

The Myth of Cheap Crowd-Sourced Design

“There are a ton of designers who will work cheap, so let’s get online and save a bundle!” Maybe you’ve heard this, or been tempted yourself, but stop and ask one of the most important strategic questions. “What are we trying to accomplish?” Most likely the answer isn’t to make something pretty. More often, it will be to add value to the business or drive results.

Design can have a powerful impact on a business when it’s part of the marketing whole. Here at Pepper Group we call this whole the SPICE Effect™—**S**olid Strategy, good **P**lanning, carefully considered **I**ntegration, **C**reative approach, message and design, solid **E**xecution, and the ability to measure **E**ffectiveness. Treat design as a single commodity and you will not only considerably weaken your overall marketing results, but you could open your company up to some unexpected risks.

Commodity design is plentiful. One site lets designers do work for free, and get paid only if they “win.” This might sound like a dream come true for a marketer, but think about it. An average \$1,000 design project gets 80 entries. If I were a designer, with those odds I should be putting \$12.50 worth of work into each entry. Even if I think I’m 3x better than the average Joe, my now 3 in 80 chance means \$37.50 worth of time per entry.

One might argue that \$37.50 is a lot of time in some countries, but that misses the point. Regardless of where you source it, \$1,000 worth of focused creativity can be much more valuable than 80 “pretty pictures.” More importantly, when a designer has \$37.50 to spend per effort, can you know with certainty that someone won’t, either accidentally or on purpose, infringe on a design copyright or misapply a font or stock photo license? These things, if they become issues, are not their problems. They are yours. I’ve witnessed this firsthand and it’s not pretty. The downside risk is tremendous for a few dollars in savings upfront.

Sure, from time to time there is a case that can be made for commodity design, but when the stakes are high, and your goal is to build value or drive results, you must look at design as an investment and not a commodity expense. Even more critically, remember that design is an integral part of a whole marketing effort. It doesn’t stand alone.

