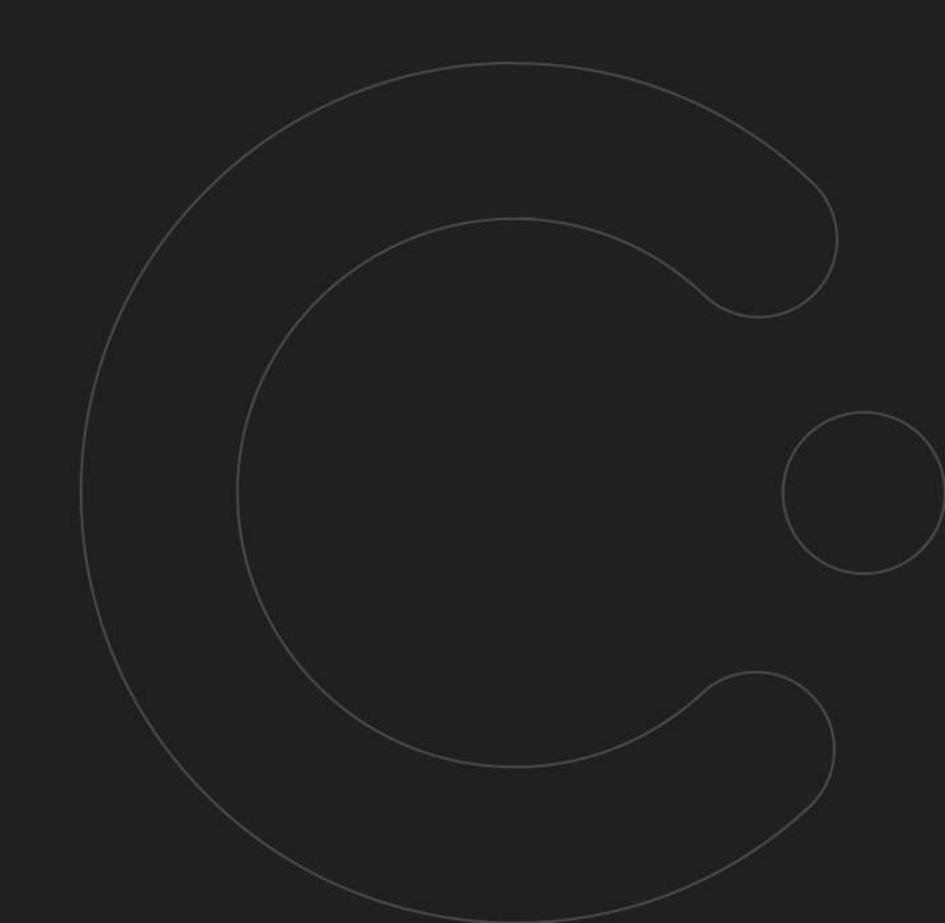


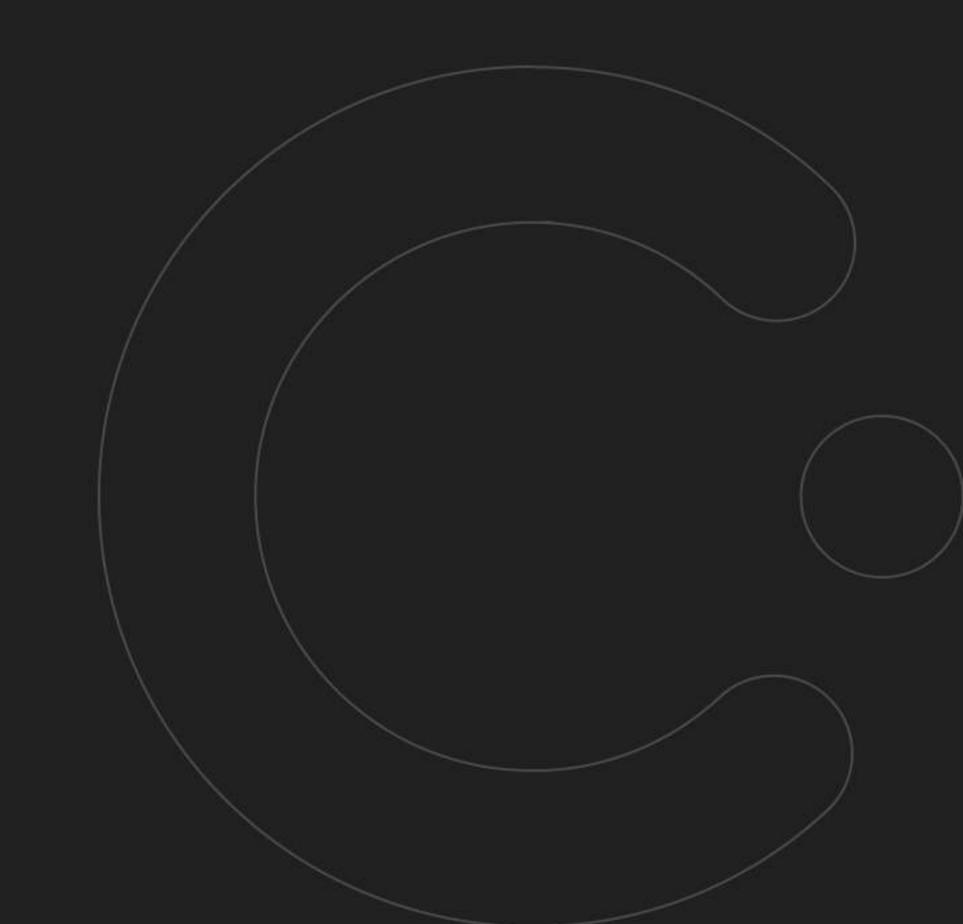
# How to hire a UX/UI designer

A complete guide for 2024



## Our guide includes:

- UX, UI, product designers, and strategists: who to hire for your project?
- 17 In-house designer vs freelancer vs agency
- Where to find a UI/UX designer?
- 32 How to analyze design portfolio
- 38 How to evaluate a designer during the interview

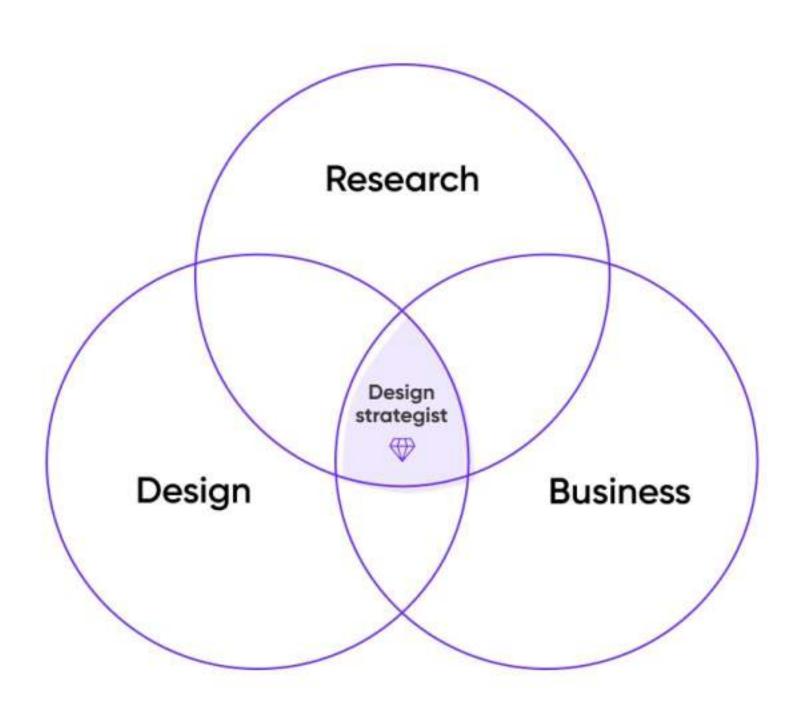


#### Intro

Have you ever thought of the distance that any digital product covers from a rough idea to an accomplished piece of technology? Typically, a founder is a person that launches the entire process. And, if stars align, they are the ones cutting a ribbon at the finish. Yet along the path, any startup pioneer cannot do without an effective product team, including designers, in the first place.

If you, as a founder, are lucky enough to get a good crew, you need not delve into design specifics and may just let the professionals do their work. Yet luck has a changeable landscape, and proper staffing may be a tricky thing. In the real world, a well-timed understanding of some key highlights of design may save tons of money and energy for a founder in the long run. It can also prevent you from making commercially fatal mistakes. This guide is going to lead you through the most important insights into the designers' kingdom.

# The evolving role of designers in 2024: moving beyond building to impacting products





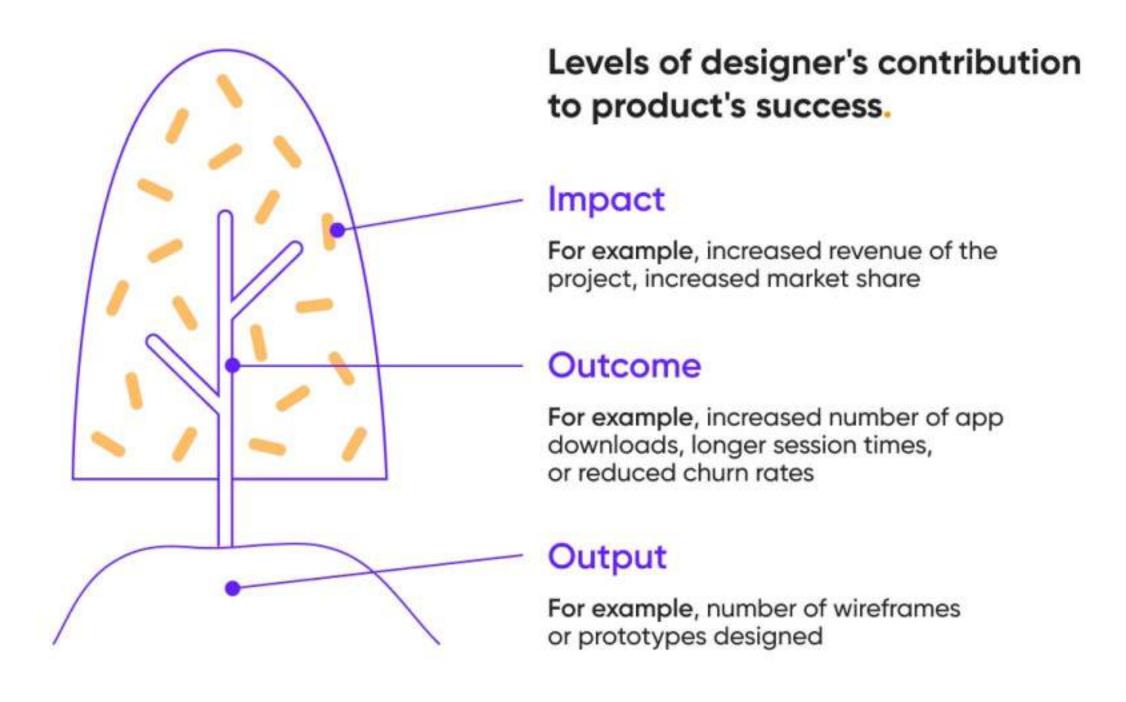
In 2024, the UX/UI designer's role has undergone a remarkable transformation. Gone are the days when designers were merely 'pixel movers', creating 'visually appealing interfaces'. Today, they are at the forefront of strategic decision-making and have a direct impact on product development

#### A good UX no longer surprises anyone

The landscape of design has evolved, with hundreds of design patterns tested and implemented across thousands of products. A good UX no longer surprises anyone. Al tools have taken over some aspects of designers' roles, freeing their time to focus on understanding business, strategy, and market needs. This shift requires designers to develop a deep understanding of business strategies, industries, markets, and user behavior.

#### Product and feature ownership becomes more common

Designers are stepping into roles that emphasize 'ownership'. This involves not just executing tasks as per client requirements but also proposing features, based on market research, user behavior analysis, and creative brainstorming, that can significantly improve the product. They take full responsibility for the implementation and life cycle of these features, positioning themselves as more than consultants.





Intro

## The partnership between product managers and designers

The partnership between designers and product managers has become more integral. They work hand-in-hand, each with their distinct areas of responsibility, ensuring decisions are made collaboratively. This synergy is crucial in aligning design with product goals.

#### Bridging towards the product management role

Designers are increasingly adopting aspects of the product manager role. While they are not product managers, they are absorbing many elements of this role, which involves understanding and influencing the broader aspects of product development.

#### The rise of the design strategist

A significant shift is the increasing demand for design strategists. This role moves beyond direct design tasks (except for creating wireframes and prototypes) to focus on market research, competitive analysis, and industry analysis. Design strategists determine which features are needed to make the product more valuable for users.

#### Integration of AI in design

Al-powered tools are revolutionizing design workflows, enabling designers to automate repetitive tasks, analyze large datasets, and prototype more efficiently. This technological integration allows designers to concentrate on strategic decision-making, creativity, and problemsolving.



#### Cieden reccomends:

How to create better digital products with Al

#### Al turns designers into data interpreters

Designers are evolving into data interpreters. They use Al generated insights to inform design decisions and optimize user experiences. By championing the integration of Al and other emerging technologies, designers are driving transformative changes and shaping the future of the industry.

#### **Embracing continuous learning**

This evolution highlights the need for designers to acquire new skills such as data literacy, algorithmic thinking, and a deep understanding of AI technologies. Continuous learning and adaptation are essential for designers to stay ahead in this rapidly changing field.



In 2024, designers are no longer seen as just "pixel movers" responsible for creating aesthetically pleasing interfaces.

Instead, their roles have expanded to include strategic decision—making and direct impact on product development.

Yuriy Mykhasyak
CEO & co-founder

Armed with this insight, prioritize candidates who demonstrate a strategic mindset, creativity, and adaptability to thrive in the rapidly changing industry landscape.

#### Part 1

# UX, UI, product designers, and strategists: who to hire for your project?

Let's cut to the chase: 99,9% of products need a designer.

A skilled professional will ensure your product looks great, meets industry standards, and is easy to use. They'll work with you to understand your users' needs and create a design that addresses them.

Data-driven design can be the difference between a successful product and one that fails. Without it, users can become frustrated and abandon your software altogether, no matter how good the underlying code may be. That's why it's essential to hire UI/UX designer who can help you create a product that not only meets your users' needs but also delights them.

But what talent does your business need? With so many different types out there, it can be overwhelming to know where to start.

That's where we come in. We've examined the differences between the main types of designers — **UI, UX, product, graphic designers, design strategists, and even designer-developers** so that you can find the right talent for your project.





Now that 'why we should hire a designer' is no longer a question, let's explore 'whom to hire' and then move on to 'how to hire'

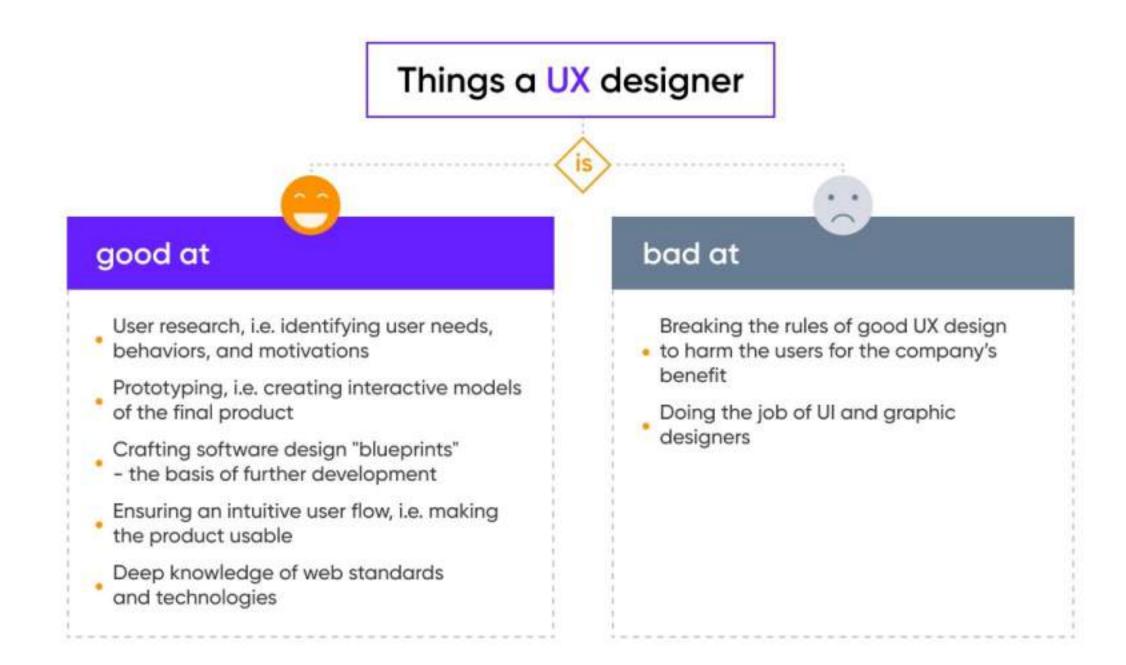
#### **UX** designer

A user experience (UX) designer is responsible for how users interact with software, whether a website, app, or desktop program. They ensure that products are intuitive, engaging, and efficient. A UX designer studies user needs and behaviors to create solutions that aren't only functional but also user-friendly. These experts tightly collaborate with UI designers and developers to build a product that works well and increases user satisfaction.

For instance, have you ever experienced a frustratingly long sign-up process that – **bad user experience design.** 

On the other hand, have you ever come across a website that is incredibly easy to use, with no intrusive pop-ups, where you could find everything you needed quickly, almost as if guided by an invisible hand? Not magic, just an example of **good UX design.** 





#### When do you need a UX designer?

Consider hiring a UX designer at the following stages of your product lifecycle:

#### Initial conceptualization.

In the early stages of developing a new product or service, UX designers can provide valuable insights into user needs and behaviors. They research to understand the target audience, helping to shape the product in a way that's both appealing and functional for them.

#### Design and development.

During these stages, UX designers focus on creating an intuitive and engaging user interface. They prioritize ease of use, ensuring that the product is accessible to as wide an audience as possible. This includes designing layouts, navigation, and interactive elements that are both aesthetically pleasing and practical.

#### Testing and iteration.

Once a prototype is developed, UX designers conduct. usability testing to gather feedback from actual or potential users. This feedback is crucial for identifying any issues or areas for improvement. They then iterate on the design, refining it to better meet user needs and preferences.



#### Post-launch.

Even after a product has launched, UX specialists play a key role in continuous improvement. By analyzing user data and feedback, they can identify trends and areas for enhancement, ensuring that the product remains relevant and user-friendly over time.

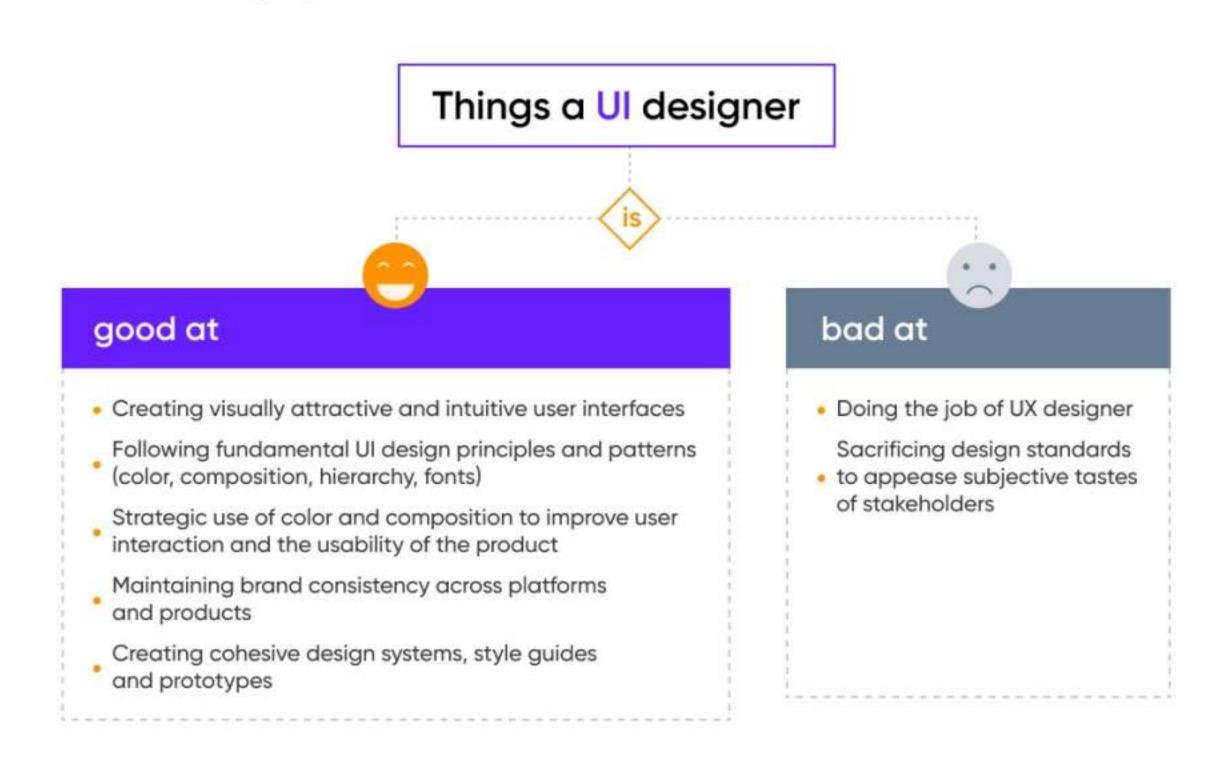
#### Rebranding or updating existing products.

When looking to update or rebrand an existing product, UX designers can help assess the current user experience and identify areas for improvement. They ensure that any updates or changes align with user expectations and enhance their overall experience.

#### **UI** designer

A user interface (UI) designer focuses on the product's visual design. They create the look and feel of the software's interface, ensuring it's aesthetically pleasing, consistent with the brand, and easy to use. UI specialists work on the layout, pick color schemes, play with fonts, juggle visuals, and create interactive elements like buttons and animations to make your product look modern, sleek, and engaging.

UI design breathes life into a project. Without it, most apps and websites would look like soulless pieces of software in fifty shades of grey.





#### When do you need a UI designer?

You'll need to hire a UI designer when:

#### Refining your product's visual identity.

If you aim to establish or enhance your product's brand through its visual interface, the UI designer ensures it aligns with your brand's values and appeals to your target audience.

#### Improving user interaction.

Whenever you want to make your product more intuitive and engaging through visual cues and interactive elements, a UI specialist can create an interface that guides users effortlessly through their journey.

#### Enhancing accessibility and inclusivity.

If you aim to make your product accessible to a broader audience, including those with disabilities, a UI designer can ensure visual elements are made with accessibility standards in mind.

#### Optimizing for different devices.

In today's multi-device world, if you need your product to provide a consistent and optimized experience across various platforms (desktop, mobile, tablets), a UI designer can adapt your interface to each context while maintaining usability and brand consistency.

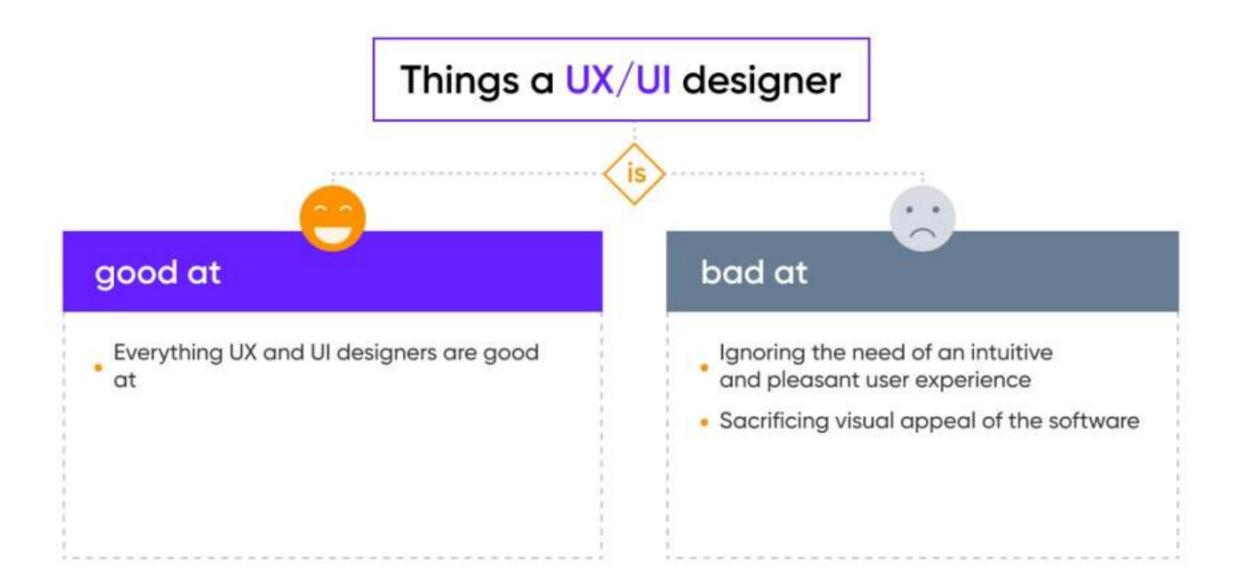
UI and UX are the yin and yang of software design. However, you rarely find a pure UI or UX designer. Often, the skills are combined in the face of a UX/UI specialist.

#### **UX/UI** designer

As the name suggests, some talents combine both UI and UX skills, which makes them **a jack of all trades** in software design.



Their role is to connect the dots between the product's functionality and appearance. By focusing on both how it works and looks, UI/UX designers create intuitive, user- friendly, and visually appealing software.



#### When do you need a UX/UI designer?

There's no one-size-fits-all checklist for deciding between single or separate specialists. On our consultations, for example, we delve into the project's needs, scope, complexity, and budget to identify the most suitable type of designer. But, to sum it up succinctly, here's the key point:

A single designer for smaller projects: For smaller or less complex projects, a single talent with a balanced skill set in both UX and UI may be sufficient. This approach can be cost-effective and ensure a unified vision for the project.

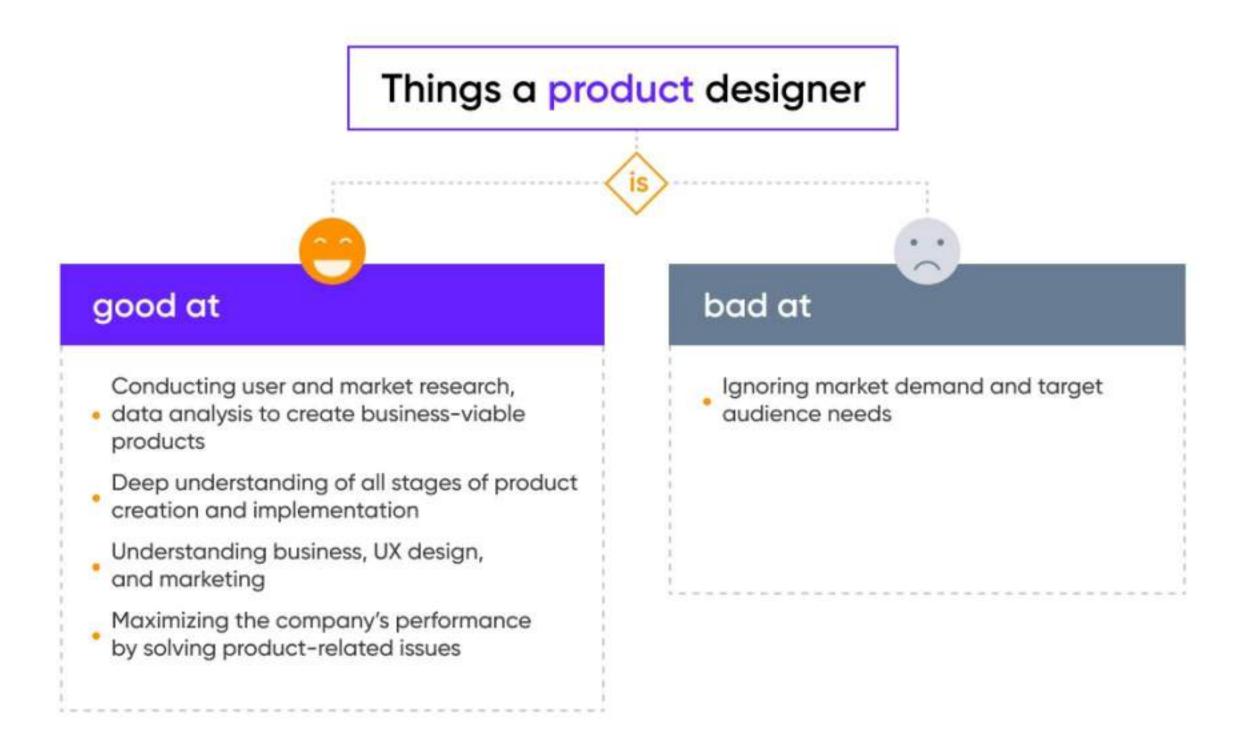
A specialized team for larger projects: For larger or more complex projects, consider hiring specialized UX and UI designers. This allows each aspect of the product design to receive the focused expertise it deserves.

#### **Product designer**

Product designers bridge user needs, business objectives, and technology to create meaningful products. They're responsible for conducting user research, ideating and prototyping, and building intuitive user interfaces. Collaborating with crossfunctional teams, they ensure designs match business goals, support accessibility and inclusivity, and keep iterating based on feedback.



Compared to UX/UI specialists, product designers have a much broader role. They cover UX/UI design but also handle bigpicture responsibilities, like ensuring the product design follows the business objectives, studying what users need, and considering the product's market fit and lifecycle.



#### When do you need a product designer?

Hire a product designer in the following cases:

#### Developing a new product or service.

When you're about to create a new product, hire digital product designers to identify user needs, spot market opportunities, and design a standout solution that really meets those needs.

#### Evolving an existing product.

When your goal is to refine or expand an existing product, the product designer for hire can assess the current user experience, identify areas for improvement, and innovate to enhance satisfaction and engagement.

#### Aligning product strategy with user needs and business goals.

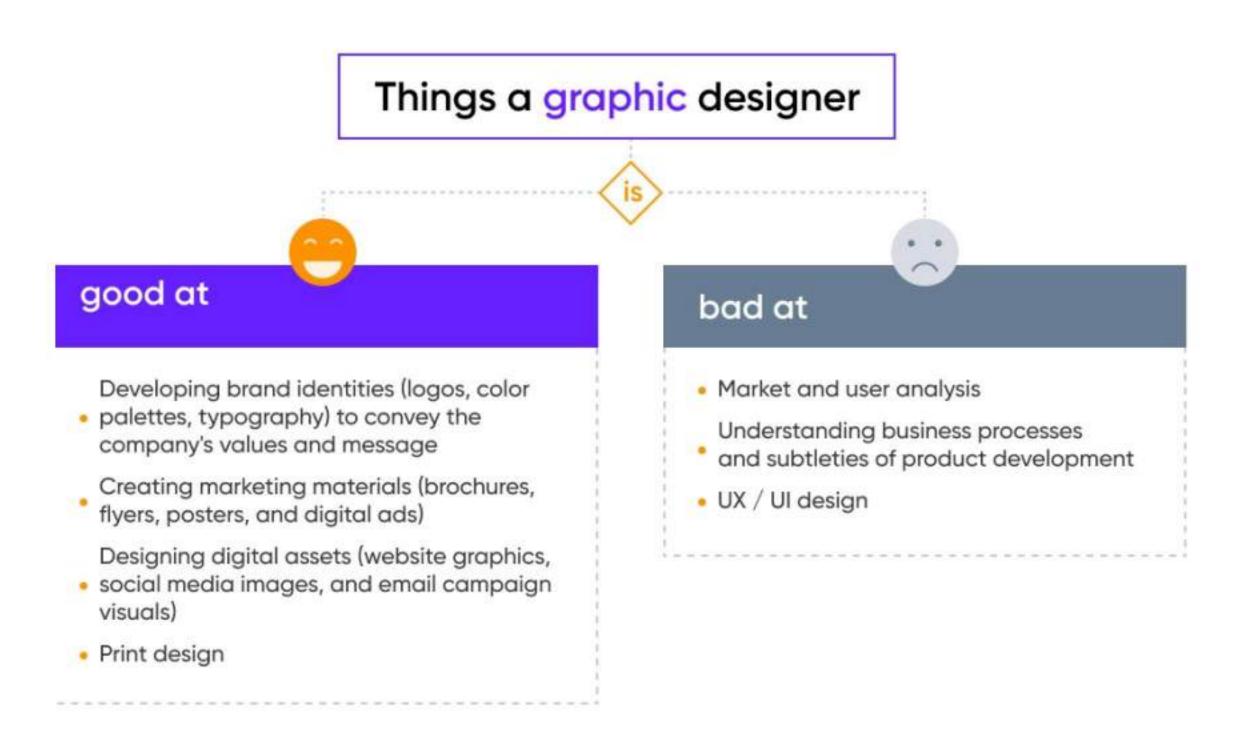
Do you want your product to meet user expectations and match your business goals? In this case, a product designer bridges the gap between user needs, technical feasibility, and business viability.



Ensuring a unified user experience across all touchpoints.
 If your product works on different platforms or uses many services, a product designer ensures everything fits together smoothly and creates a unified and coherent experience for users across the whole product.

#### **Graphic designer**

A graphic designer, sometimes known as a brand designer, is responsible for creating visual content that effectively communicates messages. They create logos, layouts, and advertisements like posters, flyers, and social media banners. Their job is to make sure these assets fit your brand, resonate with your target audience, and accurately convey the message across both digital and print formats.



#### When do you need a graphic designer?

You'll find a graphic designer's expertise invaluable when:

Establishing or refreshing your brand identity.
 Are you launching a new brand or looking to update your brand identity? Then, a graphic designer can create a cohesive visual style that includes your logo, color palette, typography, and brand guidelines.



#### Creating marketing materials.

Whether for digital marketing campaigns, social media, print ads, brochures, business cards, or product packaging, they can produce materials that capture attention and convey your message effectively.

#### Communicating complex information.

When you need to present data or information in a more digestible format, like infographics or reports, a graphic designer can organize and visualize it in a way that makes it easy for your audience to understand.

#### Events and promotions.

If you're planning events or promotions, they can create visually appealing banners, posters, invitations, and other promotional materials that align with your event's theme and goals.

#### Design strategist

The increasing demand for strategists is the product of the evolving designer's role. It's a hybrid role that blends the strategic, client-facing, and oversight responsibilities of a product manager with the design expertise, creative insight, and mentorship qualities of a senior designer. Strategists play a crucial role in shaping the project's direction and success.

When you think about a memorable brand experience that resonated with you on a deeper level, chances are there was a design strategist behind it, orchestrating every touchpoint to evoke a specific emotion or response.



#### Things a design strategist bad at good at Identifying market trends and insights Producing high-fidelity visual designs to inform design decisions UX/UI design Aligning product design with business Micromanaging day-to-day tasks strategy and goals Developing design roadmaps and frameworks for innovation Facilitating workshops and collaborative sessions to generate creative solutions Evaluating the viability and feasibility of design concepts

#### When do you need to hire UX strategists?

Consider involving a strategist in the following scenarios:

#### Brand development:

When establishing a new brand or undergoing a rebranding, a strategist can ensure brand alignment and differentiation.

#### Product innovation:

For companies seeking to innovate their products or services, a strategist can help identify opportunities that meet both user needs and business objectives.

#### Market expansion:

When entering new markets or expanding existing ones, a strategist can conduct market research and develop tailored design strategies to resonate with local audiences.

#### Strategic partnerships:

In collaborative projects or partnerships, having a strategist onboard can facilitate the alignment of design efforts with partner goals and enhance the overall success of the venture.



#### Developer-designer?

We may surprise you, but there are such kinds of designers – often freelancers – who state that they can design and develop your project. Should you hire them? Better not.

Developer-designers are as rare as unicorns and as treacherous as mountain passes. Modern development and design require a broad set of skills. Without devoting significant time to learning, trying, and failing, a designer-developer won't be able to deliver decent design and code. At best, you're risking mediocrity; at worst, you may end up with clunky, slow, and unusable software.

While there may be exceptions, they are few and far between. It's safer to hire developers and designers separately to ensure the quality of your project.

#### What designer level do I need?

If the previous section wasn't confusing enough, designers are also classified according to their experience and skill level.

Generally, there are three levels: junior, middle, and senior.

Let's examine the differences between them. Note that there are intermediary levels, such as "strong junior" or "strong middle," but we won't focus on them here.

Design level	What does it mean?	When to hire?
Junior	The first stage after traineeship.  Handling basic tasks such as designing forms, no extensive research. Juniors need to show and confirm their work with a senior team member.	Hire junior designers to an established team to manage increased workloads.
Middle	Experienced in creating consistent experiences throughout a product. They should routinely validate their work with team leads.	Middle designers are essential; hire them when building your team's core.
Senior	At the peak of their career, seniors are very good at managing independent projects.  They are skilled at solving complex problems, defining, and implementing key product features.	When you need: A backbone of a design team An experienced pro during early product development Someone to address complex tasks





#### Cieden reccomends:

UX/UI skills matrix template to evaluate designers' level

#### Summing up

Design can be overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. Here's a simple breakdown:

- Software development needs UX/UI spec for hire;
- Brand development needs visual and graphic designers;
- Product and business growth requires product designers;
- Product development and brand transformation, and market expansion require strategists.



Volodymyr Pyzh Growth Manager

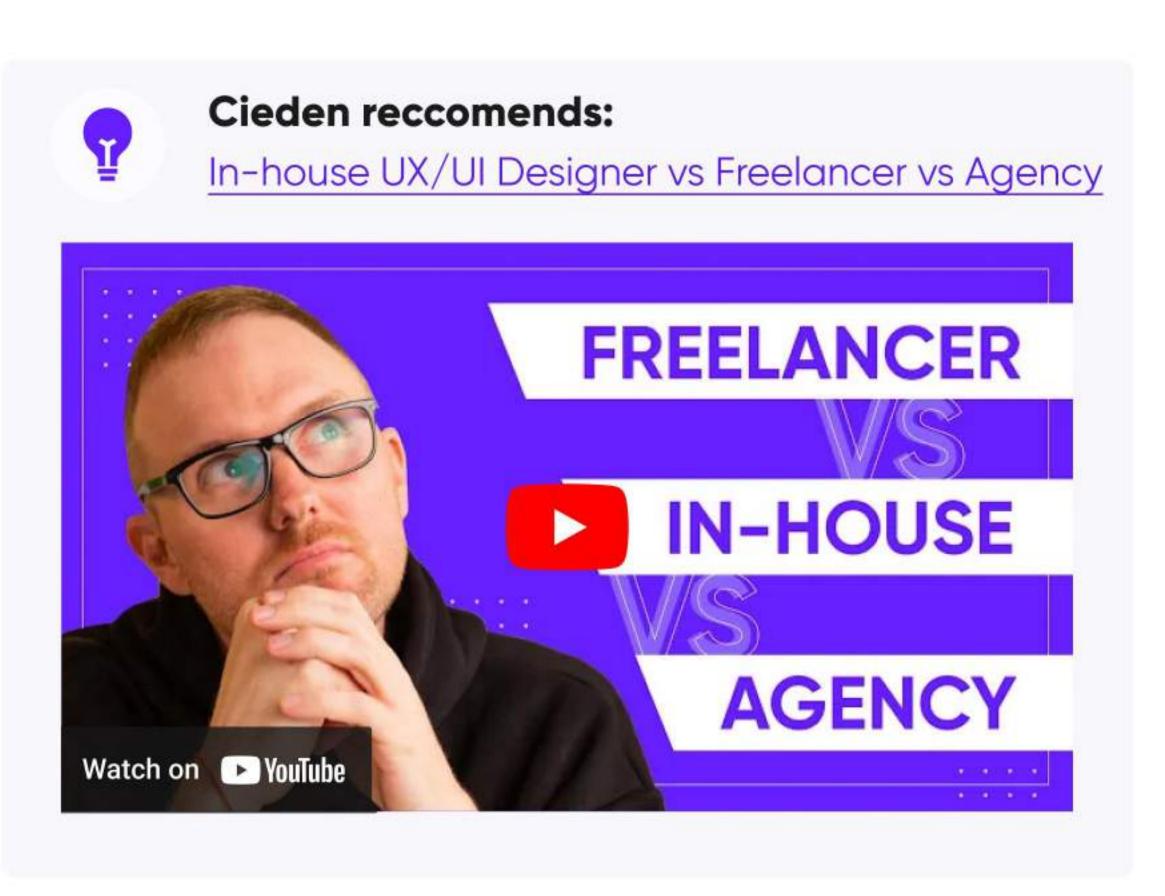
#### Not sure where to start?

Contact me for an expert consultation or to relieve the burden of choosing the right talent from your shoulders – outsourcing is a great way to do just that.

### In-house designer vs freelancer vs agency

Now that you know which specialist you need, you may wonder, what is the best cooperation model for my project? In this section, you will get practical advice based on Cieden's experience as we cover the following:

- The ins and outs and key differences of teaming up with inhouse staff, freelancers, and agencies;
- The pros and cons of each collaboration model;
- The risks associated with each option.





#### Hiring an in-house design team

A company without a designer is like a phone without a camera – it still functions, but you miss out on the benefits.

Hiring an in-house team seems like a straightforward, convenient, and lasting solution. Well, we find it logical — you get a specialist who will permanently work only for you and know your product like the palm of a hand. Seems like the perfect scenario?

Let's break it down to see all the pros and cons.

#### Pros of the in-house team:

- Independence from third parties. Your in-house team knows the company's needs and processes, works more efficiently, and doesn't juggle tasks from ten other clients.
- Full control over the management processes. You get to decide how to manage the team and which approach is the best within the company's framework.
- Brand consistency. The idea is obvious your in-house employees are the most familiar people with the company's vision and brand identity, especially if they are the ones who created this identity.
- A long-term benefit. If your designers stay, they will become
  well aware of your company processes, product
  peculiarities, and the "internal kitchen".

If you spend a decent amount of time picking up the right designers, constantly take care of their development and growth, and get them the best equipment — an in- house team will prosper your company. The fact is that not all companies have the resources for such a long process. This brings us to the drawbacks of having an in- house team.



#### Cons of the in-house team:

- Price. Businesses must pay salaries, office rent, additional taxes, and employee benefits. Don't forget about modern equipment and software for employees – an in-house team may cost a pretty penny.
- Time. Finding a single professional can take a few months considering the preparation, search, and interviewing process. And even after all the recruitment challenges, you can't be sure that the person you've found is a proper match. If you need several employees, multiply the effort by their number.
- Unpredictability. If your employees get sick or go on vacation, the work stops or slows down.
- Liability. After you've hired in-house designers, you have to keep them busy. With no workload, you're forced to cover unjustifiable expenses, and your employees can become frustrated.

#### When to hire an in-house team?

If your company has reached a point where ongoing design work is substantial and continuous, having a dedicated team in-house might save money and time. It's especially true if you constantly need product updates, marketing materials, etc. Consider, though, that each month of downtime will cost money.

It's better not to hire an in-house team if your design work is more of a once-in-a-while thing rather than a constant need. Also, if your projects are varied and need different kinds of design expertise, it's smarter to work with outside agencies or freelancers. This way, you get the flexibility and wide-ranging skills you need without the ongoing costs of having a full-time team on your payroll.



#### Addressing the main risk of hiring an in-house team

Having your in-house team can be risky since you commit to paying fixed costs, like salaries, which might be tough during slower periods. Additionally, there's the risk of hiring the wrong people. You must validate their portfolios and skills to ensure you get the right pros. It's a complex process that deserves its own guide, but we covered key moments below.

#### Hiring freelance designers

Hiring a freelance UI/UX designer can be a great way to get professional services without the overhead of a full-time team. The attitude towards work from home changes; people prefer flexibility and freedom, so the freelance niche is booming.

#### Pros of hiring freelance designers:

- Price. Hiring a freelance designer is less expensive than hiring an in-house designer or partnering with an agency.
   There are no overhead costs, and you usually pay an hourly rate.
- Time. If you needed the work done yesterday, freelancers
  are the best choice, as they often work on short notice. Also,
  they're used to quickly switching between various small
  projects.
- A huge pool of pros to choose from. There are hundreds of thousands of freelancers, and most are ready to go to great lengths to get a gig.

#### Cons of hiring freelance designers:

- Reliability. The saturation of the market also means there
  are a lot of beginners. Finding an experienced freelancer
  with a free slot soon enough may prove difficult.
- No supervision. Not all people can organize and plan work equally well. While agencies and in-house teams have dedicated professionals, freelancers have no choice but to do it themselves.



- Less focus on design. Freelancers are also their own managers, supervisors, and salespeople. It means they have less time and energy for design.
- Design-development conflict. Freelancers are so used to working independently that they may lose sight of one crucial point: they need to create projects that can be transferred to the development stage. This is a big one – what is the point of a beautiful draft if devs cannot make it a working website?
- Bad for big and complex projects. Complex projects usually require a whole design team. Hiring a team of freelancers is difficult, but making them work together efficiently is a true challenge.

#### When to hire freelance designers?

As we see, freelancers are great for minor tasks. For example, if you need a single-screen design, a simple landing page UI, or basic marketing materials.

When the scope of work is not so large to pay a full-time specialist, and there is just a need to fulfill your needs once – start browsing the freelance marketplace.

If the task is hefty or requires a wide range of skills – UI, UX, product, and brand design – you're better off with an in-house team or agency.

#### Addressing the main risk of hiring freelance designers

Finding freelancers that'll deliver on time or deliver at all is the greatest challenge of this approach. To minimize the risk, there are two main tips:

 Pick freelancers with proven track records and either sign a contract or work through specific platforms that offer some guarantee. The lowest rate is not the reason to set fifteen milestones at once and hope for a marvelous result.



 Find an in-house manager for a freelancer. It is tricky to normalize work with freelancers because they are simultaneously accountants, PMs, designers, and testers.
 Take the load off the freelancer's shoulders and leave him only those tasks he needs to do.

Keep in mind that 99.9% of freelancers are solo businesses that are not trying to build a "name." Therefore, no company brand will be responsible for the quality of their work. That is what brings us to the last point.

#### Hiring a design agency

Agencies combine the best of both worlds. On one hand, you don't have to spend time and money hiring and supporting the in-house workforce. On the other hand, you have access to a well-put-together design-focused team under professional supervision. In short, the best way to get things done without breaking the bank.

#### Pros of design agencies:

- A battle-ready team. You get a team fully equipped with all
  the professionals you need for the project, including a
  project manager and HR to keep them happy and
  productive. Whether you need animations, illustrations,
  graphic design, or branding materials, there will be the right
  person for the job.
- Best designers. Agencies invest a lot in professional growth: courses, libraries, certifications, time for self-development, and challenging tasks. It means you get skilled, experienced talents. Besides, the best agencies need to have robust recruitment departments. It helps to hire and grow strong teams – a crucial competitive advantage.
- Time to market. An agency will deliver if you need a quality product on the market ASAP. Besides, you don't have to spend time hiring freelancers or assembling an in- house team.



- Reliability. You don't get to worry about designers getting sick, leaving their jobs, or underperforming. It's an agency's responsibility to make any bumps unnoticeable to you.
- Broad expertise. Agencies bring a wealth of knowledge and diverse skills to the table. With experience in different industries and project types, they can offer fresh insights and solutions that might not cross an in-house team's mind.
- Cost efficiency compared to hiring in-house. Choosing an agency for projects with a defined scope and timeline can be more cost-effective than hiring full-time staff. You avoid the overheads of benefits, training, and workspace associated with in- house hires.
- Speed and scalability. Agencies can quickly scale up or down based on project demands. They can handle sudden project spikes without the delays of hiring new employees.

#### Cons of design agencies:

- Price. Partnering with an agency will be more expensive than hiring freelancers (but less expensive than hiring an inhouse team if it's an offshore design agency).
- Lack of total control. You'll have some control over your team, but the agency will handle the management/ supervision. Also, like in-house teams, agencies rarely work on weekends or during late hours.
- Communication and time zones. Depending on where the agency is, time zone differences may affect communication and turnaround times. This can be planned for but requires effective project management to keep things smooth.

#### When to partner with a design agency?

Agencies are great for complex design tasks, including UI/UX design, product development, business analysis, high-level consultancy, customer relationships management, or design audits. If the job is too big for a freelancer, and you don't want the hassle of an in-house team — partner with an agency.

Sometimes, it's beneficial to mix hiring approaches. For example:



- An agency can bootstrap a product and create the initial style;
- In-house designers can be hired later to manage A/B and usability testing, long- term support, and optimization.

#### Addressing the main risk of hiring a design agency

When looking for an agency to handle all your needs, it is common to consider hiring an onshore team. However, this solution has a few drawbacks.

First, onshore teams are usually more expensive than offshore ones. The difference in economic conditions between countries allows offshore agencies to keep costs low and margins thin.

Second, onshore teams don't necessarily mean better quality.

Offshore agencies often compete with onshore companies and other offshore agencies globally, forcing them to maintain high-quality standards.

To select an offshore agency that meets your needs:

- Check their reviews on websites like Clutch;
- Carefully examine their portfolio on Dribbble or Behance;
- Inquire about the team's level of English proficiency;
- Schedule a call with them to discuss their approach and vision;
- Request information on working hours and the team members who will be working on your project.

With many excellent agencies worldwide, finding the perfect match is possible. Don't settle for less than the best – hire a design agency to complete your project.

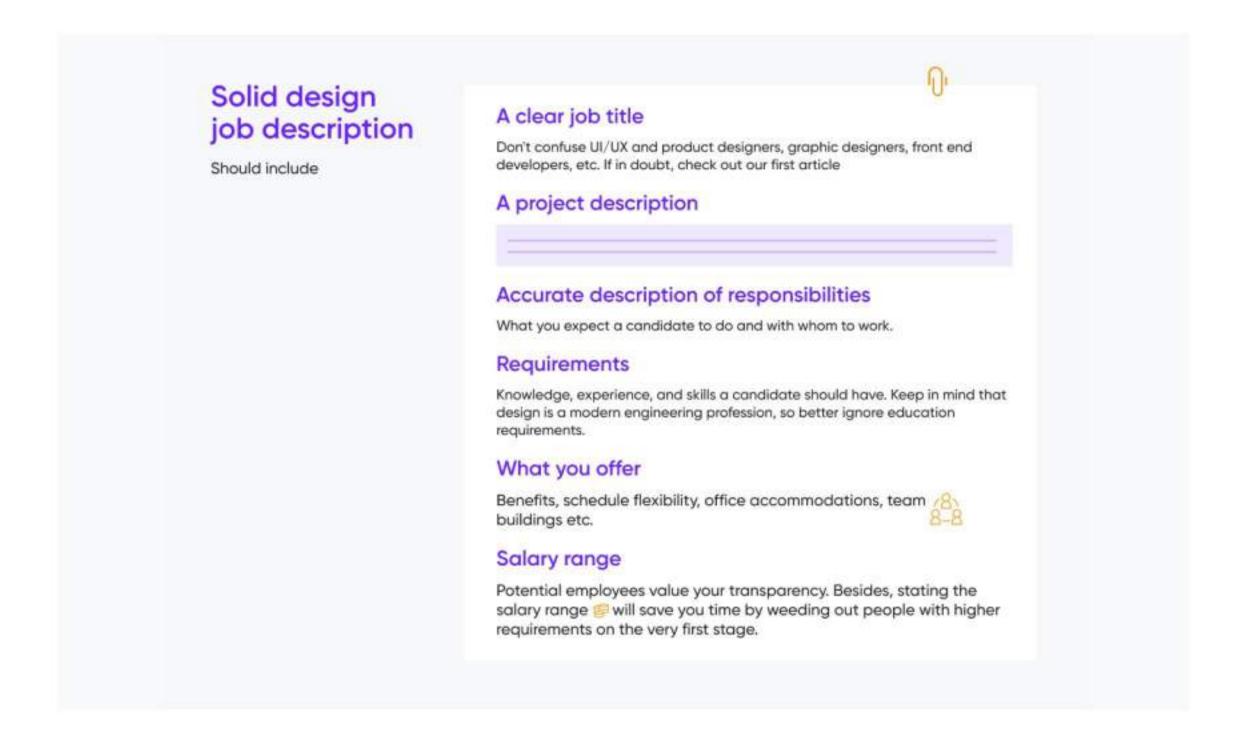
## Where to find a UI/UX designer?

Whether you need an in-house team, a freelancer, or a design agency, the first step is knowing where to look. We've got you covered with the most popular hunting grounds for designers and agencies. But before you start your search, you need a killer job description. Let's make sure you're attracting the right candidates from the get-go.

#### How to write a perfect job description

Writing a proper job description is half the battle in finding a high-end professional. Although it may seem straightforward, many people still get it wrong by either trying too hard or not at all.

Our advice is to avoid reinventing the wheel. Be straight to the point and include all essential information with minimum to no vague statements and cliches. You can read a perfect job description diagonally and still get

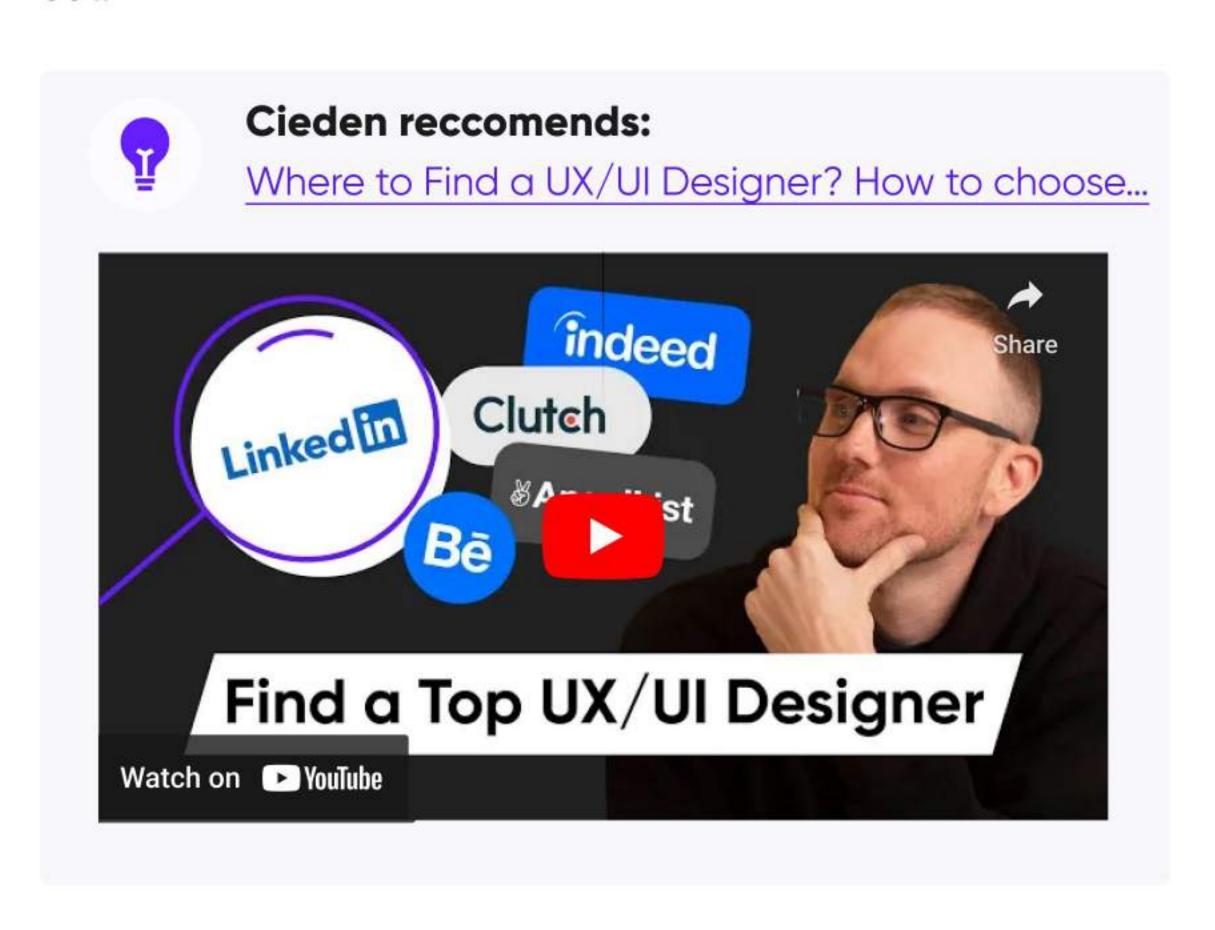




You don't necessarily need a job description. Suppose you want to partner with a design agency. Give an agency enough information about your project, and they will provide you with the project estimate and optimal team composition.

#### Where to search for designers and agencies?

So you have your killer job description, but where do you find the right candidates? Different platforms will help with the task depending on which approach you prefer. Let's check them out.



#### Job listings: for in-house designers

Job listing resources such as Indeed, Glassdoor, Monster, Work in Startups, AngelList, and LinkedIn are the most reliable ways to find in-house employees. To get started, create a company profile, submit your job offering with an attractive job description, and wait for people to apply.

One of the reasons job listings are so effective is that people who need a job approach you rather than the other way around. If you open a "remote design position" on a job listing resource, you may receive requests from agencies. If you're 100% sure you don't want to work with the agency, mention it in the description. It'll save you time.



Sometimes though, job listings aren't enough. So, improving your chances of success with social media ads is a good idea.

#### Active recruiting: for in-house designers

Don't wait for the perfect candidate, go find them! Active recruiting is a proactive approach to hiring that broadens your reach and increases your chances of success. With experienced designer recruiters leading the way, you can seek out and approach excellent candidates, initiate and lead the conversation, and bring top talent to your team.

LinkedIn is a great platform for active recruiting. Don't have the resources for active recruiting? No problem, consider hiring a recruiting agency.

#### Portfolio websites: freelancers, agencies, in-house

Behance, Dribbble, and other portfolio websites exist to allow designers and agencies to showcase their design and idea communication skills. Users present their visual case studies with insights into the product development process. These websites are great for finding experienced specialists whose styles match your taste.

However, if you are searching for designers or agencies on Behance or Dribbble, it is essential to know how to analyze a portfolio. To learn more about researching a portfolio, read below.

#### Social media ads: in-house designers

With people spending an ungodly number of hours online, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter can be surprisingly effective in finding the perfect candidate. So why not put them to work for you?



Word of Mouth: in-house designers, agencies, freelancers

When it comes to finding an agency, nothing beats a recommendation from a trusted source. Tap into your industry network, ask for advice, and see if they can connect you with a great agency. But be careful not to fall for a recommendation just because of a referral bonus. Always check the experience and ensure that the agency is a good fit for your needs.

You can also try contacting your preferred agency, even if they seem too expensive or busy. They might just have the perfect alternative in mind. After all, they're experts in the field and know the best partners to work with. Don't let a minor setback leave you hanging!

Clutch: design agencies

Clutch is a B2B market research platform that gathers and verifies client reviews on service companies. The platform then organizes the data into an elegant rating system that contains all the essential information on the companies' service quality and work ethics.

Due to its approach and convenience, Clutch has become one of the primary places to discover top B2B service providers.

Using Clutch, you no longer have to worry about the lack of social proof regarding your potential design partner.

Upwork: design agencies, freelance designers

Upwork is a marketplace for freelance talent and agencies.

The process is straightforward: create a job posting, wait for proposals, shortlist candidates, and check their profiles and portfolios to find the best fit. Alternatively, you can search for talent by categories and keywords. If you need two sources, there is also Toptal, a more expensive alternative to Upwork that does not include agencies.

Also — sorry for the shameless self-plug — Cieden is a top-rated agency on Upwork.



#### Local design courses: in-house designers

If your budget is low, local courses are amazing for finding trainee/junior designers. Research the local courses and ask the mentors or tutors to recommend the students. They would be happy to help their best students get the job, and the students would be happy to work for you. That's how plenty of successful and lasting

Places to Search for	Designers
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Type of Resources	Freelancers	In-House	Agencies
Job Listings	×	<b>~</b>	×
Active Recruiting	×	<b>✓</b>	×
Portfolio Websites	~	<b>✓</b>	<b>~</b>
Social Media Ads	×	<b>✓</b>	×
Word of Mouth	<b>~</b>	<b>✓</b>	~
Clutch	×	×	<b>~</b>
Upwork	~	×	<b>~</b>
Local Design Courses	×	<b>✓</b>	×

#### How much does it cost to hire a UX/UI designer?

The cost to hire UX and UI designers depends on various factors like the specialist's location, experience level, and cooperation model.

Expert in-house UX/UI specialists from the US charge over \$70 per hour. The junior specialists may require a compensation of about \$40 hourly, and the average rate is nearly \$50. Changing your expert's location to European countries like Germany will lower the average salary to around \$30 per hour.

Now, let's talk about freelancers. As Upwork suggests, a freelance UX designer earns \$25 to \$39 per hour. Freelance UI designers, in turn, charge \$20 to \$40 hourly to get your product's look and feel done.



Agencies' rates vary greatly based on their level of expertise, location, and the scope of services offered. Reputable agencies may command higher prices, but they usually have comprehensive teams of dedicated designers, and design leads to kickstart your project. Still, the average cost ranges from \$50 to \$60 per hour.

#### How to hire the best designer for your needs

If you're looking to hire UI designers or UX experts, there are a few things you should keep in mind. We don't want to be downers, but there's no one perfect way to hire a designer.

Different projects require different expertise, approaches, and tools, so the best one depends on your specific circumstances and requirements. Here are a few tips from our experience to guide you.

#### Know what type of designer you need

To choose the right talent for your project, define your project goals and requirements clearly. Identify whether your focus is on improving the functionality and user experience (UX) or if you're aiming to enhance the visual appeal and interactivity (UI).

Knowing the exact outcome you want — whether it's a more intuitive website, a visually stunning app, or an engaging digital product — is crucial. Consider the project's scale — will a single talent be enough, or is a multidisciplinary team needed?

#### Experience matters, but education is secondary

When hiring a designer, don't get too hung up on their education. Sure, a degree in design can be helpful, but it doesn't necessarily mean they're a great designer. Instead, focus on their portfolio and previous work to determine if they have the skills and experience you need. Don't be fooled by diplomas and awards for school projects — it's their real-world experience that counts.



#### Review previous work and discuss your brand

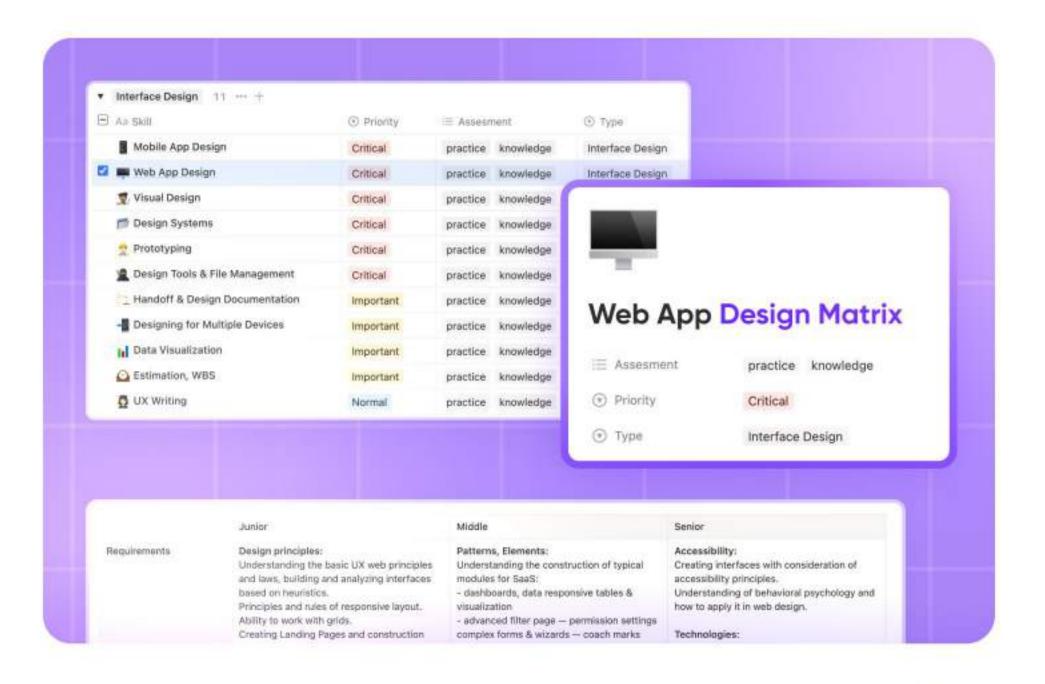
To find the perfect designer for your needs, look for examples of their work that match the project you have in mind. Discuss your brand with them to ensure they understand your values and aesthetics and can create designs that resonate with your audience.'

#### Have a diverse hiring team

If you want to hire UX designers who are perfect professionals for your needs, don't underestimate the power of diversity. Even though it's great to understand exactly what you need from a candidate — check out the UX/UI design matrix — a team with different backgrounds and perspectives can provide valuable feedback. Mainly such a team can ensure that your newbie fits your company culture well. Plus, a diverse team can help you avoid unconscious bias and consider a broader range of candidates.

### **UX/UI skills matrix**

to validate your designer



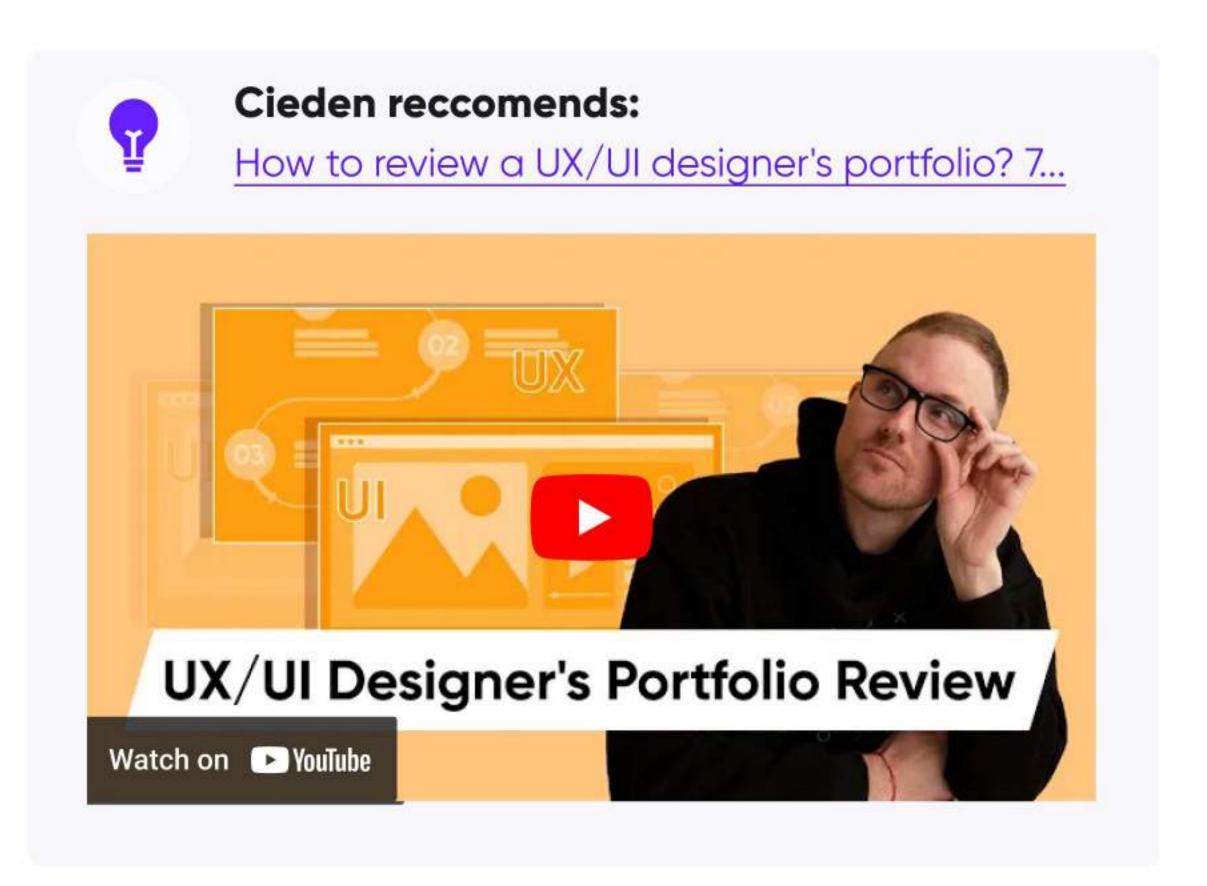
Grab your ready template!

# How to analyze design portfolio

So far, you've learned how to find design experts and agencies that match your requirements. Now, it's time to evaluate their portfolios to determine their skills and pick the best candidate.

However, analyzing portfolios can be tricky. Portfolios don't always spill all the details about the project, what the designer did, their work approach, and their design process.

In this document, we'll show you how to analyze UI/UX portfolios to determine whether a talent has the necessary skills.

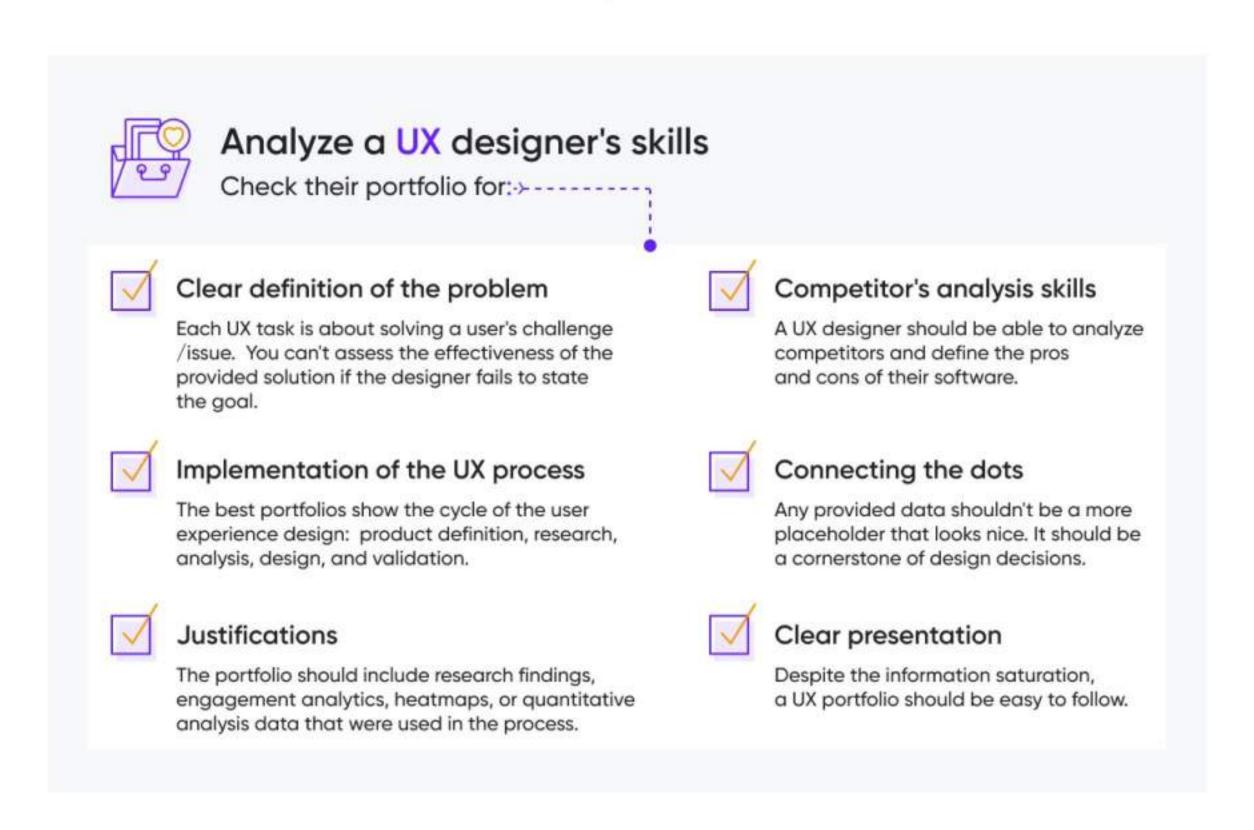




#### How to analyze a UX designer's skills through a portfolio

Analyzing a UX designer's portfolio smartly requires focusing on how they showcase their problem-solving skills and user-centered design process.

Look for detailed case studies that explain the challenge, the designer's specific role, the steps they took to understand user needs, and how they iterated on solutions based on user feedback. Pay attention to how they communicate their thought process, the rationale behind their decisions, and the impact of their work on the project's outcomes.

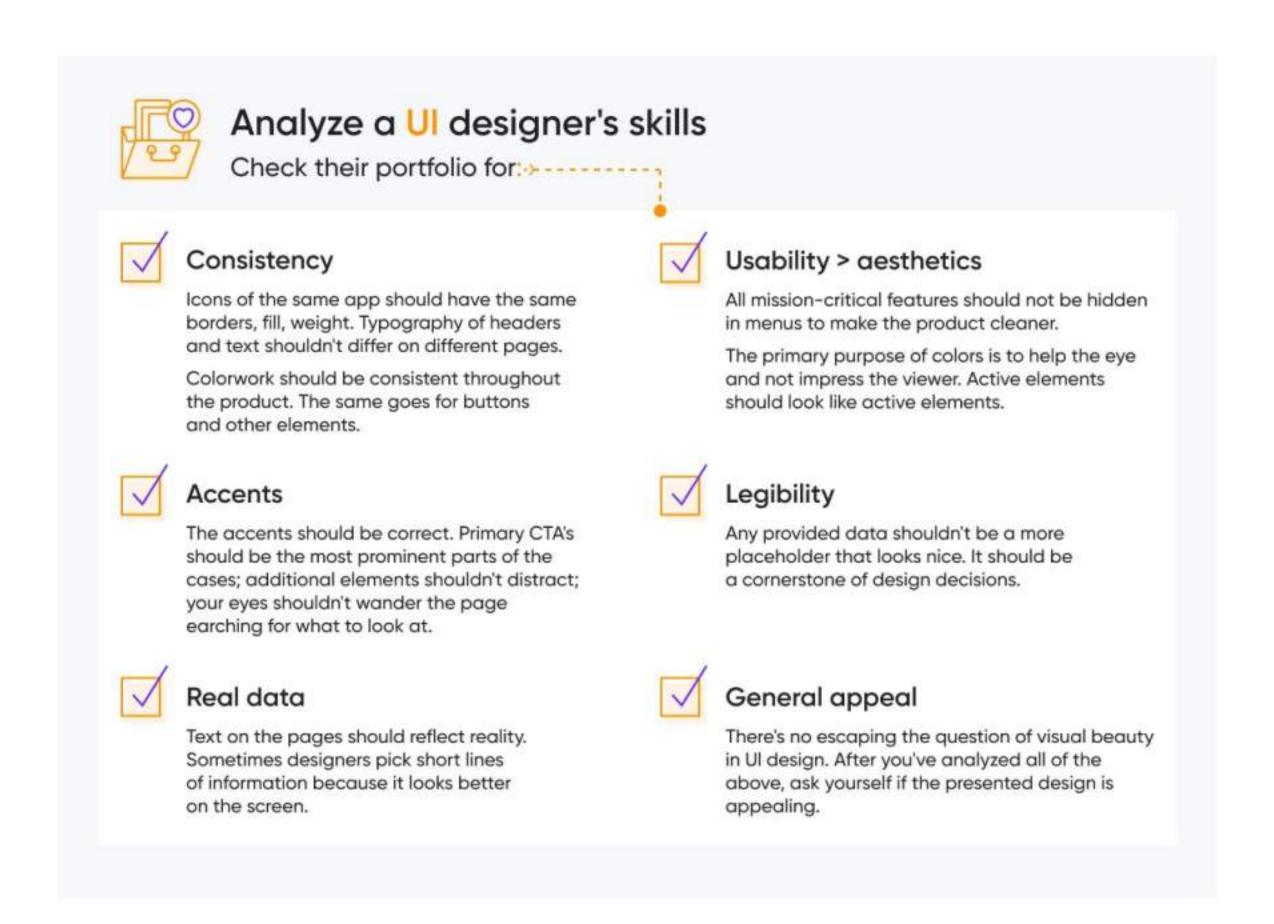


#### How to analyze a UI designer's skills through a portfolio

To effectively analyze a UI designer's portfolio, focus on their ability to create visually compelling and intuitive interfaces. Look for projects that showcase a strong sense of color, typography, layout, and overall visual hierarchy. Attention to detail, creativity in visual storytelling, and consistency across different screen sizes and platforms are key indicators of their expertise.

Additionally, evaluate how they use case studies to explain the rationale behind their choices, demonstrating an understanding of user needs and business goals.





While you can analyze aspects such as those mentioned above without much experience, other factors require extensive UI training, such as contrast ratios, grids, adherence to platform guidelines, and data alignment in forms and tables. However, the analytical basis we provided is enough to identify inexperienced designers.

Additionally, you can test your ability to detect UI imperfections with this fun test. It also explains correct answers, allowing you to learn in the process.

#### How to analyze a UI/UX designer's portfolio

A portfolio should showcase their user experience and user interface design skills. Such portfolios often combine both UI and UX cases, providing not only the visuals of the software but also the analysis and thinking behind the solutions. To analyze a UI/UX designer's portfolio, refer to the recommendations provided in the previous two chapters. But remember:

Some talents have stronger UI skills, while others are stronger in UX. When looking for a UI/UX specialist, pay more attention to whichever skill your company needs. Sometimes, finding a unicorn is easier than finding someone with equally powerful UI and UX expertise.



#### Questions to ask yourself when vetting portfolios

Here are a few questions you can ask yourself about UI/UX portfolios to find the best candidate.

#### Do you see a story?

In a portfolio, each case should weave together into a captivating story. The viewer should be left with a crystal-clear understanding of the designer's contributions. Without this essential skill, a designer may struggle to communicate their ideas and construct a flowing narrative.

#### Is their role in those cases transparent?

In many cases, an entire design department works on a product. If an interviewee presents such a case in their portfolio, it should be clear what their specific contribution was. For example, the designer may have created wireframes, designed UI based on wireframes created by their colleague, or conducted customer research.

#### Are there any cases in your industry or domain?

We can't stress this enough: if you want the best match, find designers who have experience in your domain or industry.

So, pay twice as much attention to portfolios with cases similar to your product. The more similarities, the better: market niche, platform, target audience, etc.

#### Are there any views and comments from other people?

Social proof can be tricky, especially if you don't know anything about the credentials of those providing it. However, if the portfolio is publicly accessible, check the comments section. Medium, Behance, and Dribble are particularly useful in this regard.

Besides, you can always do some quick Googling to check whether the commenters have the experience to back up their claims.



#### Do you personally like their cases?

To achieve productive "creative chemistry" between you and a designer, it's important to find someone whose taste matches yours. This will result in a better and more beautiful product with each iteration, inspiring you even more.

Therefore, choose designers with portfolios that you find attractive or, if that's not an option, ensure their work doesn't cause aesthetic discomfort.

#### Do you like their way of thinking and solving problems?

Creating a product involves continuous problem-solving. How can user flow be made more intuitive? How can the conversion rate be increased? How can design freshness and appeal be maintained? How can usability be improved?

If you appreciate a problem-solving approach in their specialized field, you will likely have a long-lasting professional partnership.

#### Does it address business goals?

Designers, particularly those in middle and senior positions, should contribute to the company's goals through their work. Portfolios that state the product's mission objective and demonstrate how they helped to achieve it will earn bonus points.

# How do they incorporate user feedback into their design process?

Knowing how an interviewee handles user feedback tells you about their adaptability and focus on user-centered design. It's important to see how they iterate on their designs in response to user testing and feedback.



#### What tools and technologies are they proficient in?

While not directly related to the portfolio's visual or case study content, knowing what tools an interviewee is comfortable with can be essential for workflow integration and project execution. This question can help assess whether the designer's technical skills match your project's requirements.

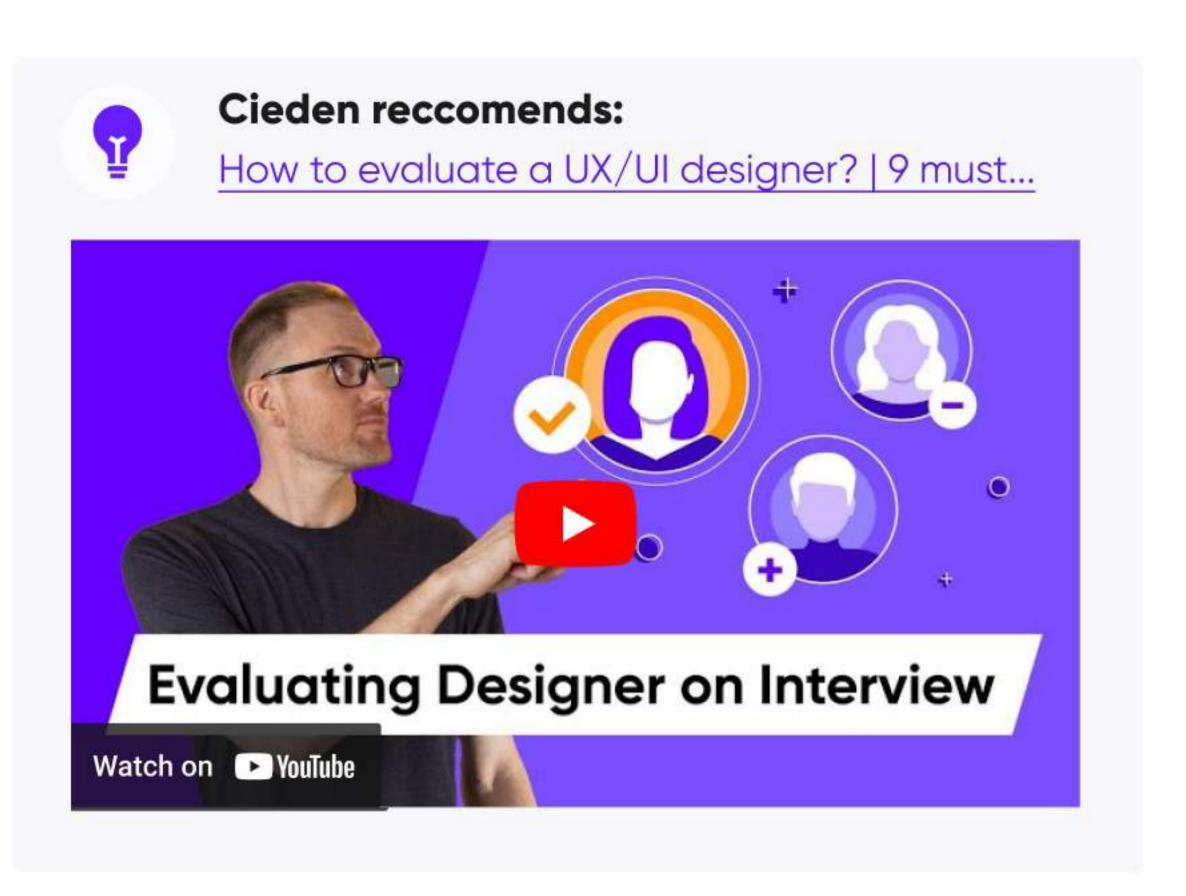
#### Summing up

Our recommendations will help you identify inexperienced or under-skilled designers, but let's face it: there's no substitute for a true expert. The game recognizes the game, and only an experienced designer will spot all the nuances and red flags of a portfolio. So, if you need help finding the perfect talent for your team, don't hesitate to contact us. We'll make sure you get the best of the best.

# How to evaluate a designer during the interview

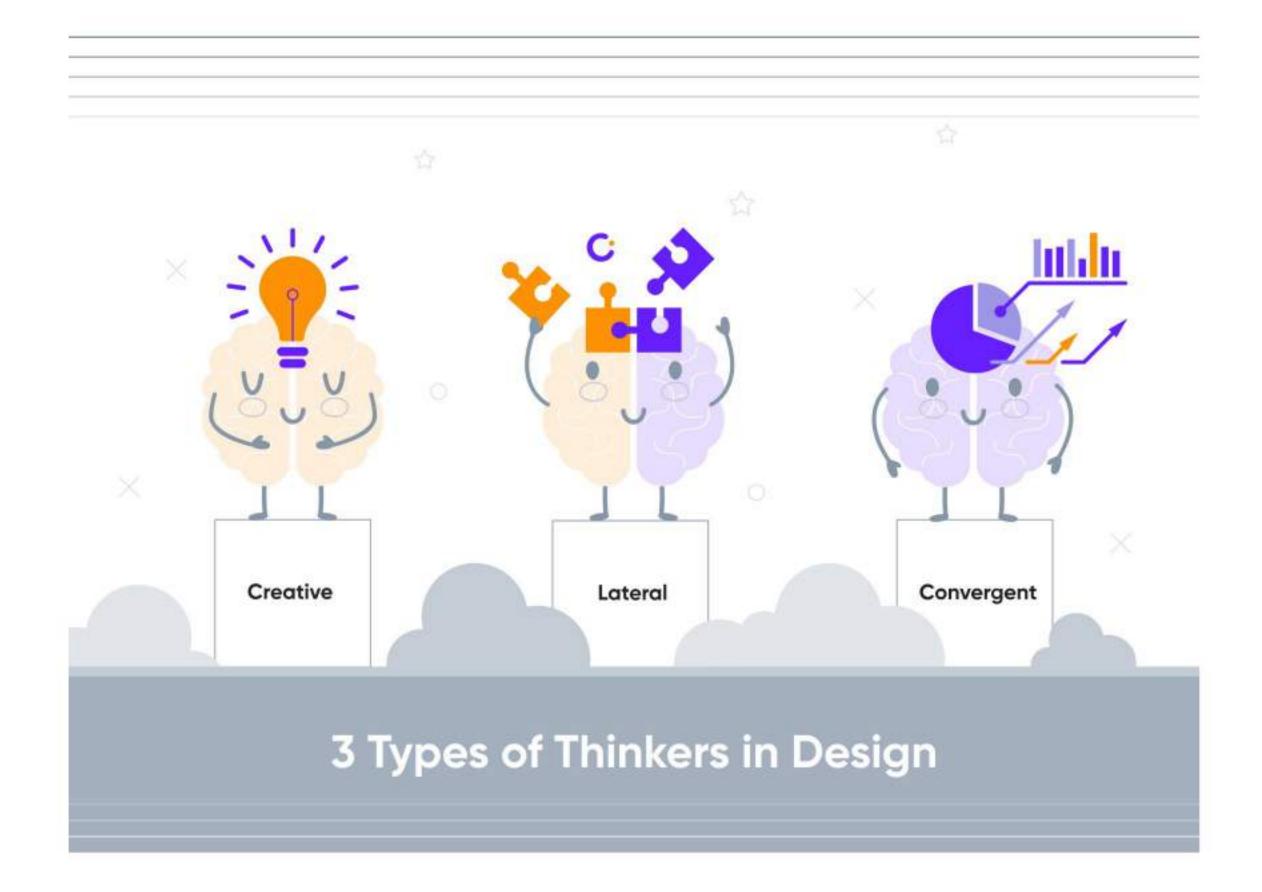
After checking dozens of resumes and portfolios, it's time to ace the interviews! In this section, we'll share our expert tips on how to get the most out of your interviews, including:

- Questions to ask during the interview;
- Test assignments to evaluate UI/UX skills;
- Is there a perfect interview?





#### Three types of thinkers in design



Whether you need a burst of creativity or a data-backed strong design strategy, there's a designer for that. Just make sure you're putting each team member's strengths to work. In our experience, design thinkers can be roughly divided into three categories.

#### Creative (divergent) thinking

"Open minds for open designs" – studies have shown that creativity is associated with openness and extraversion. Designers with creative thinking are a source of incredible opportunities for projects that require originality and imagination.

#### Convergent (analytical) thinking

Convergent thinking is the superpower that enables you to see patterns, find structure, and make data-driven design decisions. It's perfect for data-driven design and excels in projects built on research and constant validation.



#### Lateral thinking

Rare lateral thinkers can think in both modes simultaneously.

Their brain can create original ideas based on structured information and logic or momentarily select the best, viable ideas from hundreds of creative ideas that come to their minds.

Whether you need originality and creativity or data-driven decisions and research- based insights, there's a way to make the most of your team's talents. So don't ask a creative person to spend a month analyzing data or an analytical person to come up with multiple original designs. Give them tasks and projects that match their strengths, and watch them shine.

#### 9 questions you can ask during the interview process

Here are some universal questions that can help you gauge their experience and expertise, regardless of the context. From their professional background to their motivations, these questions will give you the insights you need to make the right hiring decision. So, let's dive in and find the perfect talent for your team!

#### Tell us about yourself, what is your background?

When interviewing a candidate, creating a relaxed and sincere atmosphere is important. To achieve this, start with a casual question.

For instance, you can ask:

- "Can you share a bit about your journey and what got you excited to work in this field?"
- "What did you enjoy most about your previous position?"

However, it is essential to direct the conversation to avoid sidetracking and to keep it focused on the crucial information. You can ask additional questions to gather the required information.

Don't be afraid to interrupt gently to steer the conversation in the direction you need.



#### What is your professional experience?

You may be thinking, "But I already know everything from a resume, don't I?" The answer is both yes and no.

Reading a carefully planned, almost sterile description is one thing. Hearing the person describe their experience on the fly is entirely different. This can help you understand their career status, professional focus, how they frame their responsibilities, and whether they have a superficial view of the job.

When hiring a UX or UX/UI designer, pay particular attention to how empathetic they are towards users' needs and how well they can map the customer experience. If they ignore or gloss over this issue, it may signal a lack of expertise or understanding of the role.

# Who was your manager and how would they evaluate your job?

Asking about their previous manager and how they would evaluate their work is crucial because it provides insights into the designer's self-awareness, ability to reflect on feedback, and professional growth. Understanding a candidate's perspective on their performance and the dynamics with their manager can help you comprehend how they might fit into your team's culture and work ethic.

#### What was your best role on the project?

This insight can help you align the candidate's potential role within your team with what they do best, ensuring their job satisfaction and peak performance. Additionally, it reveals how they view their contributions to a project's success, providing clues about their team dynamics, leadership qualities, and ability to collaborate.

#### How do you stay up to date with the design industry?

A designer must stay up-to-date with the latest trends and techniques. So, where do they get their information from? Here are some top resources to consider:



- Baymard Institute a top provider of UX research data for e-commerce projects;
- Nilsen Norman Group a #1 destination for interaction design findings;
- NFX.com probably the best source of knowledge for people who create marketplaces and work with the network effect.

Of course, there are more relevant resources, books, and style guides. If the interviewee names a few you don't know, feel free to check them out later. And don't forget, reading design books is just as important as keeping up with the latest trends. It shows that a candidate is dedicated to learning and improving their craft.

# What was the last design problem you solved and how did you approach it?

Understanding a designer's approach to tackling the issues they face offers a direct glimpse into their problem-solving skills, creativity, and ability to handle challenges — key qualities for any UX/UI specialist. This question lets you evaluate their analytical thinking, how they research and gather insights, their process for generating solutions, and their capacity for critical feedback and iteration.

#### How would you do user research for our future market?

To evaluate the research skills of a UX designer, you could ask questions such as:

- For which product should we conduct research?
- What is the goal of our research?
- Who is our target market?
- What is the user journey and how to work with it?

When designing for user experience, it is important to consider various aspects of market research such as user demographics, preferences, and behavior patterns. In terms of research approaches, there are two main types:



- Qualitative research, which includes interviews, usability tests, and cultural background studies. When designing a user experience, it's important to consider external factors such as the user's environment, technological limitations, and cultural differences. This type of research helps to understand what and why the user wants something.
- Quantitative research, which includes analytics and surveys, is used to test whether implemented solutions work well.

#### What is your greatest professional success/failure?

A tricky yet insightful question.

The first variation helps to discover what the person considers "success" and "best." Is it about the awards their projects have won or about increasing customer engagement by 25%?

The "greatest failure" question reveals the person's humility and ability to own up to their mistakes, especially in the era of "failing fast." Additionally, ask about the cause to see if the person tries to shift the blame on anyone or anything but themselves.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, but they will help you understand where the person stands.

#### What are your motivations?

Soft skills and emotional intelligence are crucial for productive collaboration and a healthy, spirited atmosphere in the workplace. It's no wonder some employers prefer less experienced candidates with better soft skills over highly skilled but "abrasive" professionals.

Emotionally intelligent individuals not only make for more pleasant colleagues, but they also minimize conflicts and potential burnout.

To assess a candidate's emotional intelligence, motivations, and personality, you can ask some of the following questions:



- What motivates you in your work?
- What types of things tend to make you feel irritated?
- If you were unable to pursue design, what would you do instead?
- Are there any projects that you would decline regardless of the circumstances?

#### Mistakes to avoid when hiring a designer

Looking for talent can be a daunting task, but with these tips, you'll be able to avoid costly mistakes and find the perfect candidate.

#### **Avoid merging several roles**

Specialization is key. A jack-of-all-trades but a master of none-designer may struggle with complex projects. Focus on finding someone with a deep understanding and proven track record in the specific area you need, whether that's UX research, UI design, or interaction design.

#### Don't prioritize specific skills

While certain technical skills are necessary, looking at the candidate's entire skill set, including soft skills and their ability to adapt and learn is important. Consider how their overall experience and approach to design thinking will benefit your team and projects.

#### Don't overestimate a UX portfolio

Portfolios highlight completed projects but may not reveal the challenges encountered or the designer's exact role in the solution. Dive deeper during the interview to understand their problem-solving process, how they overcome challenges, and how they collaborate with team members.



#### Don't expect a quick turnaround time

Quality design takes time. Set realistic research, ideation, prototyping, and testing deadlines to ensure the final product meets user needs and business goals. Clear communication about timelines from the start can prevent misunderstandings and rushed work.

#### Don't post a boring job ad

Capture the essence of what makes your project or company special. An engaging job ad should reflect your company's culture, the exciting challenges the designer will tackle, and the impact their work will have. This approach attracts candidates who are not just looking for any job but are excited about what you're doing.

#### Don't ignore the fiercely competitive UX market

To attract top talent, offer a competitive package that includes not only salary but also benefits, work-life balance, and opportunities for professional growth. Highlighting these aspects can make your offer stand out in a competitive landscape.

#### Don't skip the cultural fit assessment

Beyond skills and experience, the talent's fit with your company culture is crucial. An employee who shares your company's values, work ethic, and team dynamics is more likely to succeed and contribute positively to the team.

#### Don't overlook communication skills

Effective communication is essential, as designers must articulate their ideas to team members, stakeholders, and users. Evaluate their ability to communicate complex design concepts clearly and effectively, both verbally and in writing.



#### **Test assignment**

Typically, when evaluating a junior or mid-level candidate for a position, you'll assign them a substantial design task to complete in their spare time. This task should mimic their expected work and test their fundamental skills, including research, analysis, and actual design.

For a senior specialist, providing a longer paid task or a few paid days of work with your team is better.

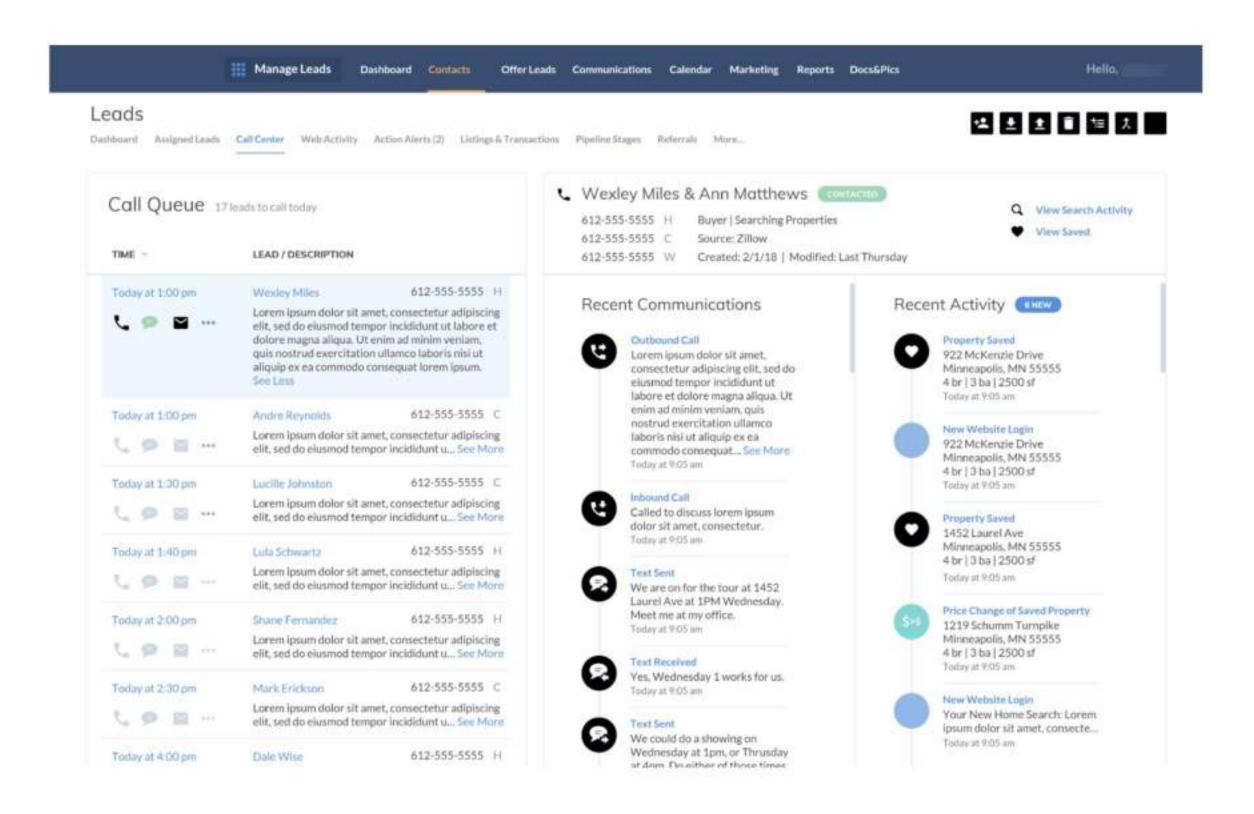
During the job interview, there are also tasks you can give potential candidates to quickly assess their skills and ability to work under time constraints. For example, you can prepare a few screens with usability flaws to show your candidates and ask them for improvement ideas. This will help you better understand their design mindset and make an informed decision on whether or not they are a good fit for your team.

What should be the answers?

- Newbie designers: In the worst case, you may receive vague, subjective feedback such as "It's bad," "I would completely redesign it," "I don't like the colors/icons," or "The screen is too dense." These are indicators of an inexperienced designer.
- UI-focused designers: If the interviewee tells you how to fix colors, icons, fonts, layout, and screen density, their main focus is visuals. It is perfectly fine, especially if you need strong UI expertise.
- UX-focused designers: These specialists have ideas for new features that can improve the user experience (UX). They can also suggest ways to reduce the number of clicks or scrolls required, how to provide better element naming, and how to improve data visualization.
- Designers with a business-oriented mindset: Some interviewees will start by asking more questions about design goals and main usage scenarios. If you're unsure how relevant their questions are, ask how they will use this information to change the design.



For example, here's the screen with a few usability flaws we use.



A UX designer could notice the following flaws:

- There are three scroll blocks on this page. It's better to have one scroll if possible so users will not make mistakes, and it will take less time to navigate the page.
- The active menu item is named differently than the page header.
- The implementation of the master-detail view can be improved to make it less disconnected. It may take some users time to understand how the navigation works.

Here are a few new features that can improve the design:

- To improve the user experience of this CRM, we can provide aggregated information about customer searches on the first screen. This will save users from having to click through multiple pages to access customer information.
- We can add a sidebar with the ability to save contextual notes before the call. Or canvas similar to the notion app so users can easily link properties, contacts, documents, or specific info about those properties.



 If agents work on multiple contracts simultaneously, maybe we should consider opening contracts in new tabs or even internal ones inside the app.

In general, we have defined 250 topics of design theory that we expect a mid-level designer to understand. Additionally, 50 design skills are validated through portfolios, test assignments, and project performance.

While we can't cover everything here, check out our UX/UI design matrix to see the exact requirements for each level and skill.

#### A customized interview process

There is no one-size-fits-all interview process. Your approach should be adjusted based on your requirements, budget, time constraints, and available resources. However, the key to a successful interview remains the same: clearly define what you are looking for, prepare thoroughly, ask relevant questions, and analyze the results.

It's also important to note that even the most well-executed interview process cannot guarantee a 100% success rate. As a top design agency in Ukraine, we have a multi- stage interview process with sophisticated test tasks that evaluate Product, UX, and UI. Yet, around 20% of our hires are not successful.

#### Summing up

Design is blind to gender, race, age, and cultural background. What truly matters are experience, skill, and emotional intelligence. Embrace diversity and find the perfect match for your company.

We all are in the people business, even more so than the technology business. So, the ability to select and grow the best teams is the number one competitive advantage.

# Looking for a designer to win the hearts of your users?

Cieden is an award-winning digital product design agency with over 6 years of experience working with B2B/B2C SaaS and enterprise software.

We understand the significance of building trust, and our smaller engagements provide an opportunity for us to earn that trust. With each engagement, you'll receive a redesign concept that applies our research insights to enhance your product. This cost-effective approach allows you to get a feel for our approach before committing to a larger project.

