



FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

Twelve Questions Before Your Film Misses the Launch.

Ask them before you sign an architectural animation contract. A studio worth hiring answers all twelve in one email, with dates and frames. The wrong one goes quiet around question four.

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START HERE

Every failure was visible before you signed

Architectural animation projects rarely fail on camera work. Smooth showreels are everywhere. They fail on the five things below, and every one 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 FIVE
01 "We can turn it around quickly"	The film lands after the launch event. There is no time left for a second edit, let alone the short cuts for social.
02 "Priced per film, nice and simple"	The website loop, the vertical reel, the 30-second ad and the stills from frames are each quoted as new work, although the scene was already built.
03 "I'll handle it personally"	The landscaping changes, the freelancer is on another project, and nobody else can reopen the camera paths to render the shot again.
04 "Our in-house 3D team"	The agency passes your drawings to a subcontractor you have never met. Every note on the storyboard travels through two inboxes.
05 "We animate, the stills came from elsewhere"	The stills studio's model does not open cleanly for animation. The building is rebuilt, and the film and the stills no longer match.

You are not choosing a portfolio. 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.



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THE TEST, PART ONE

Questions 1 to 6: time and money

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. When would I see the storyboard and a first preview, counted from a complete brief?	A number of working days to each, with a low-resolution preview of the camera paths before any final rendering.	The first thing you see is the finished film.
2. What date would the finished film land, and what could move it?	A date, around 4 to 6 weeks for up to a minute, plus what would push it: late drawings, a changed storyboard.	A date with no conditions, or no date.
3. What happens if the deadline moves forward by a week?	A rush option with a price, roughly half the time for around 40% more.	"We'll make it work" with no price attached.
4. What does a second cut cost: a vertical reel, a 30-second version, stills from frames?	Noticeably less than the main film, because the scene and cameras exist; it is reframing and editing, not a rebuild.	Every cut priced as a new film.
5. How many frames will you render, and what does extra length cost?	The frame rate and count, for example 24 fps x 60 s = 1,440 frames, and a price per extra second or shot.	"About a minute" with no frame rate.
6. How many revision rounds are included, and what counts as one?	A fixed number, typically two at the preview stage and one on the final, with a round defined as one consolidated list.	"Unlimited revisions". It means nobody has priced them.

Why questions 4 and 5 matter most

A film is rarely one file. The launch wants the full cut, the website a loop, social a vertical reel and the brochure a few stills from frames. The frame count and the price of each extra cut decide your real budget.



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THE TEST, PART TWO

Questions 7 to 12: people and files

ASK THIS	A GOOD ANSWER SOUNDS LIKE	WALK AWAY IF
7. Who exactly will model, animate and edit my film?	Named roles on the studio's own team, including who edits, and who you will talk to day to day.	"Our partners", "our network", or silence.
8. Is any part of the work passed to another company?	"No", or an honest "yes, the voice-over" or "the music licence" with the reason.	A pause, then "we have a trusted team".
9. If my contact is away, who picks up the project?	A second person who already knows the file.	It depends on one person being available.
10. Who keeps the scene and camera paths, and for how long?	The studio archives the working scene, so a shot can be rendered again months later with a new facade or season.	Only the final video file exists after delivery.
11. Can the same model also give us stills and 360 views?	Yes, from the same model and materials, so the film, stills and tour match.	"We'd bring in a partner for that."
12. What would you need from me to start this week?	A short list: drawings, site photographs, one or two reference films, the length and where it will play.	A thirty-page questionnaire before a quote.

10 - 12

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

7 - 9

ASK FOR A PAID STORYBOARD AND PREVIEW BEFORE COMMITTING THE FULL FILM

0 - 6

WALK AWAY, HOWEVER STRONG THE SHOWREEL LOOKS

The question studios dodge most often is number 8

Subcontracting is common and not always bad. Hiding it is the problem, because you cannot fix a timing or quality issue with a team you are not allowed to talk to. Ask it plainly and listen to how long the answer takes.



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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. Replies arrive within a working day, and the difference between them is usually obvious by the second paragraph.

THE EMAIL TO SEND

01	Subject	Architectural animation for [project], quote and twelve questions
02	Line 1	We need a [length]-second animation of [building type] in [city] for [launch / website / sales suite] by [date].
03	Line 2	Attached: drawings, site photographs and two reference films 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, state the frame count, name the people, and ask you one or two questions back about where the film will play.

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.



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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/
Animation work	maverickframe.com/services/3d-architectural-animation/
Or simply	reply to the email this guide arrived in.

Written by the people who read these briefs

Dim Kuzmenko is the 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.