

FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

One Year of Renders. In-House or Outsourced. $43,240 Apart.

One studio's year of images priced twice: a visualiser on the payroll for $80,120, or the same 64 stills and a film from an outside team for $36,880. Every line shown.

Dim Kuzmenko
Co-Founder, Maverick Frame Studio

maverickframe.com

START HERE

The salary looks cheap. The year does not.

A studio of twenty-five people starts to think about its own visualiser in the month a competition, a client sign-off and a planning submission all want images at once. The sums are done on the back of the fee proposal: one salary against one render invoice, and the hire looks like a saving.

It rarely is. A render invoice pays for finished images. A salary pays for a year, including the months between deadlines when there is nothing to render, the software that renews anyway and the workstation that ages under the desk. Put both on the same twelve months and the picture changes.

	WHAT THE HIRE LOOKS LIKE ON PAPER	WHAT THE FIRST YEAR BRINGS
01	**One salary, one person always on hand**	Four months of that salary with nothing to render between peaks
02	**Software bought once**	Around ten subscriptions that renew every year
03	**The office PC will do**	A GPU workstation, and render credits the night before a deadline
04	**One person covers every image**	Animation and 360 views still go outside, at full price
05	**Ready for the next competition**	On holiday, ill or finishing the last project the week it lands

Compare years, not invoices.

An outside rendering department is paid per image and costs nothing in a quiet month. A visualiser is paid every month. In the composite overleaf, the same images cost $43,240 more in a year when made in-house.



Maverick Frame production render.

THE INVOICE

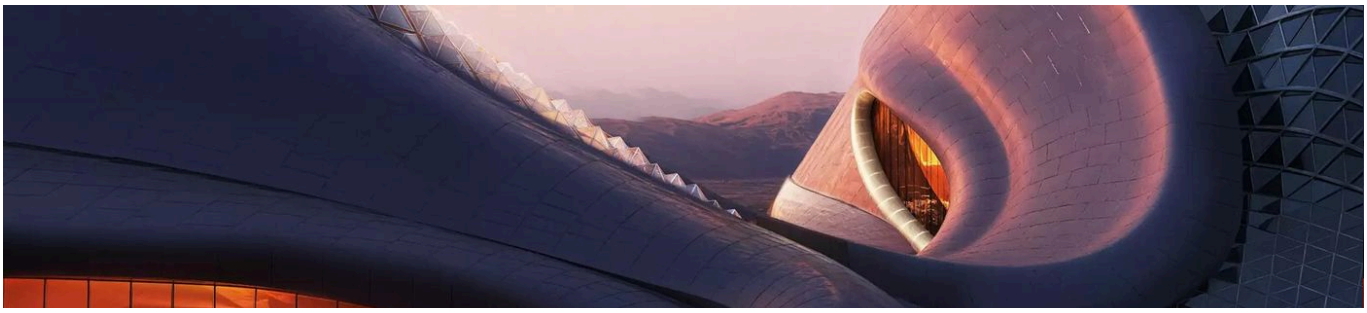
One studio, one year, priced both ways

A composite of the practices that bring us work: a 25-person studio making 64 stills and one minute of animation a year, in three peaks. In-house lines use a mid-level visualiser's salary; outside lines are priced at mid-market studio rates.

	LINE ITEM	BASIS	PER YEAR
01	Visualiser's salary, eight production months	8 x $4,800	**$38,400**
02	The same salary, four quiet months between peaks	4 x $4,800	**$19,200**
03	Employer costs: payroll taxes, benefits, leave	20% of salary	**$11,520**
04	Software: 3ds Max, V-Ray or Corona, Photoshop, plug-ins, asset libraries	10 subscriptions	**$5,400**
05	GPU workstation, written off over three years	$6,000 / 3	**$2,000**
06	Render farm credits in deadline weeks	12 x $200	**$2,400**
07	Training, courses and version upgrades	per year	**$1,200**
08	Model clean-up: Revit or ArchiCAD file made render-ready	8 x $400	**$3,200**
09	Exterior stills, drafts and revision rounds included	40 x $450	**$18,000**
10	Interior stills, drafts and revision rounds included	24 x $400	**$9,600**
11	Rush on one competition set, half the time	6 x $450 x 40%	**$1,080**
12	Walkthrough animation, one minute	1 min x $5,000	**$5,000**
	Outside rendering department, lines 8 to 12		**$36,880**
	In-house visualiser, lines 1 to 7		**$80,120**

$43,240 between the same 64 stills and one film.

Your client sees the same images either way. The gap pays for idle months, software that renews anyway and an ageing machine. The four quiet months alone, $19,200, are more than half the outside bill.



Maverick Frame production render.

LINE BY LINE

What the salary line leaves out

Seven costs that do not appear when a hire is weighed against a render invoice. None of them is exotic. Every studio that has kept a visualiser on the payroll has paid all seven.

	THE LINE	WHAT IT REALLY COVERS
01	**The salary**	One person who models, lights, grades and retouches. Few are strong at all four, and the weak one shows in the images.
02	**The quiet months**	Work arrives in peaks: competition, sign-off, planning. Between them the visualiser waits or is moved onto drawings.
03	**The subscriptions**	Rendering engine, modelling, post-production, plug-ins, libraries of trees, people and furniture. They renew whether you render or not.
04	**The workstation**	A GPU machine that is slow within three years, with renders queuing on it the night before a deadline.
05	**The render farm**	Credits bought in exactly the week there is no time to compare prices.
06	**The adjacent skills**	Animation, 360 panoramas and walkthroughs. One person rarely covers them, so they go outside anyway.
07	**The week they are away**	Holiday or illness lands on the week of a submission. In-house, there is no one to cover.

When a hire does pay off

In-house rarely pays off, but it can. It starts to make sense when:

- [ ] There is rendering work every week of the year, not in three peaks.
- [ ] The volume is high: at these rates the hire breaks even at about 186 stills a year, nearly four every week.
- [ ] Someone senior in the studio has the time to art-direct every image.

$80,120
ONE VISUALISER, ONE YEAR

$36,880
THE SAME IMAGES, OUTSIDE

~186
STILLS A YEAR TO BREAK EVEN



Maverick Frame production render.

THE ONE PAGE

What studios actually send us

The studios whose logos sit on our pages do not send specifications. They send something close to this, usually in the body of an email with the model attached, and it is enough to quote from and to start work.

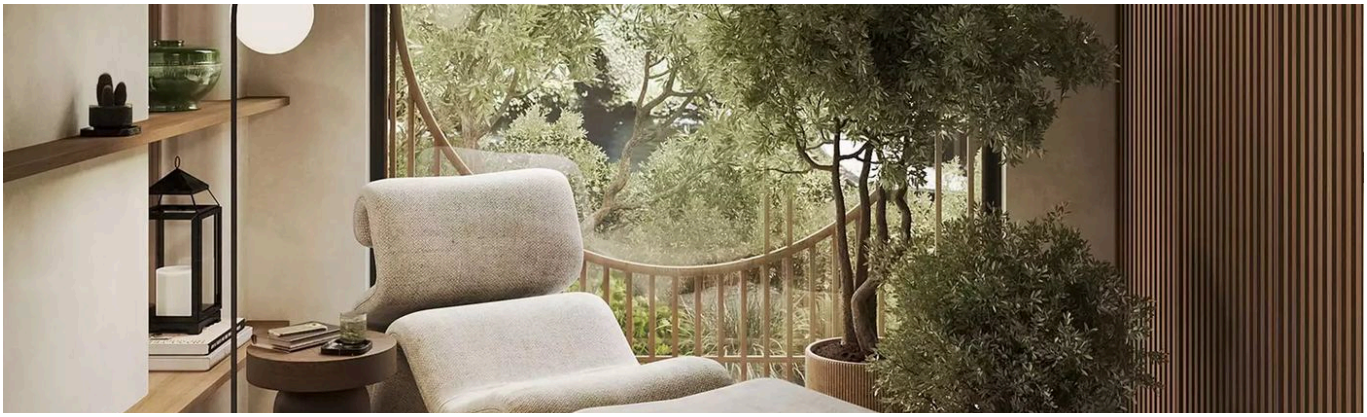
01	**The model**	Revit, ArchiCAD, Rhino or SketchUp, as it is. Say which parts are still moving.
02	**The drawings**	Plans, sections and elevations as PDF, so the model can be checked against them.
03	**The views**	How many, and a sketch or phone photo of the camera for the one that leads.
04	**Your references**	Two or three images from your own boards or portfolio. They set the house style.
05	**The materials**	The specification or a photo of the sample board, even if it is provisional.
06	**The context**	Site photos, a survey or a map pin. For planning views, the viewpoints requested.
07	**Who sees the images**	Your client, a jury, the planning officer or the press. It sets the level of finish.
08	**Who collects comments**	One person in your team, so each round reaches us as one list.
09	**The deadline**	The submission or meeting date. The real one.
10	**The budget**	A figure, a range or the reimbursable line in your fee proposal.

Your name on every image

We work white-label: no credit or watermark on the files, no contact with your client unless you ask, and your NDA signed before the model arrives. We invoice your studio only.

The scene stays on file

We keep the scene after delivery. When the design moves or the next stage needs images, you pay for the new views, not for building the project again.



Maverick Frame production render.

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 model and the deadline

Revit, ArchiCAD, Rhino or SketchUp files, the drawings and a few references from your own boards, in whatever state they are in. We will reply to your studio with a scope, a price and the questions that decide it - as a reply, not a sales call.

The contact form	maverickframe.com/contacts/
Studio rendering	maverickframe.com/solutions/3d-rendering-for-architecture-and-design-studios/
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.