

Our Position on Solicitations for Competitions

The School of Design at Carnegie Mellon University would like to work with your organization. However, we discourage proposals for competitions because they are usually a solicitation of design concepts to be produced on a speculative basis by the professionals you are considering.

We do not participate in, or promote projects that essentially ask students to design on “spec.”

More Information about Our Position

National design organizations like the AIGA and the IDSA discourage spec work of this type (<http://www.aiga.org/position-spec-work/>). We caution our students against spec work as such a practice has a number of negative effects:

- 1) It takes work away from professional designers who should be properly compensated for it.
- 2) It does not provide students with a challenging experience (They are not exploring parameters, nor are they asked to solve a high-level problem. Instead they are given tight parameters designed to produce a pre-determined commercial result.)
- 3) It delivers a message to them that spec work is an acceptable practice.

We hope you understand our concern—we do not want companies to take offense, but rather to understand that upholding the ethics of the discipline our students are entering into is part of our charge as educators.

We also understand that companies like yours may not be trying to get as much work as possible for free, but might genuinely be trying to offer students a real-world experience.

We do enter into industry-sponsored projects with companies, however these relationships do not mimic a “work for hire” situation. The company provides students with a broad, high-level problem to solve and the solutions produced at the culmination of this process are not finished designs that will be used by the company as if they had paid for finished work. Rather, these agreements are a means of helping the sponsoring company to expand their knowledge about a particular challenge they are grappling with.

Your Next Steps

A more effective approach to requesting speculative work is to ask designers to submit examples of their work from previous assignments as well as a statement of how they would approach your project. You can then judge the quality of the designer’s previous work and his or her way of thinking about your business. The designer you select can then begin to work on your project by designing strategic solutions to your criteria while under contract to you, without having to work on speculation up front.

Please let us know if you would like to post your proposed opportunity as a job, we would be happy to help. Please send an email to jobs@design.cmu.edu. If you are interested in discussing a sponsored project with us, please send an email to info@design.cmu.edu.