

# Bigger Isn't Better, It's Just More Expensive

**As an independent creative,** I work both as a solo practitioner and as part of larger teams. In recent years, the opportunity to create fluid creative groups has increased, making larger projects a lot more doable. However, there has been a lag between the expanded capabilities of independents and how some clients perceive them. Many of us are unfavorably compared to large agencies due to assumptions about their supposed greater benefits.

Big agencies project images of greater power, sophistication and resources. They also try to convey a sense of status seldom associated with small firms. I think retaining independents is on the rise because more and more clients are starting to realize the following:

## **Big agencies prefer big clients.**

The status thing works both ways. If you're not the client bringing in the most revenue, that can have an effect on how your project is prioritized. As more businesses are launched, those that don't fit the ideal client model of big firms may not get the attention they deserve. The good news: there are also increasing numbers of excellent small firms who provide gency-level work.

## **Big agencies charge more to cover their higher costs.**

Large staffs have to be paid regularly and require large offices with all the necessary support. Maintaining a large firm with a massive overhead is a monster that has to be fed constantly. That creative director you're meeting with? He may make \$100/hour or more, but you're paying his firm upwards of \$300/hour just to sit in the same room. And he probably won't be doing your work – that will be done by a junior or mid-level designer who makes a fraction of the CD's salary.

## **Big agencies hand off work to junior associates.**

Usually, senior management focuses on developing new business. Once clients are landed, they often get



*David slays the agency overhead Goliath.*

shuttled to junior associates. At a smaller agency, the person you signed with will typically be the person who works on your project and is responsible for the outcome.

## **Big agencies are less nimble.**

Large staffs also mean layers of management to deal with that don't exist in a smaller firm. Because of their size, large firms tend to be less agile than smaller ones. This can be a problem given the rate at which business changes. Fewer people mean less bureaucracy and more flexibility.

## **Big agencies no longer have a technology advantage.**

The competitive advantage big agencies once had in research has been erased by online tools available to firms of any size. Technology has made the monopoly big firms used to have on these resources obsolete.

The use of big agencies is being questioned for good reason. Responsiveness, flexibility, working with a senior creative, less bureaucracy, far lower overhead (with resulting lower fees), and a level technology playing field mean that you have a lot more options than before.

***When it's time for your next  
communications project, go small.***

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