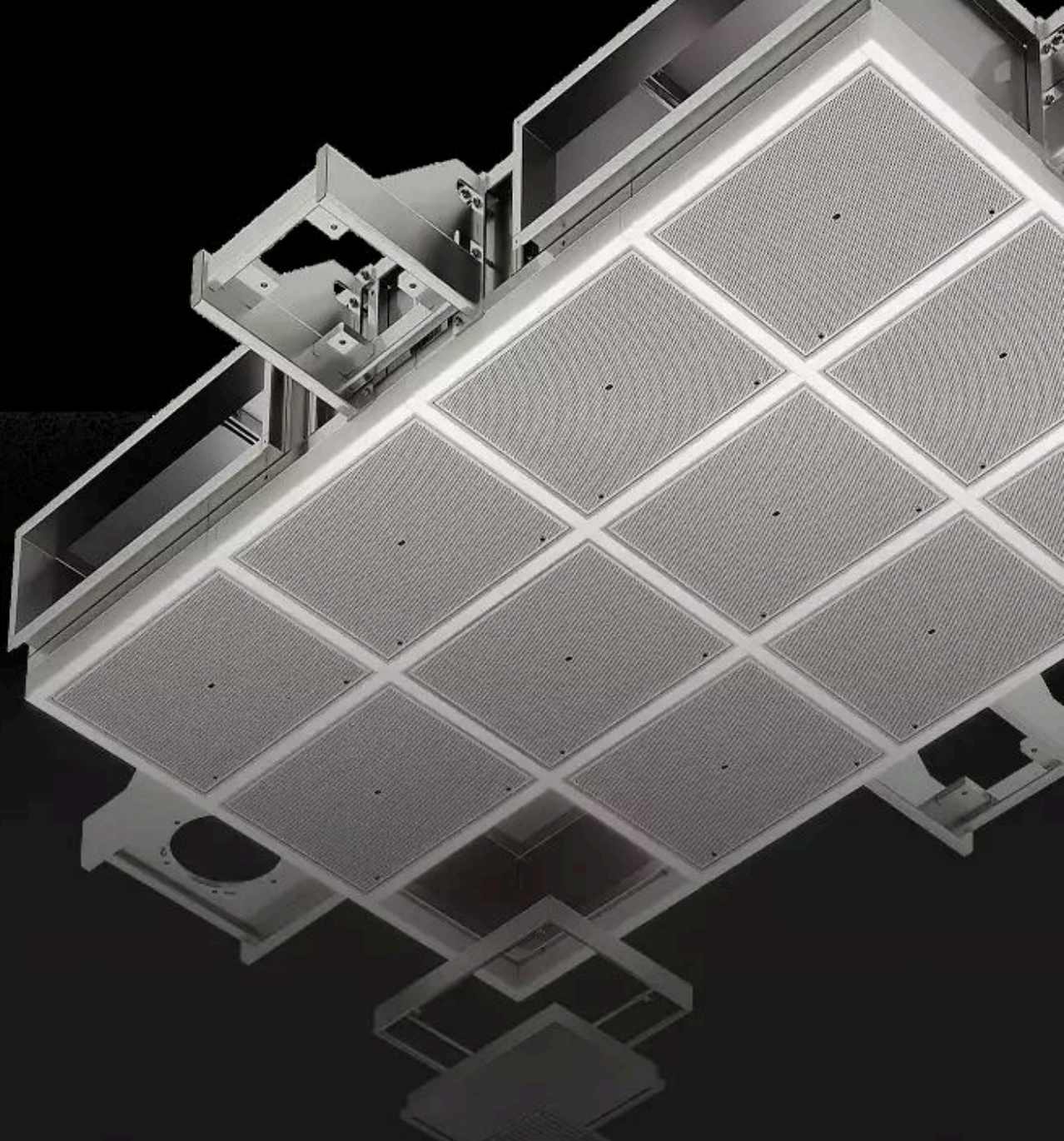




FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

Your CAD File Is Not a Render Model. Fixing It Cost **\$5,450.**

What engineering files leave out for rendering, priced line by line, and the handover checklist that gets the same product modelled for \$2,200.

START HERE

CAD describes how it is made, not seen

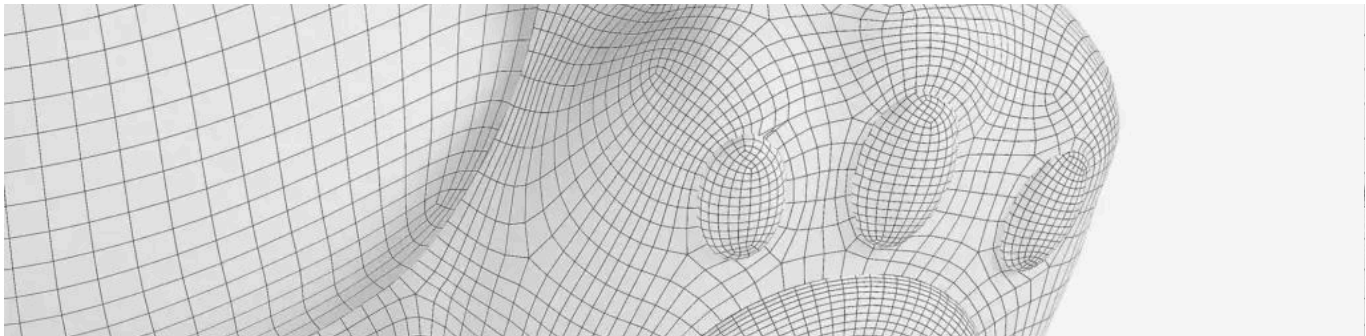
Engineering files are built to manufacture a product. They hold tolerances, fasteners and every internal part, and they are exactly right for the factory. A render model is built to be looked at: every visible surface clean, every finish separate, and nothing inside that the camera will never see.

So the same product needs two different files, and the gap between them is where the cost sits. When the CAD arrives as a fused export with no finish list, the studio spends the first days repairing it, then models by guesswork the parts engineering never drew: the cable, the feet, the label, the foam in the box.

WHAT ENGINEERING CAD HOLDS	WHAT A RENDER MODEL NEEDS
01 Every screw, board and internal part	Visible surfaces only. The inside is weight that slows every render and every export.
02 Solids for machining, sharp edges	Soft, slightly rounded edges that catch light the way the real object does.
03 One body per part, no finishes	Surfaces split by finish, each named: matte, gloss, brushed, soft-touch.
04 What the factory makes	Everything in the photograph, including cables, stickers and packaging nobody modelled.

The file you send decides what the model can do later.

A model built only for one still cannot be animated, put in a configurator or opened on a phone in AR without rebuilding it. Say what the model is for before it is built, and the same work covers all four.



Maverick Frame production render.

THE INVOICE

What the file engineering sent actually cost

Below is a composite of the modelling work behind product enquiries this year, priced at mid-market studio rates. Every line is time spent making an engineering file usable, or rebuilding a model because nobody said what it would be needed for next.

	LINE ITEM	BASIS	AT STUDIO RATES
01	Cleaning a fused export of 1,400 parts	assembly	\$900
02	Remodelling soft edges lost in the export	surfaces	\$450
03	Removing screws, boards and internal parts	clean-up	\$300
04	Splitting one solid into six finishes by guesswork	no finish list	\$400
05	Cable, feet and labels missing from the CAD	3 x \$150	\$450
06	Label artwork rebuilt from a flattened JPG	artwork	\$350
07	Colour corrected after the sample finally arrived	extra round	\$300
08	Model rebuilt for a web configurator	rebuild	\$1,200
09	Separate lightweight version for AR	rebuild	\$600
10	Lid and hinge separated for an animation	rework	\$500
	Subtotal		\$5,450
	Model built from the file engineering sent		\$5,450
	The same model from a clean handover		\$2,200

\$3,250 of it is repair and rebuild, not modelling.

From a clean handover the same product costs: model from a STEP export with a finish list (\$1,100), the parts CAD leaves out, from photographs (\$300), moving parts separated (\$200), a UV layout ready for variants and a configurator (\$300), and an AR version from the same model (\$300).

THE HANDOVER

What to send from engineering

Most of this already exists somewhere in the company. It takes an afternoon to gather, and it replaces most of the lines on the previous page.

SEND THIS	WHY IT MATTERS
01 A STEP export, plus the native file	STEP opens anywhere. The native file keeps the part structure if the export fuses it. Say which version is final.
02 A list of finishes per part	Part names with the finish on each: colour code, gloss level, texture. One line per part saves a round.
03 A physical sample	Soft-touch, brushed metal and textiles cannot be judged from a screen. A sample settles colour in one look.
04 Photographs of the real object	Plain light, several angles. They show the cable, the feet and the labels the CAD never had.
05 Label and packaging artwork	Print-ready vector files. Text rebuilt by hand from a JPG is where errors enter a product image.
06 What moves, and how far	Lids, hinges, buttons, drawers. Separated at the start, they cost little; split later, they cost a rework.

LATER USE	WHAT THE MODEL MUST HAVE	DECIDE BEFORE MODELLING
Variants	Every finish as its own named material	How many colourways
Animation	Moving parts separated, pivots set	What opens or turns
Configurator	Clean UVs, swappable parts, light geometry	Which options combine
AR	A lightweight version with baked textures	Which platforms

THE ONE PAGE

What brands actually send us

The clients whose logos sit on our service pages do not send engineering archives. For 3D product modelling they send something close to this, usually inside the body of an email with one file attached, and it is enough to quote from and to start work.

01	The product	One line and the model number. Say which revision is going to market.
02	The file	A STEP export. The native file too, if the export looks fused.
03	The real object	A sample in the post, or photographs in plain light from several angles.
04	Finishes	One line per visible part: colour code, gloss, texture.
05	What is hidden	Which internal parts can go. Usually all of them.
06	What moves	Lids, hinges, buttons, anything that opens in a film or a configurator.
07	Labels and artwork	Vector files for every printed surface and the box.
08	What the model is for	Stills now; variants, animation, configurator or AR later. This decides how it is built.
09	The date you need it	The real one, not the comfortable one.
10	The budget	A figure or a range. It is the fastest way to a fitting scope.

Send the file as it is

Do not ask engineering to clean it for us. They will spend a week on the wrong things. Send the export and the finish list, and we will say what is missing in the first reply.

Say the future, not the detail

Topology, edge flow and polygon counts are our job. What we cannot guess is where the model goes next year. One sentence on that is worth more than a page of modelling rules.

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 CAD, however rough

A STEP export or the native file, a sample or photographs of the real object, finish codes and label artwork, in whatever state they are in. We will reply with what the file is missing, a price and the questions that decide it - as a reply, not a sales call.

The contact form	maverickframe.com/contacts/
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3D product modelling	maverickframe.com/services/3d-product-modeling-services/
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Or simply	reply to the email this guide arrived in.
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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.