run...say no thank you!
- watch out using someone you have known a long time as we tend to then bend our own rules. We get the most burned by people we make assumptions about. Remember disappointment has its roots in unrealistic expectations.
- ask for a reference from a customer similar to you in the past year.
- try to get a starting quote. If you find a graphic artist who will work from a contract price and not by the hour, call me. I am collecting their names on my recommended list!

File types:

- will you need your design for any of all of these?

business cards

stationery

website

fax covers

banner

email signatures

- for example: for print, like business cards, stationery, fax covers - the best file format is a tif. For website and email messages, the best file format is a gif or jpg. A banner needs a pdf.

- be very specific about what you need and are ordering. Consider how many different file types you will need. How much will they charge you for each file type? I have dealt with a few Artists who hold your design hostage, making you request and pay for every file type.

Cost/billing

- get your order in writing, be very specific about your deadlines and what when and how you will be billed.

- before they start - ask how they bill. Ask to see a sample of a past bill so you clearly understand how yours will look. Ask questions, how will your bill be different from this one? You don't want something like this as a surprise:

edit #1 \$75.

edit #2 \$75.

edit #3 \$75.

edit #4

etc!

- what will happen if they end up using your design ideas more than creating one for you from scratch? If this happens, will the bill be less than the original quote?

In summary, I would like to say I *really am a fan* of Graphic Artists (although in this article I have been somewhat hard on them!) Yes, you need your materials designed by a Graphic Artist...*I can smell a homemade design a mile away.* It's all about image. I recommend you spend as much as you can afford on professional design - and I hope this article helps you get your monies worth!

Note to Graphic Artists: I hope this article also helps you to design your service to make it easy for a potential client to choose you in a marketplace where they have lots of choices. If you end up incorporating any or all of my customer service ideas into your sales procedures, state your value added features clearly on everything about your business. *Be very proud that you understand and care about what the client is looking for!*

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