

FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

Twelve Questions Before Your Launch Images Go Live.

Ask them before you sign a cosmetic rendering contract. A studio worth hiring answers all twelve in one email. The wrong one goes quiet when you ask how it makes glass, cream and metal look real.

START HERE

Every failure was visible before you signed

Cosmetic rendering projects rarely fail on the hero shot. Glossy jars on pastel backdrops are in every portfolio. 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 LAUNCH
01	"Photoreal, of course"	The perfume glass looks like plastic, the cream looks like paint, and the metallic cap has no reflection. The retail buyer sees it first.
02	"Every word will be sharp"	The ingredient list smears on the curve of the tube, and the regulatory copy cannot be read on the listing.
03	"Shades are easy"	Every shade is quoted as a new view, the colours drift between images, and the range looks like three brands.
04	"We can animate it too"	The film comes from another vendor, rebuilt from scratch, with a cap and a label that do not match the packshots.
05	"We'll have it ready"	The images arrive after the buyer meeting, the pre-order launch or the campaign date. None of those dates moves for a late render.

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 before a single image is rendered.



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THE TEST, PART ONE

Questions 1 to 6: the files, the finishes, the date

Send these as they are. You are not looking for enthusiasm; you are looking for file formats, working days and names. 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?	The dieline or packaging artwork as print files, CAD of the bottle, jar or device if it exists, and a sample or daylight photos of each finish.	"A photo of the jar is enough."
2. How do you keep the ingredient list and small print readable on a curved pack?	The artwork is mapped from the print file at print resolution, and every line is checked against it before final rendering.	"We'll retype the label."
3. How do you make glass, cream, gel and metal look real?	Refraction, subsurface light and reflections built into each material and checked against a photo of the real finish.	"We add the shine in Photoshop."
4. How do you deliver images for a marketplace?	The main image follows the marketplace rules for that slot; lifestyle, texture and claim images go to the secondary slots.	"We'll put flowers around the jar on every image."
5. If a shade, a claim or a size changes after sign-off, what does the update cost?	The label and colour are textures on the kept model: new artwork, re-rendered views, priced in hours per SKU.	"We'd have to rebuild the scene."
6. When would I see the first draft, counted from a complete brief?	A date in working days for the first view and for the full set, and a clear list of what "complete" means.	"As soon as possible" or no number at all.

Why questions 3 and 4 matter most

A retail buyer or a marketplace judges the packshot before any shopper sees it. Fake-looking glass and a listing image off the rules both send the file back, and the launch date does not move with it. Both are decided by what the studio asks for, and checks, before it starts.



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THE TEST, PART TWO

Questions 7 to 12: the range, the film, the team

ASK THIS

A GOOD ANSWER SOUNDS LIKE

WALK AWAY IF

7. How do you keep a whole range identical across SKUs and shades?

One master scene, one lighting set-up and one camera per angle; each shade is the same model with its own colour and label.

"Each product is its own project."

8. What does the next shade or size cost once the first is built?

A price in hours per SKU on the existing model, far below the first pack, stated in the quote.

Every shade quoted as a new project.

9. Can the launch film, the ads and the social cuts come from the same models?

Yes: the packshot models are animated, so the film, 9:16 cuts and FOOH clips match the stills.

"Animation is another team, from scratch."

10. Do you need a physical sample?

A sample if you can send one, otherwise close-up photos in daylight of every finish, texture and colour.

"No need, every cream looks the same."

11. How many revision rounds are included, and what counts as one?

Two at draft and one on the final, with a round defined as one consolidated list of comments.

"Unlimited revisions."

12. Who exactly will model and render the range, and is any part passed on?

Named roles on the studio's own team, or an honest "yes, the animation" with the reason.

"Our network", a pause, or silence.

10 - 12

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

7 - 9

ASK FOR ONE PAID TEST VIEW BEFORE COMMITTING THE LINE

0 - 6

WALK AWAY, HOWEVER STRONG THE PORTFOLIO LOOKS

The question studios dodge most often is number 12

Subcontracting is common and not always bad. Hiding it is the problem, because a range rendered by three different hands is exactly how shades and caps start to drift. 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	Cosmetic renders for [product or range], quote and twelve questions
02	Line 1	We need [number] images of [number] SKUs in a [jar / tube / dropper bottle / perfume bottle / device] for [our store / a marketplace / a retail sell-in / a launch campaign] by [date].
03	Line 2	Attached: the dieline, the packaging artwork as print files, CAD if we have it, and photos of the [cream / serum / glass / finish].
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 the finishes and the shades.

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 the dieline and the pack files

The dieline or packaging artwork, CAD of the bottle, jar or device if you have it, photos of a sample and whatever brief you have, in whatever state it is in. We will reply with a scope, a price and the questions that decide it - as a reply, not a sales call.

The contact formmaverickframe.com/contacts/

Beauty workmaverickframe.com/solutions/cosmetics-rendering/

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.