



FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

Twelve Questions Before Your Film Looks Like a Toy.

Ask them before you sign a 3D animation contract. A studio worth hiring answers all twelve in one email. The wrong one goes quiet when you ask who holds the scene files.

START HERE

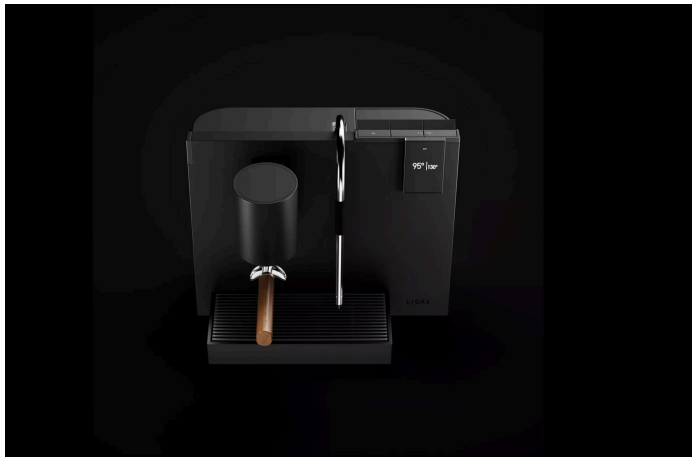
Every failure was visible before you signed

3D animation projects rarely fail on the showreel. Every studio has a few beautiful shots. They fail on the five things below, and each of them could have been spotted in the first email, if anyone had asked.

WHAT THE SALES CALL PROMISED	WHAT YOU FIND OUT IN WEEK THREE
01 "Photoreal, like our showreel"	Plastic materials, flat light and floaty motion. A premium product looks like a toy, and viewers skip the film in seconds.
02 "We will model it from your photos"	Proportions, buttons and joints drift. The first engineer who watches spots that it is not your product.
03 "One film for every channel"	A single cut tries to serve investors, buyers and technicians, and is too technical for some and too vague for others.
04 "Changes are no problem"	Feedback lands after the final render. Every edit costs days and the launch or trade-show date moves.
05 "Our animator is great"	One freelancer holds the files and the schedule. When they take on other work, your film stops.

You are not choosing a showreel. You are choosing a process.

The twelve questions on the next two pages test the process. Each one maps to one of the failures above, and each has an answer you can check.



Maverick Frame 3D animation still.

THE TEST, PART ONE

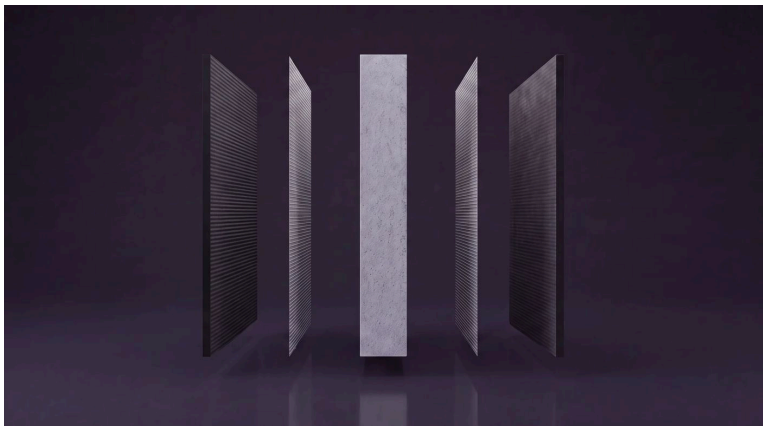
Questions 1 to 6: the model, the plan, the date

Send these as they are. You are not looking for enthusiasm; you are looking for numbers, names and dates. Vague answers are an answer too.

ASK THIS	A GOOD ANSWER SOUNDS LIKE	WALK AWAY IF
1. What do you need from us to start?	A brief with goal, audience, channels and runtime, plus CAD or STEP files, photos or sketches, the brand book and two references.	"Just send us a video you like."
2. How do you keep our product exact in every close-up?	The model is built from your CAD or drawings and close-ups are checked against the real part or your engineer.	"We will match it by eye from photos."
3. Do we approve a script and a storyboard before animation starts?	Yes: a script, then a shot-by-shot storyboard with timings, both signed off before any shot is animated.	"We prefer to show you something finished."
4. When do we see the look of the film?	Styleframes: a few finished stills that lock light, materials and colour before animation.	"You will see it at the end."
5. When would I see the storyboard and the first animatic, counted from a complete brief?	A number of working days for each, and what "complete" means.	"As soon as possible" or no number at all.
6. How many revision rounds are included, and what counts as one?	A fixed number at storyboard, at styleframes and at the edit, with a round defined as one consolidated list.	"Unlimited revisions."

Why questions 2 and 4 matter most

Most disappointing films are not badly animated. They show the wrong product in the wrong light. Both answers tell you whether the studio fixes the product and the look before it spends weeks on motion.



Maverick Frame 3D animation still.

THE TEST, PART TWO

Questions 7 to 12: quality, versions, files

ASK THIS

A GOOD ANSWER SOUNDS LIKE

WALK AWAY IF

7. How do you check quality before delivery?	Frames are checked at full resolution, motion at full speed, and the edit against the approved storyboard.	"Our artists are very experienced."
8. Can you show how something works inside?	Cutaways, exploded views and slowed-down sequences built from the same model, with labels where your engineers need them.	"We only do beauty shots."
9. Who edits, adds sound and on-screen text?	An editor on the studio's own team who cuts to the storyboard and works from your approved copy.	"We deliver the shots, you edit."
10. Which versions do you deliver for each channel?	A 16:9 master plus the 9:16, 1:1, loops and short cut-downs the launch needs, agreed before animation starts.	"We send one file, you resize it."
11. Can stills and later films come from the same scenes?	Yes: stills, social cuts and the next film reuse the model, so later work costs less.	"Each film is a new job."
12. Who exactly makes the film, and is any part passed on?	Named roles on the studio's own team, or an honest "yes, the voice-over" with the reason.	"Our network", a pause, or silence.

10 - 12

GOOD ANSWERS: HIRE, AND ASK FOR THE STORYBOARD DATE IN WRITING

7 - 9

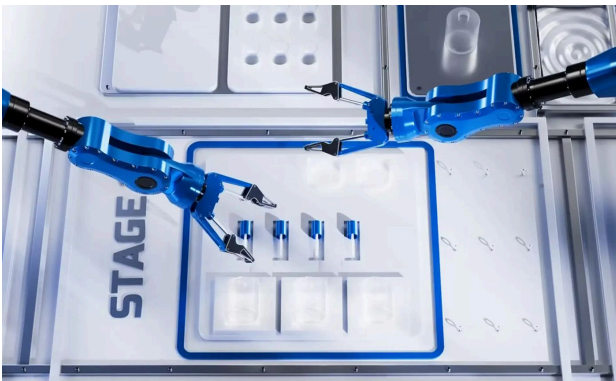
ASK FOR ONE PAID STYLEFRAME BEFORE COMMITTING THE FILM

0 - 6

WALK AWAY, HOWEVER STRONG THE SHOWREEL LOOKS

The question studios dodge most often is number 12

Passing work on is common and not always bad. Hiding it is the problem, because you cannot fix a wrong close-up or a missed launch date with a team you have never met.



Maverick Frame 3D animation still.

SEND IT

One email, three studios, one day

You do not need a call to run the test. Paste the email below, attach what you already have, and send it to the three studios on your shortlist at the same time. The difference between the replies is usually obvious by the second paragraph.

THE EMAIL TO SEND

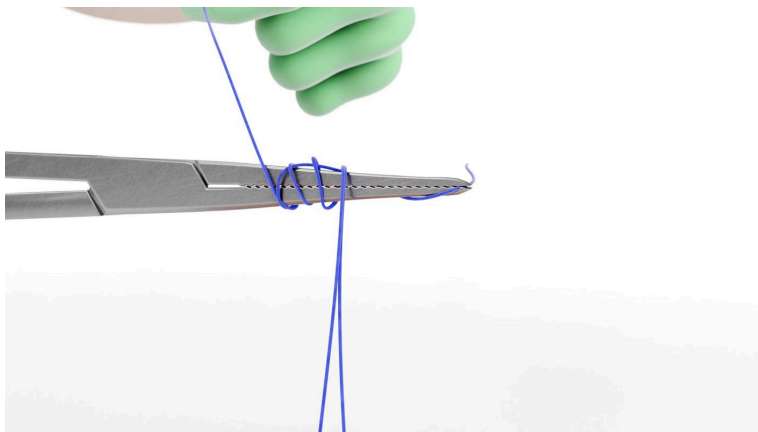
01	Subject	3D animation for [product, machine or project], quote and twelve questions
02	Line 1	We need [a launch film / an explainer / a how-it-works film / a walkthrough] of about [length] for [channels] by [date].
03	Line 2	Attached: the brief, CAD or drawings, photos or sketches, the brand book and two references we like.
04	Line 3	Please answer the twelve questions below with numbers and names, not ranges.
05	Line 4	Paste questions 1 to 12 from pages 03 and 04.
06	Line 5	We will decide within a week of receiving all three replies.

What good replies have in common

They are short. They answer in working days and dollars, name the people, and ask you one or two questions back about your files and where the film will run.

What we would answer

Our own numbers are on the next page, in the same format, so you can score us with the same test.



Maverick Frame 3D animation still.

WHAT THINGS COST

Market rates and our terms, so you can check any quote

Ranges seen across the market in 2026, freelancer to studio. Use them to sanity-check any quote, including ours.

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

Our standard timelines and revision terms. They are what we quote unless a project needs something else, and we say so before work starts.

STAGE OR DELIVERABLE	MAVERICK FRAME STANDARD
First draft of a still	3 to 5 working days from a complete brief
Finished stills, package of 5 - 8	2 to 3 weeks, drafts included
Animation, up to one minute	4 to 6 weeks, storyboard and preview first
Revision rounds included	Two at draft stage, one on the final image
What counts as a round	One consolidated list of comments, sent at once
Rush delivery	Half the time for about 40% more, when the schedule allows

Line up a studio before the deadline is on fire

The most expensive projects we see are not the badly briefed ones. They are the ones briefed in a panic, after the first supplier failed and the launch date did not move. Vet one or two studios while nothing is urgent.

A note on in-house: one artist needs around ten software subscriptions, a workstation and a stack of adjacent skills - modelling, lighting, post-production and client communication. It pays off only when that person is busy every day. Below that, the arithmetic favours outsourcing on its own.

NEXT

Send us what you already have

Plans, a model, photographs or a draft brief, in whatever state they are in. We will reply with a scope, a price and the questions that decide it - as a reply, not a sales call.

The contact form	maverickframe.com/contacts/
3D animation work	maverickframe.com/services/3d-animation-services/
Or simply	reply to the email this guide arrived in.

Written by the people who read these briefs

Dim Kuzmenko is a co-founder of Maverick Frame Studio. The figures in this guide come from our own inbox and our own rate card, not from an industry survey.