



IN-HOUSE ISSUES

THE OUTSIDERS

Need help to fill the shoes of a team member on leave or to fix a computer problem outside the scope of your internal IT department? Follow these tips to find outside creative and technical talent to support your in-house team.

If you manage an in-house creative department, chances are that at some point you've probably needed to bring in outside consultants for either creative or technical support. But as you know, it's an ongoing challenge to find people who have the talent and skill sets to satisfy your team's needs. It also takes a certain type of person to survive and thrive in the corporate culture. Whether you're looking for a freelance designer to develop packaging concepts or a technical consultant to maintain your computers, here are a few tips to make the hunt and hire a bit easier for you:

CREATIVELY SPEAKING

First, find a creative staffing agency that serves the design community and ask to meet with a representative to discuss your needs. There are many to choose from, including The Creative Group, Aquent, BOSS Staffing and Artisan. Designers come in all shapes

and sizes, and finding the right fit can take time. Consider the skills required. Are illustration skills key? Heavy client contact? Do you need a Photoshop guru? A PowerPoint maven? How about production skills? Also, you'll need to discuss hourly rates and what your budget can handle.

Years ago, I found an agency that continued to send me one killer designer after another based on the profile I provided on day one. (I needed a freelance designer to cover for a staff member who was going on vacation for a few weeks.) There were a few clunkers in there, but for the most part I was getting top-shelf talent. Not only was I a happy camper, but the freelancers also appreciated the variety of work and were thrilled to be a part of my department, even if it was for a limited time.

Whenever I need temporary talent, the staffing agency forwards PDFs of résumés and portfolio

ILLUSTRATION BY CHARLES GLAURITZ www.mrglauritz.com

samples for several candidates for me to review. Before I make a commitment, I always arrange an interview with the designer so I can get a sense of his or her personality and communication skills, and determine if this person will play nicely with the rest of my team. It also gives me the opportunity to get an up-close and personal view of the designer's work. Often, designers include work that they had minimal involvement with, so I always ask what their specific contribution was for each project. (I once interviewed a designer who brought printouts of PDF samples of his work and another who didn't even bring a portfolio at all. Neither one got the job.)

Those who did get the job were multitalented, like a combo platter: skilled designers who had the versatility and ability to create compelling designs one day and spend the next day with an X-ACTO blade in their hand, trimming foam board signage and posters without cutting off an appendage. I came to rely on a small group of seasoned professionals who not only were able to have coherent conversations with clients, but who, through their return engagements, became knowledgeable about the company, its products and culture. This, in turn, made my job easier because there was less hand-holding, which increased productivity. In essence, they fit in with the team.

If you hire a freelancer and find that it isn't working out, recruitment agencies will work with you to find the perfect match. It's in their best interest to do so. If you're not getting the caliber of talent you expect, then move on to another agency. And if you're as lucky as I was, you'll eventually develop a partnership with an agency, providing you with a greater sense of security when the heat's on and you need good talent fast.

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

You've got computers. Apple computers. And your IT department doesn't support them, right? Well, you're not alone. One of the many differences between the agency and the in-house corporate design department is the heavy Windows presence that dominates the office landscape. Along with that is the general lack of internal technical support for the Macintosh platform. In the corporate world, Windows rules.

Because the internal IT department wasn't equipped to manage the Apple computers in my department, I had to find an external resource that could provide reliable support. To help build a bridge, I was fortunate to find an outside vendor who was well-versed in both Mac- and PC-speak. And because of this, he immediately gained the trust and respect of the IT group with his knowledge of Macintosh, Windows and Unix platforms. His basic philosophy was that Apple computers are good at some things and Windows at others—they both have a place in this world.

It's up to you to bridge the gap between the two disciplines. Be proactive and open a dialogue with your internal IT team. Invite them over and let them take your Mac Pro out for a spin and experience the beauty of OSX. The 23-inch HD cinema display is usually enough to get anyone hooked. Make them aware of your needs and of the challenges you face regarding

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tech support, and they may be able to assist you in locating a resource.

You also can check out the Apple Consultants Network (www.consultants.apple.com), where you'll find independent technical experts skilled in the setup, use and maintenance of Apple products. They can help you locate a local consultant who specializes in your industry. Shop around and look for someone who can provide the hardware and software support that you require and who also has the diplomacy needed to work with your internal IT group. This is very important, because at some point your external techie will need to work with your internal techie, and it would be great if they worked well with each other.

Once you establish a solid relationship with an outside consultant, set up a schedule so they can periodically tune up your Macs and keep them operating at an optimum performance level. Keeping your systems in tune will mean less downtime and happier designers.

I've developed a good relationship with our internal IT team over the years because I respect their knowledge of all things Windows and have relied on their expertise and services to maintain our server, retrieve back-up data, assist with printer configurations and, more recently, set up the Windows side of our Intel-based Mac Pros. They, in turn, have come to appreciate the beauty, power and function of Apple computers.

Whether you're looking for external technical support or freelance creative assistance, take your time. With a little research and planning, you can gradually build a reliable and solid external support network that will be at your disposal and enable you to focus on the important stuff: your work. **HOW**

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