

Finding and Working With a Cover Designer

Choosing the right designer and understanding the design process will make your book design experience a pleasant one.

by Michele DeFilippo

Finding a designer is easier than ever, now that the internet is literally at our fingertips. But how do you determine whether a designer is qualified or if they will provide good customer service?

1. USE YOUR NETWORK

- **Ask friends and colleagues** in the publishing industry who they recommend for cover design. They'll be happy to tell you about their experiences, both good and bad.
- Talk to designers at industry-related functions. If you feel comfortable talking to your designer in a casual setting, it's likely that you'll work well together later.
- Look at covers you like and contact the designer, who may be listed on the copyright page or in the acknowledgements.
- Explore designer websites; search for "book designers." Information about their services and samples of their best work can be found here.
- When evaluating website samples, try to look "through" the subject matter and evaluate the underlying design skill. A good designer can design a book on any subject, so don't disqualify a designer simply because their samples don't happen to match your subject matter.
- Be careful of friends and relatives who claim to be artists. They may not understand the complexities of preparing a book cover for print. If you do want to use a friend's painting or sketch, take the artwork to a cover designer who knows how to integrate it with a title for maximum impact.

2. REQUEST PROPOSALS

- Once you have narrowed the field to a few qualified designers, call or write to request a proposal.

- Be prepared to discuss the size of your book, the subject matter and your wishes for the cover. Do you want a custom illustration on the cover? A royalty-free stock photo? Or will you provide artwork? Do you need printed books in time for a scheduled event? Your designer needs this information to give you an accurate price.
- Note how long it takes the designer to respond to your request. Slow response time could indicate slow service later.
- You should receive a specific, written quote that clearly states what is included in the price. The estimate should also specify the amount of revision time that is included, and the hourly rate for revisions that exceed that time.
- Ask questions about the quote. A professional designer will be happy to explain anything that is unclear and will not become impatient with you. We want the job to go smoothly, too!

3. CHOOSE A DESIGNER WHO OFFERS:

- Book cover design experience. A graphic designer experienced in ads or brochures may not understand the technicalities of book cover design.
- Quality of work and a style that appeals to you.
- Interest in your subject matter, your title, and in your goals.
- Professionalism in communications with you.
- Price is always a consideration, but should never be the primary one. Cover design is always a collaboration and the best results are achieved with a lot of time and interaction between designer and client. Be suspicious of low bids. Instead of a unique, creative cover, you may wind up with a template that has been used hundreds of times before.

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4. INFORMATION YOUR DESIGNER NEEDS

- Manuscript or at least a synopsis of the book.
- Final title of the book and author's name as it will appear. Changing this text later creates difficulties.
- Any other text or logos that are to appear on the front of the book
- Book size and the number of colors your cover will print in.
- Your vision for the cover
- Your audience/market
- Whether the book is part of a series
- Any other information you feel will help the designer understand your book.

5. STARTING THE DESIGN PROCESS

- Your designer will create several concepts of the front cover. These "roughs" are meant to gauge your preferences and establish a direction only. (see next page.)
- Review these designs and share your thoughts. It's helpful to your designer to point out what you *like* about each design so that additional concepts will build on the positives and move in a direction that appeals to you.

6. WHAT MAKES A GOOD COVER? (Objective)

Your cover **MUST** meet all of the following criteria to be effective:

- The title should be large and easily readable. There should be good contrast between the title and the background.
- Simple is better! The cover should tell the story in one quick glance. Avoid covers that are too "busy" or that contain fancy fonts or too many competing elements.
- Your cover should look good in very small sizes as well as in black and white, because it will often appear in advertising this way. Ask your designer to show you a printout both ways.

7. WHAT MAKES A GOOD COVER? (Subjective)

- There are thousands of ways to design a book cover, and everyone who views the concepts will suggest changes. Always evaluate changes against the objective criteria above to make sure they will not destroy the effectiveness of your cover. Keep your eye on the goal of selling books!

- Designers want happy clients but we also want to give you a good cover. If your designer resists a change you're requesting, please listen to the reasons given and understand that your designer has your best interest at heart.

8. FINALIZING THE COVER

- Once a front cover concept has been chosen, the back cover and spine will be designed and a high-resolution file will be prepared for printing.
- The printer provides the final spine width based on the number of pages and the paper to be used.
- Your proofreader and/or editor should review the complete cover for any last-minute text changes.
- The printer will send a proof for a final review before the presses roll, but changes at this stage can be expensive, so try to take care of all the details before the job goes to press.

9. REMEMBER TO HAVE FUN!

- There is no such thing as a perfect book cover! So relax, do your best, take the pressure off yourself, and remember to enjoy the process, because writing a book is a great accomplishment!

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The Cover Design Process • Which One Would You Choose?

