



FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

Hiring a CGI Studio in London

What to establish about planning visuals before anyone renders anything, what actually drives London day rates, and where the agency layer helps or costs you.



START HERE

Two completely different products

More money is wasted on this distinction in London than on any other single thing, because a dense planning environment means most schemes need both and many briefs ask for one while meaning the other.

	PLANNING AND VERIFIED VISUALS	MARKETING VISUALS
Purpose	To demonstrate, accurately, what will be seen from a defined point.	To make somebody want it.
Camera	Surveyed position, recorded, reproducible.	Chosen because it flatters the scheme.
Method	Documented, often with a methodology statement.	Not applicable.
Context	Real, surveyed, frequently including consented neighbouring schemes.	As much or as little as looks good.
Light	Defensible and often specified.	Whatever sells.
Cost driver	Survey, context modelling, documentation.	Styling, dressing, post-production.

The expensive mistake

Commissioning marketing images first, then discovering the authority wants verified views from nominated positions. Almost none of the first job transfers to the second, because the context model and the camera discipline were never there. Establish the planning requirement **before** the marketing brief, even when marketing is the urgent one.



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STEP 01

What to confirm with the authority first

Requirements vary by borough and by scheme and they change. This is not a statement of what any authority requires — it is the list to get answered in writing before commissioning.

01 Are accurate or verified visual representations required, and to what standard?

If yes, this determines survey, method and documentation, and it cannot be added afterwards to images already made.

02 Which viewpoints, and who nominates them?

In a dense environment this is frequently prescribed, sometimes after pre-application discussion. Producing images from viewpoints nobody asked for is the most common wasted spend here.

03 Is a townscape or heritage assessment involved?

If so, the consultant leading it usually specifies the visuals, and your studio should be talking to them directly rather than through you.

04 Cumulative context — which consented schemes must appear?

This is the line item that most often doubles a context modelling budget, and it is knowable at the start.

05 Is photography required, and in what conditions?

Season, foliage state and weather can all be specified. That means a shooting window, which means a programme risk worth naming early.

06 What format and scale must the submission be presented at?

Print size drives resolution, and resolution drives render time. Cheap to plan, expensive to retrofit.

Take the answers to your studio. A studio that receives none of this will quote for marketing images, because that is what an unqualified brief describes.



STEP 02

What actually drives the London number

01	Context modelling	The dominant hidden cost. A scheme in a dense area needs its neighbours built, and in some cases their consented replacements too. It is frequently larger than the cost of the building you are actually selling.
02	Survey and verification	Only applies to verified work, and when it applies it is significant. Establish it at the start or it becomes a variation.
03	Where the work is done	A London office with London overheads prices differently from a London-fronted team producing elsewhere. Both are legitimate. Ask which you are buying, and price accordingly.
04	The agency layer	Property marketing agencies often commission CGI on your behalf and add a margin. Sometimes that margin buys genuine art direction and a single point of accountability. Sometimes it buys a forwarded email. Ask what it covers.
05	Programme compression	Committee dates do not move. A three-week job squeezed into eight days is paid for in overtime by somebody, and it shows up in the quote or in the quality.

The question that reprices a job

"How much of this quote is context modelling, and can we reuse that model across the planning submission, the marketing set and the animation?" On a dense urban site the answer often reframes the entire budget conversation — because the expensive part is shared and most briefs pay for it more than once.

On local knowledge

London stock brick, the specific grey of a wet pavement, the way light behaves between tall buildings on a dull day. A studio that has worked here produces images a planning committee reads as familiar. One that has not produces images that feel subtly imported, and nobody articulates why.



STEP 03

The short scorecard

- ☐ Verified or accurate visual work they can show, not just marketing images
- ☐ Willing to produce a methodology statement
- ☐ Context modelling quoted as its own line
- ☐ Will talk directly to your townscape or heritage consultant
- ☐ Clear on who surveys and who photographs
- ☐ Says plainly where the work is produced
- ☐ Context model reusable across planning, marketing and motion
- ☐ A written revision policy with a definition of "a round"
- ☐ Capacity confirmed against your committee date, in writing
- ☐ Rights covering agent, developer and third-party marketing use

The last one catches people

A residential scheme's images end up with the developer, the selling agent, the letting agent, a portal and sometimes a funder. If the licence was written for one of those, somebody raises it at the worst possible moment. Agree the full list of users at the quoting stage, when it costs a sentence.



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WORKING WITH A STUDIO

Cost, and how to brief it

Two things people ask us before anything else. Both answers are short.

COMMISSIONED WORK	FREELANCER	STUDIO
Single exterior still	\$100 – 300	\$250 – 600
Single interior still	\$120 – 350	\$300 – 700
Package, 5–8 views	\$600 – 1,500	\$1,500 – 4,000
Animation, per minute	\$1,000 – 3,000	\$3,000 – 8,000

Market ranges we are willing to publish. Turnaround and revision-round figures are deliberately not in this table: ours vary too much by project type to state as a benchmark, and an invented number here would be worse than none.

How to brief it — shorter is better

This is the opposite of what most people assume. Four things:

- What you need — **how many images, and of what**
- The plans and elevations, as they are
- A few reference images for mood and light
- One clear line on what the images are *for*

Inflating a small job into a fifty-page specification backfires: taken literally it comes out ugly, and it misleads the people doing the work. Tell them the intent and let the team that does this daily handle the detail.

The mistake that costs the most

The biggest failure we see is not choosing the wrong vendor. It is **timing**. People start looking only after the first supplier has already failed and the deadline is on fire, then choose in a panic.

Line up and vet rendering partners **before** you need one. One, ideally a few, briefed and ready to take work. It costs an afternoon now and saves a project later.

10+

YEARS RENDERING
VISUAL STORYTELLING

350+

BRANDS & AGENCIES
EMPOWERED GLOBALLY

95%

CLIENT
SATISFACTION RATE

40%+

OF OUR COMMISSIONS NOW
INCLUDE MOTION OR 360

When the image has to hold up, **talk to us**

We are a CGI studio: architectural and product rendering, 3D modelling, animation, 360 tours and VR. Ten years, 350+ brands and agencies, and the kind of work that still looks right when somebody counts the windows.

Send us the plans and a line on what the images are for. You get a scope and a price, and no obligation to use either.

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SEE THE WORK

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Maverick Frame production render. · Cost ranges are market ranges as of 2026 and are not a quotation.