

Maximize Your Marketing Investment with Independent Communication Professionals

Freelancers, independents, solo creative talent – by any name, independent creative professionals (ICPs) can help you make the most of your marketing budget by offering top-notch service without agency overhead.

This category includes strategists, copywriters, proofreaders, editors, speechwriters, print and electronic graphic designers, illustrators, photographers, video producers, multimedia specialists and any other person who uses creativity to help produce communications materials for clients.

When can you use an independent?

Any time you would call in outside help from a creative agency (advertising, marketing, public relations, graphic design), consider using an ICP or team of independents. Some projects or ongoing campaigns benefit from the agency approach of having many resources under one roof. Others, however, can be completed just as well by ICPs, often faster and more economically. Teams of ICPs can work together very effectively.

The best time to consult an ICP is before you begin a project. Find someone who can help you define what your goals are and the best way to achieve them. You don't necessarily need a strategist for this task—if you know you need a brochure, go directly to a copywriter or graphic designer to start. ICPs worth their salt will explore your options with you so you get big impact from even the smallest communications project.

How can you find an ICP?

The best way to find creative talent is through word of mouth. When you see materials you appreciate, ask who produced them. ICPs can refer you to their peers with other specialties, also. Groups such as the Network of Writers and Artists, Inc. (www.nowa.org) can be a great resource.

Before you begin a project, interview several ICPs and ask:

- Who have you worked with and what did you accomplish?
- Have you ever worked on a project like ours?
- What would you envision as the scope of this project?
- What can you bring to this project that someone else might not?
- Can I contact some of your clients to discuss your work?
- Do you have samples of similar jobs that we can discuss?
- How do you price your services, and what are your terms?

How do ICPs Charge for Their Work?

Select the ICP who best suits your needs, rather than the person who charges the least. Your goal is to get a quality product, and sometimes that requires investing a significant amount of money in creative services. Choose the ICP you feel is the best for your needs

and be honest about what you can afford to spend on your project. The ICP will customize services to suit your budget. Another approach is to tell the ICP what you have already budgeted, and ask whether he or she can work within that amount.

Here are a few more tips relating to costs:

- Do not expect fees to be based on word count or artistic complexity. When you buy creative services, you're paying for years of accumulated knowledge about what to leave out, as well as what to put in. A 50-word ad can require more creativity than a 500-word article.
- It's OK to ask, but do not expect fees to be lower if you are a non-profit. The ICP will put as much time into your projects as into something for a Fortune 500 company.
- Ask for and sign an itemized estimate before a job begins.
- Appoint a liaison or point person within your organization. Nothing is more frustrating for an ICP than dealing with several decision-makers on a single project.
- Set reasonable deadlines. Do not call something a rush job unless you are truly in a rush. Be willing to pay 50 to 75% more for true rush projects that require the ICP to drop other jobs in order to complete yours.
- Be flexible and listen to the ICP's ideas.
- Be clear about each party's responsibilities. Will you provide resource material, or will the writer do research? Will the writer find the designer, or will you? Will the graphic designer coordinate printing or will you?
- When a job is completed, give the ICP prompt feedback and payment.

Is an ICP Right for Your Project or Campaign?

If you need help evaluating your options, I can help. I've been an independent marketing communications professional for 20 years and have worked with agencies and many other ICPs in that time. If I can't provide the services you need, I'll help you find an ICP or agency that can. You can reach me by email at Melanie@melaniejdavis.com, or you can call me at 908-722-1632.