

7 + 1 ways to respond if your client thinks you are ... *...too expensive*

Are you worried that clients may consider you to be too expensive?
Do you feel uncomfortable negotiating for fees and asking for payment?

These concerns are fairly common, and here are some practical tips to respond next time (and yes, it is up to you which response you will use, don't let your emotions get too much in the way):

Response 1: Say nothing, stay quiet

There is no reason why you should feel the need to defend yourself. So don't respond and don't take it personally.

In fact, seasoned negotiators very often use the 'stay quiet' technique, as the other party (often less experienced) will feel uncomfortable with silence, and they start talking, hereby often coming down with their request.

Response 2: Say in your most friendly & confident voice: *'Yes, you are right'*.

Your work is high quality, an original idea or design; you have taken years to develop your skills, so yes: it is expensive.

Explain to your client the real value of your work, your skills, and your materials.

If they are buying unique design thinking or are working with a highly skilled designer then they will need to pay for that experience and profile.

If they are buying a new future that has been carefully created and that will be enjoyed by all involved, then relatively speaking it isn't that expensive.

Share with your clients the real value of your work, the processes and time involved.

Present your work with due care and detail. If you communicate and present your work well, then your clients will realise its worth it.

Response 3: Ask your client: *'What makes you say that?'*

Talking directly with clients is a great way to find out more, and to discover what motivates your client. Ask questions in an inquisitive (non-aggressive or frustrated!) way to let them open up to you.

If you listen to their objections carefully then you can learn a lot about how potential clients perceive your work. You can respond to potential misconceptions by answering their questions, or make strategic changes in your positioning or presentation.

Especially if a trade buyer or seasoned collector says that your work is expensive, take note! If a retailer purchases your work then their mark-up will

double or triple the retail price that the consumer will pay. You need to be aware of the calculations 'design buyers' use to take this into account. Very often new designers are too expensive to sell their work to contracting companies.

If you want to sell to 'design buyers' in the longer term, then you need to start with selling to clients at the beginning, and become more efficient and effective in your working methods so that your prices become more competitive for design buyers. Continuously work on improving how you communicate the value of your work – in a verbal and visual way (think branding and visual presentation here)

Response 4: Ask your client: *'What's your budget?'*

If your client is commenting on the price then they are already in a 'buying mood', or at least they are considering your work.

Instead of you setting the price, ask your potential client what their budget is. If they are looking to buy they will often have a budget in mind. If not, then they might (not yet) be ready to buy anyway. So asking for their budget is a great way to find out how serious they are at this stage about purchasing from you.

If they give you a budget you can explain what you could do within their budget. If you do this in some detail in writing in the form of a design brief and quote, then that sets very clear, and professional expectations from the start, and stops wasting your and your clients' time.

Response 5: Ask yourself: *'Has my client actually said that, or is that just me thinking that?'*

Very often (newish) designers worry that they are too expensive; *that they themselves would not be able to afford their own work.*

But you are not your own client!

Make sure that you are dealing with the facts, and not with your own worries or insecurities about the value of your work.

Response 6: Ask yourself: *'Is cost an 'easy' excuse?'*

So your client has indeed said that you are too expensive.

But is that actually true? For many people who are buying something mentioning the cost is often the easiest way out if they don't want it (anymore).

What they actually mean when they say you are too expensive is ...

- *'Re-doing my reception area is a lot of hassle, maybe it can wait',*
- *'I can't make my mind up, let's wait till after Christmas',*
- *'Will my business partner like these ideas too?',*
- *'Maybe cousin Johnnie can do my design concepts cheaper', ...*

Response 7: Ask yourself: 'Are you selling in the right place, to the right people?'

Pricing your products or services isn't easy, because it often comes down to **where you want to position yourself**. What might be perceived 'expensive' in one place, isn't in another place (especially true online when you sell on market places such as <http://www.peopleperhour.com> but also at networking events where people try to haggle more often than in formal situations.

So, if you are considered to be too expensive then do more research into what your peers are charging and selling, what their fee levels are and start showing marketing in a more suitable manner for your pricing and positioning.

Bonus tip: Tell yourself: 'If your clients never tell you that you are too expensive, then you are probably too cheap.'

I got this advice a couple of years ago, and realised it's very true.

Be prepared for a little bit of negotiating, especially when dealing with design buyers, as it's part of the game. It's nothing personal, it's how some people do business.

Feel embarrassed when negotiating for payment. Don't be unless you have a modest belief in the competitiveness of your ability, talent & professionalism. The attached handout - **7 + 1 ways to respond if your client thinks you aretoo expensive** - shall offer you some strategies of how to counter the widely experienced question about **'the apparent high level of design fees'**.

Never see negotiations around 'money' as something connected to you personally.

This is about your professional practice and the value/reputation and strategic potential of your creative expertise.

The cost should be worth it, as you deliver total commitment and an extremely high level of professional self expectation on what you do - *don't you?*