



FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

What Hiring a 3D Artist **Really** Costs

The full cost of producing your own renders, worked out on one page — and the break-even point almost nobody calculates before buying the software.

START HERE

The three costs people forget to count

You have just compared rendering software. The licence price is the number on the page, and it is the smallest number in this decision. Here is the rest of it, and a worksheet to put your own figures into.

01 The stack

One renderer is never one subscription. A working artist runs around ten paid tools plus asset libraries. The renderer you were comparing is one line of ten.

02 The skills

Modelling, lighting, post-production and client communication are four different jobs. They are rarely one person, and the person who has all four is not junior.

03 The idle time

In-house capacity is paid for by the month and used by the project. The gap between the two is where in-house rendering quietly stops paying.

In-house rendering rarely pays off below a certain size. One artist still needs around ten different software subscriptions, a workstation that can actually render, and a stack of adjacent skills. It works at a headcount that keeps that person busy every day. Below that, outsourcing wins on arithmetic alone, before anyone argues about quality.

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Maverick Frame production render.

STEP 01

The stack, priced

Fill in current list prices for your region and licence type. We have deliberately left the numbers blank: software pricing changes several times a year, and a printed figure would be wrong by the time you read it.

LINE	WHAT IT COVERS	YOUR ANNUAL COST
Modelling package	3ds Max, Blender, Cinema 4D or similar	
Production renderer	V-Ray, Corona, Redshift or similar	
Real-time renderer	D5, Lumion, Twinmotion — for animation and quick looks	
CAD interchange	Rhino, SketchUp, Revit or a converter	
Scattering / environment	Forest Pack, RailClone or equivalent	
Material authoring	Substance or equivalent	
Soft goods	Marvelous Designer or equivalent	
Post-production	Photoshop, and After Effects if there is motion	
Asset libraries	Models, textures, HDRIs, vegetation, people	
Render capacity	Workstation amortised, plus any render-farm spend	
Storage and backup	Project archives grow fast and are contractually needed	
Stack total, per year	Before anyone is paid	

Two lines people leave out and then discover: render capacity, because a machine that models comfortably is not a machine that renders a set of eight views overnight; and storage, because the client who comes back in eighteen months expects you to still have the scene.



STEP 02

The worksheet

Print this page. Ten minutes with real numbers beats a month of arguing about it.

A What you actually need

IMAGES YOU COMMISSIONED LAST YEAR

IMAGES YOU EXPECT NEXT YEAR

MINUTES OF ANIMATION NEXT YEAR

BUSIEST MONTH, IN IMAGES

QUIETEST MONTH, IN IMAGES

The last two matter more than the annual total. In-house is sized for the busiest month and paid for in the quietest.

B In-house, per year

STACK TOTAL FROM PAGE 03

SALARY, FULLY LOADED

RECRUITMENT, AMORTISED

MANAGEMENT TIME, IN HOURS × RATE

RAMP-UP: FIRST 3 MONTHS AT PARTIAL OUTPUT

IN-HOUSE TOTAL

C Outsourced, per year

IMAGES NEXT YEAR × RATE PER IMAGE

ANIMATION MINUTES × RATE PER MINUTE

YOUR OWN BRIEF AND REVIEW TIME

OUTSOURCED TOTAL

Use the ranges on page 06 if you do not have quotes yet.

D The break-even

Divide your in-house total by your per-image outsourced rate. That is **how many images a year in-house has to produce before it is the cheaper option.**

Now compare it with line A. If your real volume is below that number, the arithmetic has answered you and nothing about quality needs to be discussed.

If it is close, the deciding factor is the gap between your busiest and quietest month — not the average.

STEP 03

What the number does not capture

Five things the arithmetic misses. Three favour outsourcing, two favour in-house. Read them before you act on the result.

01	Peak load	An in-house artist has one throughput. A competition deadline and a sales launch in the same fortnight do not care. Studios flex; a salaried person does not.
02	The bus factor	One artist means one holiday, one illness and one resignation between you and a missed deadline — with every project file in their format, on their machine.
03	Range	Exteriors, interiors, animation, 360 and product are different specialisms. One person is genuinely good at two of them.
04	Iteration speed — favours in-house	Somebody two desks away can try a material change in ten minutes. That is real, and it is the strongest argument for in-house at the concept stage.
05	Confidentiality — favours in-house	Some work genuinely cannot leave the building. If that is you, the arithmetic is not the deciding input — but price the stack honestly anyway.

The pattern we see most

A hybrid, and it is usually the right answer: one person in-house for concept, massing and fast iteration, an outside studio for the finished sets, animation and anything that goes to print or planning. It costs less than a full in-house team and removes the peak-load problem, which is the one that actually breaks deadlines.

If you go in-house anyway

Budget the full stack from page 03, not the renderer alone. Plan three months of partial output. Agree where files live and in what format from week one. And keep one outside studio briefed and ready — not for the average month, for the bad one.



Maverick Frame production render.

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



MAVERICK
FRAME
STUDIO

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.

START HERE

maverickframe.com/contacts

SEE THE WORK

maverickframe.com/gallery

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

