COMMUNICATING YOUR SKILLS

Right now ...

There has never been a better time to be a creative individual. You can, with very simple - and in many cases free - tools promote yourself, your skills, your experience, and your potential to anyone in the world through a website, social media, and an online portfolio plus professional sites such as Vimeo, YouTube, and LinkedIn. It’s inspiring - and also frightening.

Because everyone else in the world can do the same. The professional playing field just got a thousand times bigger. Animators and designers in China, India, and Europe have the same access to your potential market as you do. And they’re good - probably many of them are better than you, at least for some skills. And cheaper. $10 an hour for a skilled 3D animator, anyone? $5?

So how do you win against the whole world? You do it by using the age old qualities of shared culture, location, individuality, and responsiveness.

... use your location

Let’s say you’re a digital modeler, animator, product designer ... a creative tech professional. You’re trying to appeal to a market and that market is local in the sense of being in the same county, state, or country as you. What advantage do you have over someone trying to reach the same market from China or India at a quarter or one tenth the cost per hour on Elance or Freelancer?

First, you’re local. You can meet with your client easily. This builds trust. You can talk face to face with them, it’s easy to drop prints or prototypes off, and there are no translation or financial hassles.

Second, you share a culture - and don’t underestimate this. I once worked as an architectural renderer and competed against amazingly skilled online visualization sites in India and China. They built 3D models from drawings, lit them, and rendered them for prices I could never match and a quality I could never reach. But ... they never looked quite right. The trees weren’t local species, the people didn’t look American, there was always something slightly foreign about the images. Not to mention I could be in the architects’ office in thirty minutes if needed to review materials and paint chips. I kept my clients.

Third, as you gain experience as a creative professional, you’ll develop a style. Consciously or unconsciously, that style will have developed within American culture and will appeal to American clients. It is very hard for creative professionals in other countries to do this. Not impossible, but hard, and particularly for individuals who haven’t experienced life in the US. Intuitively, your style of work will appeal more.

And finally, you’ll develop contacts, references, and links. Put these into your online resume and LinkedIn profile. Get recommendations. Remember, people are averse to risk, particularly where their work is concerned; a reference is worth a thousand words. If you’re nearby with good recommendations that’s going to count a good deal more than being dirt cheap and eight thousand miles away; emphasize responsiveness, locality, individuality, and experience in your marketing materials as a result.

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