

FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

Twelve Questions Before an Engineer Stops the Film.

Ask them before you sign an assembly animation contract. A studio worth hiring answers all twelve in one email. The wrong one goes quiet when you ask who checks the assembly order.

START HERE

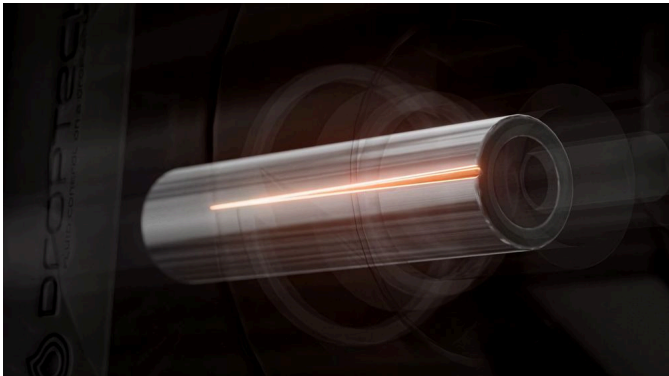
Every failure was visible before you signed

Assembly animation projects rarely fail on the showreel. Every studio has a gearbox flying apart. 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 AT THE FIRST REVIEW
01	"We can model it from photos"	A housing, a thread or a fastener is redrawn by eye. Your engineers stop trusting the film the moment they see it.
02	"We will make the sequence look dynamic"	Parts move where they look good, not where they can go. Installers copy an order that fails on the bench.
03	"One film works for everyone"	Too long for the product page, too vague for the service manual, and no help to the installer in between.
04	"Send us the CAD as it is"	Heavy assemblies crash the scenes or render for days, and the schedule slips in week two.
05	"Send feedback when it is done"	A part changes after rendering, and the whole film has to be paid for again.

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

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



Maverick Frame industrial valve animation stills.

THE TEST, PART ONE

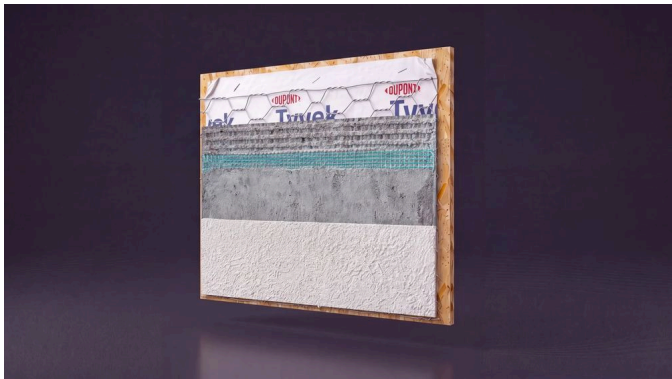
Questions 1 to 6: accuracy and review

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

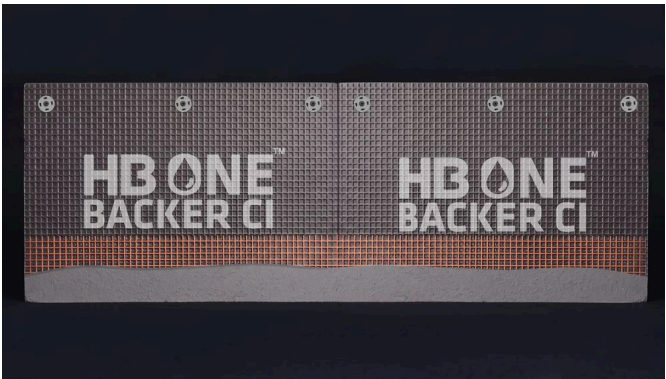
ASK THIS	A GOOD ANSWER SOUNDS LIKE	WALK AWAY IF
1. What do you need from us to start?	Audience, channels and runtime, plus CAD or STEP files, a parts list, the assembly order and your brand guidelines.	"Just send us some photos."
2. Where does the assembly order come from, and who checks it?	From your manual or your engineer; your engineer signs off the step list before animation.	"Our animators know how it goes."
3. How will you build the model?	From your CAD, simplified where the camera cannot see, with every visible part checked against the drawings.	"We will remodel it to look better."
4. How do you handle heavy CAD files?	A file check in the first days, with simplification that keeps every visible proportion exact.	"We will see when we import it."
5. At which steps does our engineer see it?	Step list, storyboard and animatic, all before the costly frames are rendered.	"When it is finished."
6. How many revision rounds are included, and what counts as one?	A fixed number per step, with a round defined as one consolidated list from all your reviewers.	"Unlimited revisions."

Why questions 2 and 5 matter most

Accuracy is not checked once at the end. It is built in at the step list and confirmed on the storyboard and the animatic, when a correction takes an hour instead of a week of rendering.



Maverick Frame wall system animation stills.



THE TEST, PART TWO

Questions 7 to 12: audience, files, team

ASK THIS	A GOOD ANSWER SOUNDS LIKE	WALK AWAY IF
7. One film, or one cut per audience?	One model, separate cuts: a short exploded view for sales and a step-by-step version for installers.	"One film for everyone."
8. When would I see the step list and the storyboard, counted from complete files?	A number of working days for each, and what "complete" means.	"As soon as possible" or no number.
9. How do labels, callouts and languages work?	Callouts from your approved copy, and a version without burnt-in labels so every language can be added later.	"We burn the text into the render."
10. What exactly do you deliver?	A 16:9 master, cutdowns for each channel, silent loops for screens and high-resolution exploded-view stills for manuals.	"One MP4 file."
11. How do you keep an unreleased product confidential?	An NDA, with CAD files shared only with the artists working on your shots.	"Our portfolio shows everything we make."
12. Who exactly will make 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 STEP LIST DATE IN WRITING

7 - 9

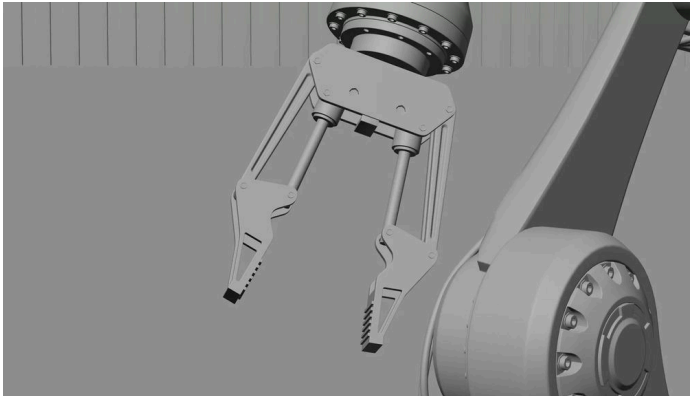
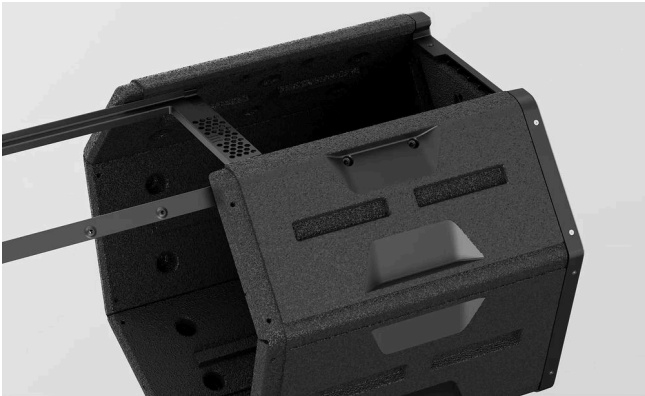
ASK FOR ONE PAID STYLEFRAME BEFORE COMMITTING THE FILM

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 nobody can fix a sequence your engineer rejected with a team you are not allowed to talk to. Ask it plainly and listen to how long the answer takes.



Maverick Frame product and mechanism animation stills.

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	Assembly animation for [product], quote and twelve questions
02	Line 1	We need [an assembly film / an exploded view / an installation guide / a how-it-works film] of about [length] for [audience and channels] by [date].
03	Line 2	Attached: the CAD or STEP files, the parts list, the assembly order and our brand guidelines.
04	Line 3	Please answer the twelve questions below with names and working days, 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, name the people and the review steps, and ask you one or two questions back about your files and your reviewers.

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 industrial valve animation stills.



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 the CAD and the files

CAD or STEP files, a parts list, a manual or just a first draft of the brief, in whatever state. We reply with a scope, a price and the questions that decide them, in writing and without a sales call.

The contact form	maverickframe.com/contacts/
Assembly animation	maverickframe.com/services/3d-assembly-animation/
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.