Presenting your Design Concept to your Client

One of the most difficult steps in any design process is selling that design to your client and getting an approval sign-off.

A lot of people would think that if you've understood your client and their brief well enough, made the right decisions and put lots of hard work in, your design should sell itself and the meeting will go of very smoothly. But as much as we would like our designs to speak for themselves, walking a client through the design and discussing comments always has a stronger impact and a higher probability for approval.

Here are a few tips and tricks to help you turn this fearful step into something you would enjoy and look forward to

Make well researched and studied design decisions

Assuming you came up with a great design, you will still need to think through and know your design well. In order to sell something and gain approval you will need to be able to explain why certain decisions were made, this may seem obvious, but some designers almost always make design decisions without really knowing why as its easy to work on instinct or not fully think through decisions as they're being made. DO NOT fall into this trap, it will come back and hurt you when its time to sign-off your designs.

Know your Client

It is highly important to know who you will be presenting to, this is vital if presenting a commercial proposal, dont trust that your clients will simply give you this information and dont rely on assumptions.

Ask them specifically who will be making the decisions, doing this will help you tailor your presentation and could influence your design decisions as well, but beware even if you are 100% sure who will be reviewing your work and who is making decisions, always be prepared to present your design to just about anyone, sometimes a new decision maker will be introduced in the middle of a project or even in the middle of the presentation itself, and usually you will find that this person is someone who's opinion carry's a lot of weight, this will happen from time to time, so always be prepared.

Set Expectations

It's important to set yourself up for success from the beginning, tell your client what you're going to do and how the design process is going on, explain your design decisions and tell your client why they are a good fit. Tell them they are going to love the concept you're proposing before showing them anything, the more you can be in the mood the better it should go.

Always remember that your clients hired you to help them as a professional consultant, they will let you lead them if you step up and take the reins from the beginning.

Getting feedback

The "I do not like it" kind of feedback will not do, you need to be able to extract exactly what it is they don't like about the concept with specific detailed. Also ascertain the reason for not liking something, make them really have to think about what they're telling you. Not only will it help get your designs approved, it will also give you much better feedback to work with when it comes to revisions, if need be.

Defend, but never become defensive

Be prepared to defend yourself without being defensive, chances are you will get some feedback you do not agree with, sometimes it could really damage the

integrity of the design. Your goal here is to not let your clients do something they will regret later on but take care, the last thing you want to do is become defensive. Don't let your ego get in the way, a defensive attitude will clearly show and you'll damage your credibility, the design itself and possibly loose the job.

When it comes to the smaller stuff, go ahead and let the client win, it's not worth fighting over something trivial, pick your battles and fight those only worth fighting.

Listen

The most important thing during a design review is listening, you have to understand your client's questions and feedback. This simple fact of listening and letting them share how they feel about your work will help you sell it, always remember you are working for and with them, they are an essential part of the design process.

Be patient in your replies, listen first, think it over then reply, do not disagree or reply with the first word that comes out of the client's mouth, do not interrupt your client, give them space to talk, the more they talk the more likely they will listen to you.

Conclusion

Learning how to sell a design is an educational process, you'll get better as you gain more experience interacting with clients, but always remember, the idea is to get the best possible design for your client, **not for you.**

Remember when giving your presentation that you have some cheat cards if you are not confident that you'll remember everything that you should discuss/tell them about the concept. Make sure that you cover off on the following:
- The theme/concept & how it meets the brief
- What atmosphere is proposed to be created

- Walk through the floor plan(s)
- Explain the proposed colour scheme
- If there are patterns & textures in the proposal explain them
- Explain how all the elements of the concept relate
- Discuss the reason behind your choices
- Point out the focal points
- Summary the concept
- Always finish with the advantages this concept will provide the client

Always use the correct terms and names and use 'design' language. Remember that this is a concept, you have not actually completed the project so be sure that you use the words

"what I propose........" or "what I'm recommending is….."

NEVER
"what I've done......." or "what I will do........"