

Good, Fast, Cheap: Pick Two

Or, How to avoid getting stuck with schlock

by JANE PELLICCIOTTO

Google the phrase “Good Fast Cheap Pick Two” and you get over 78 million search results. There are only 1.7 million for “Fountain of Youth.” Apparently people desire good, fast and cheap more than they do the secret to staying young! Many requests like this are in various online venues like LinkedIn. Is it the economy? Is there a growing sense of entitlement? Or is it more benign than that — businesses don’t realize that a request for good, fast *and* cheap are not useful descriptors in seeking, and getting, what they really need?

To ask for and receive all three is mostly a fantasy. Even two are a stretch, as you’ll see below. But many businesses, especially nonprofits, often find themselves hard pressed to eliminate two of the three. The problem is that your organization deserves good work but the people most likely to deliver good work run from these requests.

You wouldn’t buy a car, build a bridge, hire an electrician or find a mate with these three criteria. Well, possibly, if you didn’t care about the results.

But let’s break these down so we can see the impacts of the different scenarios.

What you get when you can only pick two

Fast and Cheap. With this option, high-quality is likely to suffer in the form of creative output, research time, accuracy, and ability to test and consider options. Make sure you are comfortable accepting some or all these drawbacks. If a designer does agree to work under these requirements (good ones worth their salt will not), make sure the designer explains what the drawbacks are so you avoid surprises. Visual examples help a designer understand your expectations. Getting on the same page quickly is imperative for *fast*, as there’s no time to waste. (See below for defining good.)

Good and Fast. To get these, extra time beyond the normal work hours is usually involved. This could mean nights or weekends, which usually carry a rush fee. For printing, it might mean paying a premium to bump another job. And outside services like photography or web development might carry their own rush fee.

Good and Cheap. A designer or printing company might lower their rate for an organization in need of services beyond their budget. The project can also be established as pro bono if the organization qualifies in the eyes of the designer. But in order to do good work *and* keep costs down, this project usually cannot be made a high priority. The project will most likely be done only after commitments to full-fee jobs are met.

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Be wary of those who jump to fulfill a request like good, fast and cheap, or even pro bono for that matter. If you leave your criteria as open-ended as this, you'll be unhappy with the results. Only by communicating what good, fast and cheap means to you will you get the results you are looking for.

Better approaches are to:

- Define good.
- Plan to your advantage.
- Have a budget.

These are not novel concepts but if you read below, you'll see the implications of their lack.

Define good.

Develop the ability to evaluate or describe the good you need. This way, you don't waste your time or that of another. Worse is finding out that your visions of *good* don't match after you've already invested time. Share printed samples or website links if you're trying to express your idea of good to a designer. Similarly, request samples if what you're looking for is a printing company.

Use meaningful, universal, descriptive words to paint the right picture for the other party. A good printing company to one person might mean flawless ink coverage. To another it means that the pages are in the right order. These are very different!

Plan to your advantage.

We need *fast* when we don't plan or we are surprised by an opportunity that we want to seize. Many designers and printers will bend over backwards to help a client out in a pinch. And while no one loves transferring their lack of planning to another party (and emergencies do arise), poor planning should be the exception and not the rule.

Use one of your own recent endeavors (an article, press release, proposal, business plan) as a rough indicator of how much time you need to factor in. Most of us are too idealistic and unaware of how much time we spend on tasks. So when it comes time to contracting for services, we expect it pronto. Be as realistic as possible. And if a designer or printing company does bail you out, reward them in the form of patience, money, loyalty, appreciation, creative freedom or a good referral!

We're almost done. >>

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Have a budget.

Second only to planning, budgets are often absent. What many don't realize is that everyone wants affordable — no matter the available funds or the size and caliber of the company. A nonprofit's definition of affordable might be different than that of a for-profit business, but that's also why the word *affordable* is meaningless to use in seeking a designer.

Sending out a request for an affordable designer does two things. First, it indicates that cost alone is the most important thing, over quality and effectiveness (ignoring the concept of *value*). And second, the desperate designers come running and the good ones retreat. You will know soon enough if you can't afford that good one via a simple cost request. Advertising cheap begets cheap.

One approach is to say, "This is how much I have to spend. What can we do with that?" And not, "I need this. How much will it cost?" The desire for cheap without definition leaves you too vulnerable to a mishap. Instead, strive for *value* —the specific benefit you receive at the specific price you pay.

The more well defined and specific these requirements, the more likely you will end up with a timely and cost-effective end product whose quality you are happy with. Your organization deserves the best it can get with the resources available.

