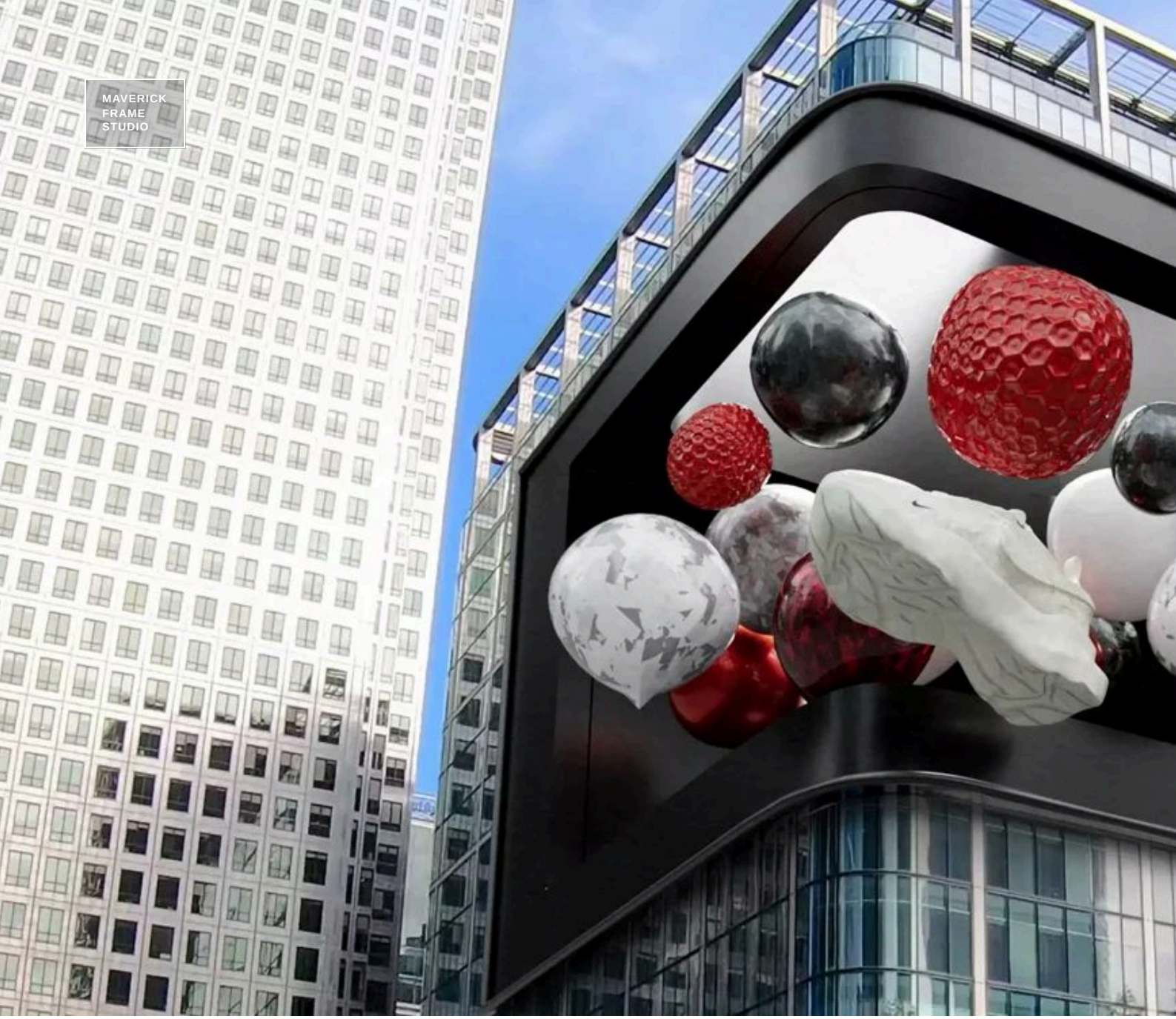


FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

Twelve Questions Before Your Client Sees the Render.

Ask them before you hand a client campaign to any CGI studio. A partner worth your margin answers all twelve in one email. The wrong one goes quiet around question four.

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START HERE

Every failure was visible before the brief went out

Agency CGI rarely fails on the reel. Every studio has a good one. It fails on the five things below, usually in the week before the air date, 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 THREE
01	**"We can absorb your peak"**	Three campaigns land in the same month. Yours queues behind a bigger account, and the pitch visual arrives after the pitch.
02	**"Just send us the samples"**	The samples arrive late and in the wrong colour. The studio waits for the product, and the launch date does not move.
03	**"Revisions are included"**	Your client's third round on the colourway reopens the scene, and every round after the second comes with a fee nobody quoted.
04	**"Our AI pipeline is fast"**	The key visual looks soft, the label text is garbled, the cap is the wrong shape, and the brand team rejects it at review.
05	**"We deliver a master, you crop it"**	The 9:16 placement cuts off the product, the billboard needs more sky, and the marketplace formats were never rendered.

You are not choosing a reel. 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 before your client sees a single frame.



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THE TEST, PART ONE

Questions 1 to 6: capacity and the product

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. If three of our campaigns land in the same month, who works on them?	Teams on the studio's own staff running in parallel, and one named project manager for your agency.	One freelancer, "our network", or silence.
2. Is any work passed to another company, and whose name is on the files?	"No", or an honest yes with the reason. White-label by default, your NDA signed, no contact with your client.	The studio's logo on the files, or a wish to present to your client.
3. When would I see the first draft, and what if the air date moves forward?	3 to 5 working days for a still from a complete brief, and a priced rush: about half the time for around 40% more.	"As soon as possible", or a rush with no price attached.
4. Can you build the product before the sample exists, and from what?	Yes, from CAD, dielines or clear photographs, with a list of what is missing and a check when the sample lands.	"Send us the physical product first."
5. How do you check the model against the real product?	An accuracy pass: sizes from CAD, label from the print files, colour matched to a swatch, and a preview to sign off.	"It will look right."
6. What would you need from us to start this week?	A short list: the brief in any format, references, product files, the placements and the air date.	A thirty-page questionnaire before a quote.

Why question 2 protects your margin

White-label is not a courtesy. If the studio's name is on the files or it joins your client's calls, the relationship and the price stop being yours. A good partner invoices only your agency, so you set the client's rate and your margin stays private.



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THE TEST, PART TWO

Questions 7 to 12: review, quality, formats

ASK THIS	A GOOD ANSWER SOUNDS LIKE	WALK AWAY IF
7. How many revision rounds are included, and what counts as one?	A fixed number, typically two at draft and one on the final, with a round defined as one consolidated list.	"Unlimited revisions". It means nobody has priced them.
8. Once the scene is built, what does a new colourway or angle cost?	Noticeably less than the first view, because the model, materials and lighting already exist.	Every colourway priced as a new render.
9. Where do you use AI, and where does a person decide?	A plain answer: AI where it saves time, the product itself modelled and lit, and an art director checking every frame.	No answer, or a key visual that is generated end to end.
10. Can I see a work-in-progress frame next to the final?	A clay render, wireframe or lighting pass from a recent job, shared under NDA.	Only finished reel images, nothing in between.
11. Which formats will you render, and when do we agree them?	Every placement in the media plan listed at the start, with safe areas for 16:9, 9:16, 4:5 and 1:1 set in the scene.	One master image and "you can crop it yourselves".
12. Who keeps the scene files, and can a new placement come from them later?	The studio archives the working scenes and renders new cuts from them for the next flight.	Only the final JPEGs exist after delivery.

10 - 12

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

7 - 9

ASK FOR ONE TEST RENDER ON A LIVE BRIEF BEFORE THE CAMPAIGN

0 - 6

WALK AWAY, HOWEVER STRONG THE REEL LOOKS

The question studios dodge most often is number 9

Using AI is not the problem. Hiding it is, because a garbled label or a wrong proportion is then found by your client's brand team, not by the studio. Ask where a person signs off each frame and listen to how specific the answer is.



Maverick Frame production render.

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**	CGI for a [product category] campaign, quote and twelve questions
02	**Line 1**	We need [number] stills and [number] films of [product] for [pitch / launch / always-on], first air date [date].
03	**Line 2**	Attached: CAD or dielines, finish references and the media plan with placements.
04	**Line 3**	The work is white-label under our agency's name. Our NDA is attached; please answer with numbers and names.
05	**Line 4**	Paste questions 1 to 12 from pages 03 and 04.
06	**Line 5**	We will decide within [number] working days 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 the placements and the air date.

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 production render.

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/
Agency CGI production	maverickframe.com/solutions/marketing-agencies/
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.