In-house, agency, or freelance—what's right for me?

Article by Ram Castillo

Filed Under: Inspiration , professional development , career , Article , in-house design , freelancing , Design Job Series

Image by Youth Experimental Studio

Tweet your questions about how to land your dream design job—or just how to get your foot in the door—to our resident career expert @thegiantthinker. We'll publish his answers here each month and keep the conversation going on Twitter @AIGAdesign.

"Here's one often on the minds of our students: in-house, agency, or freelance? What's right for me?"— @aiganeworleans

This is a super common question and I'm glad you asked it. In my experience, a creative communications agency or design studio is ideal, followed by an in-house role, then freelance. And I'll tell you why that order is in your favor as a student or emerging designer.

1. First, you need experience somewhere, anywhere. The best place to build foundations is in idea generation, working quickly with real briefs/live jobs, internal collaboration opportunities, presenting to clients, and understanding how

businesses processes work—and that's best found in an agency. They usually have many different clients, many types of deliverables, and a diverse range of projects. You'll hit the ground running and be thrown in the deep end. This is a good thing. You'll survive, don't worry, but you need to be a sponge in order to accelerate your progress.

2. Working in-house can be equally fast-paced and demanding. If you get this type of opportunity and you've just completed your design course or have two to three years of experience, then take this role. Most of the concerns I hear about taking an in-house job are from emerging designers who feel that they'll end up there forever. This is not true. There's absolutely no way working in-house will hinder your chances of getting a job at an agency or design studio later down the track. What matters is that you learn as much as you can from that organization. All the values and processes still exist in an in-house design department. Who knows, you might love it, especially if you're an in-house designer for a company like Uber, Apple, Pinterest, Instagram, *Vogue*, *Wired*, or Coke.

3. I believe there's a time in one's career to freelance, specifically at a full-time capacity, but I don't recommend it straight out of design school. As a full-time freelancer myself for over three years now, a move I made after working as a full-time employee for agencies and design studios for over eight years, it's important to highlight the many hats that are required as a freelancer.

Not only are you hands on with the creative strategy, ideation, design, and final output, you're also the accountant, the new business manager, the administrative staff, the social media guru, and many other roles. Unless of course you delegate those duties, in which case you're a small studio.

Experience is the best teacher. We've all heard that saying, and it really is true. No matter how intelligent you are or how many diplomas and certificates you've got under your belt, until you're actually working in the real world—with real deadlines, real budgets, and real products—everything is theory.

Carefully consider the three points above, especially when starting out. By having a mixture of in-house and agency experience, you may actually be a more valuable asset, since you've seen both sides of the fence. When it comes to freelancing full-time, you'll know when you're ready (i.e. you have the connections and the financial stability). But by all means, there's nothing stopping you from freelancing with clients after hours and on weekends. I've never known a designer who doesn't do this.

When you've had a minimum of six to eight years of full-time experience, you'll definitely have more to leverage and can be pickier about where you'd like to work, be it a specific field or company.

About the Author:

If you'd like to be a designer, read Ram's internationally industry acclaimed book here:

www.getajobasadesigner.com

-

Ram is an award winning Design Director, Blogger, top ranking Podcaster, Speaker, CreativeLive.com Instructor and Author of the internationally acclaimed book 'How to get a job as a designer, guaranteed'. He's based in Sydney, Australia and in 2012, started the blog GiantThinkers.com which helps thousands of design students and graduates be employed. Ram has since been featured in Communication Arts, HOW magazine, Herman Miller, deFrost*, AIGA.org and Apple.

-

Book: getajobasadesigner.com
Blog: giantthinkers.com
Portfolio: ramcastillo.com
Email: ram@giantthinkers.com
Twitter: @thegiantthinker

Instagram: @thegiantthinker
Periscope: @thegiantthinker
Snapchat: @thegiantthinker

0 Comments   **AIGA website**   ① **Login** ▾

♥ **Recommend**   ☒ **Share**   **Sort by Best** ▾

	Start the discussion…

Be the first to comment.

✉ **Subscribe**   ⒟ **Add Disqus to your site Add Disqus Add**   🔒 **Privacy**

AIGA, the professional association for design
© 2016 AIGA. 233 Broadway, 17th floor New York NY 10279 | 212 807 1990 | terms | contact

Official Sponsor   Follow us

Adobe