

FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

Twelve Questions Before Your Pool Looks Like Plastic.

Ask them before you sign a pool rendering contract. A studio worth hiring answers all twelve in one email, with dates and prices. The wrong one goes quiet around question four.

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START HERE

Every failure was visible before you signed

Pool rendering projects rarely fail on the water. Portfolios with good caustics 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 THREE
01	**"We can turn it around quickly"**	The draft lands after the brochure goes to print. There is no time left for the dusk view with the underwater lights on.
02	**"Priced per render, nice and simple"**	The website hero, the brochure spread, the social crop and the showroom banner each cost a full render, although the pool scene was already built.
03	**"I'll handle it personally"**	Six months later the tile changes, the freelancer is on another project, and nobody else can open the scene to swap the mosaic.
04	**"Our in-house 3D team"**	The agency passes your plans to a subcontractor you have never met. Every comment on the water colour travels through two inboxes.
05	**"We do the renders, they did the model"**	The pool, deck and planting from one vendor do not open cleanly at the other. You pay for the scene twice and lose two weeks.

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 first draft, counted from a complete brief?	A number of working days, 3 to 5 for a still, and what "complete" means: pool plan, finishes, planting list.	"As soon as possible" or no number at all.
2. What date would the finished set land, and what could move it?	A date, plus the two or three things that would push it: a late finishes schedule, a changed pool shape.	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. Once the pool scene is built, what does a dusk view or a new angle cost?	Noticeably less than the first view, because the water, tiling, lighting and planting already exist.	Every extra view priced as a new render.
5. What does a crop for a website, brochure or social post cost?	A small fee or included, since it comes from the same master file.	A new render fee for each format.
6. 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.

Why questions 4 and 5 matter most

A pool is rarely sold on one image. The day view shows the tile and coping, the dusk view shows the lighting on the water, and the website, brochure and social feed each want their own crop. The price of the second image decides 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 build the water, lighting and planting in my scene?	Named roles on the studio's own team, 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 planting library" 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 files, and can a finish change later?	The studio archives the working scene, so a new tile, coping or lounger is an edit months later, not a rebuild.	Only the final JPEGs exist after delivery.
11. Can you build the pool model and also produce the animation and 360 views?	Yes, from the same model, so a later film or tour does not start from zero.	"We'd bring in a partner for that."
12. What would you need from me to start this week?	A short list: pool plan, finishes schedule, site photographs, a reference or two, the views you need.	A thirty-page questionnaire before a quote.

10 - 12

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

7 - 9

ASK FOR ONE PAID TEST VIEW, IDEALLY THE DUSK SHOT, BEFORE COMMITTING

0 - 6

WALK AWAY, HOWEVER GOOD THE WATER LOOKS IN THE PORTFOLIO

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**	Pool renders for [project], quote and twelve questions
02	**Line 1**	We need [number] views of [pool / spa / resort deck] at [site] for [sales / website / brochure] by [date].
03	**Line 2**	Attached: pool plan, finishes schedule, site photographs 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, usually about the finishes and the time of day.

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/
Pool work	maverickframe.com/services/pool-3d-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.