



FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

What a Minute of **Animation** Really Buys

Why duration is the wrong unit, the seven things that genuinely drive the cost of a walkthrough, and a scope worksheet to fill in before you ask for a price.



START HERE

You are not buying a minute. You are buying shots.

Animation is quoted per minute because a minute is easy to write down. It is a poor description of the work. Sixty seconds held in one slow move past a facade and sixty seconds cut from fourteen shots across eight rooms are the same duration and nothing like the same job.

SAME 60 SECONDS	SHOTS	WHAT HAS TO EXIST
One continuous exterior move	1	One facade, one sky, one time of day. Everything outside the frame can stay unbuilt.
Exterior approach into lobby	3 – 4	Outside and inside both finished, and the transition between two completely different lighting conditions.
Full apartment walkthrough	8 – 14	Every room finished to hero standard, every surface seen from several angles, continuity across all of it.

Ask any studio to quote in shots rather than minutes and the number becomes comparable between suppliers. **A shot is a unit of work. A minute is a unit of playback.**

We build and render the model in 3ds Max, because it gives the better result. D5 real-time carries the animation and the economics — work that took roughly a week to render can come back in minutes.

DIM KUZMENKO, CO-FOUNDER, MAVERICK FRAME STUDIO

That shift is why animation stopped being a luxury line item. More than 40 per cent of our commissions now include animation, 360 tours, VR or panoramas, and the share is still rising. The saving is in rendering, though — not in modelling, not in materials, and not in the decisions below.



Maverick Frame production render.

THE DRIVERS

Seven things that move the number

01	Shot count	The dominant variable, well ahead of duration. Each new shot is a new composition, a new lighting check and a new set of surfaces that must survive being looked at.
02	Camera movement	A locked or slowly drifting camera shows one view. A camera that travels reveals the model from every side, so every side has to be built. Handheld feel, focus pulls and parallax past foreground objects all add work on top.
03	Populated or empty	People and moving cars are the largest single jump in an animation budget. A still can borrow a photographed figure. A moving shot needs animated characters that walk correctly, and badly animated people are worse than none.
04	Exterior or interior	Exteriors are usually cheaper per shot: one dominant light source, and the context can be simplified with distance. Interiors need every surface finished, furniture that stands up close, and light that behaves as it bounces around a room.
05	The state of the model	If a model already exists from your stills, the first shot is far cheaper than it would otherwise be. If it was built facing one way, expect to pay to finish the other three sides before anything can move.
06	Sound and music	Licensed track, sound design, voiceover, subtitles. Individually small, collectively a real line. Decide who supplies and who licenses, and for which territories and how long.
07	Deliverable formats	One master is one job. Vertical, square, a 15-second cut, a silent autoplay loop for a website header and a version with burnt-in subtitles are five more. Each is small; nobody budgets for all of them.

Where the savings are real

Fewer, longer, better shots. Static or near-static cameras where the architecture is the subject. An empty scheme at a quiet hour instead of a populated street. Reusing the model from your stills. Every one of these reduces cost without making the film look cheaper.

Where they are not

Cutting the animatic stage. Approving shots in isolation rather than as a sequence. Skipping the still frames. Each of these looks like a saving in week one and is paid back with interest at the first full review, because a change to a sequence is never a change to one shot.

SEQUENCE

Approve it in the order it is made

The cost of a comment depends entirely on when it arrives. Three checkpoints exist so that expensive opinions can be had cheaply. This is the typical shape of the work, not a promise about any particular schedule.

01 The shot list, in writing

Every shot numbered, with what it shows, roughly how long it holds and what it is there to prove. Argue about this document as much as you like. It is the only stage where an argument is free.

02 The animatic — grey, ugly, correct

Untextured geometry with the real camera moves, cut to the real length, often with the intended music underneath. It looks like nothing and it is the most valuable thing you will be sent. Timing, order and whether the film makes sense are all decided here, and all cheap to change here.

03 Still frames from each shot

One key frame per shot, rendered properly. Light, mood, materials and season are signed off on these. Approving a look on stills is faster and more accurate than approving it on moving footage.

04 The draft cut

Full sequence at working quality with sound. Reserved for pacing, sound and the transitions between shots. If the conversation here is about the colour of the brick, something went wrong two stages earlier.

05 Master and deliverables

Final render, grade, titles, then every format from driver 07 exported at once while the project is still open.

The sentence that saves the most money

“Show us the animatic before anything is textured.” Structural notes on a finished film are the most expensive words in this business, because a shot that gets cut has already been fully rendered. On an animatic it costs an afternoon.

WORKSHEET

Fill this in before you ask for a price

Send this instead of a duration. Quotes built from it can be compared line by line; quotes built from “about two minutes” cannot.

PROJECT _____

WHAT THE FILM HAS TO ACHIEVE _____

SHOTS

Exterior shots	_____	Interior shots	_____
Aerial / drone	_____	Detail / insert	_____
TOTAL SHOTS	_____	Target length	_____ sec

PER SHOT, ON AVERAGE

Camera static _____ slow move _____ travelling _____

People none _____ few _____ busy _____

Cars none _____ parked _____ moving _____

Time of day _____ Season _____

THE MODEL

Exists already from stills? _____

Built for one view only? _____

Interiors modelled? _____

SOUND

Music: we license _____ / studio licenses _____

Sound design _____ Voiceover _____ Subtitles _____

Territory and term for the track _____

DELIVERABLES (tick every one you will actually use)

16:9 master _____ 9:16 _____ 1:1 _____

15 sec cut _____ 30 sec cut _____ silent web loop _____

Subtitled version _____ Still frames pulled _____

APPROVAL

Who signs the shot list _____

Who signs the animatic _____

Two lines carry most of the number: **total shots** and **people and cars**. If the budget will not stretch, reduce those before you reduce anything else — and reduce them at the shot list stage, where reducing them is free.

WORKING WITH A STUDIO

Cost, and how to brief it

Two things people ask us before anything else. Both answers are short.

COMMISSIONED WORK	FREELANCER	STUDIO
Single exterior still	\$100 – 300	\$250 – 600
Single interior still	\$120 – 350	\$300 – 700
Package, 5–8 views	\$600 – 1,500	\$1,500 – 4,000
Animation, per minute	\$1,000 – 3,000	\$3,000 – 8,000

Market ranges we are willing to publish. Turnaround and revision-round figures are deliberately not in this table: ours vary too much by project type to state as a benchmark, and an invented number here would be worse than none.

How to brief it — shorter is better

This is the opposite of what most people assume. Four things:

- What you need — **how many images, and of what**
- The plans and elevations, as they are
- A few reference images for mood and light
- One clear line on what the images are *for*

Inflating a small job into a fifty-page specification backfires: taken literally it comes out ugly, and it misleads the people doing the work. Tell them the intent and let the team that does this daily handle the detail.

The mistake that costs the most

The biggest failure we see is not choosing the wrong vendor. It is **timing**. People start looking only after the first supplier has already failed and the deadline is on fire, then choose in a panic.

Line up and vet rendering partners **before** you need one. One, ideally a few, briefed and ready to take work. It costs an afternoon now and saves a project later.

10+

YEARS RENDERING
VISUAL STORYTELLING

350+

BRANDS & AGENCIES
EMPOWERED GLOBALLY

95%

CLIENT
SATISFACTION RATE

40%+

OF OUR COMMISSIONS NOW
INCLUDE MOTION OR 360

When the image has to hold up, **talk to us**

We are a CGI studio: architectural and product rendering, 3D modelling, animation, 360 tours and VR. Ten years, 350+ brands and agencies, and the kind of work that still looks right when somebody counts the windows.

Send us the plans and a line on what the images are for. You get a scope and a price, and no obligation to use either.

START HERE

maverickframe.com/contacts

SEE THE WORK

maverickframe.com/gallery

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Maverick Frame production render. · Cost ranges are market ranges as of 2026 and are not a quotation.