



FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

Spot a Bad Studio in 20 Questions

Twenty checks and five red lines for choosing a CGI studio — scored, weighted, and designed to be run across a shortlist in an afternoon.

START HERE

How to use this

Comparison articles get you a shortlist. They cannot tell you which of five studios will still be answering emails in week four of your project. These twenty checks can, and most of them are answerable before you speak to anyone.

Scoring

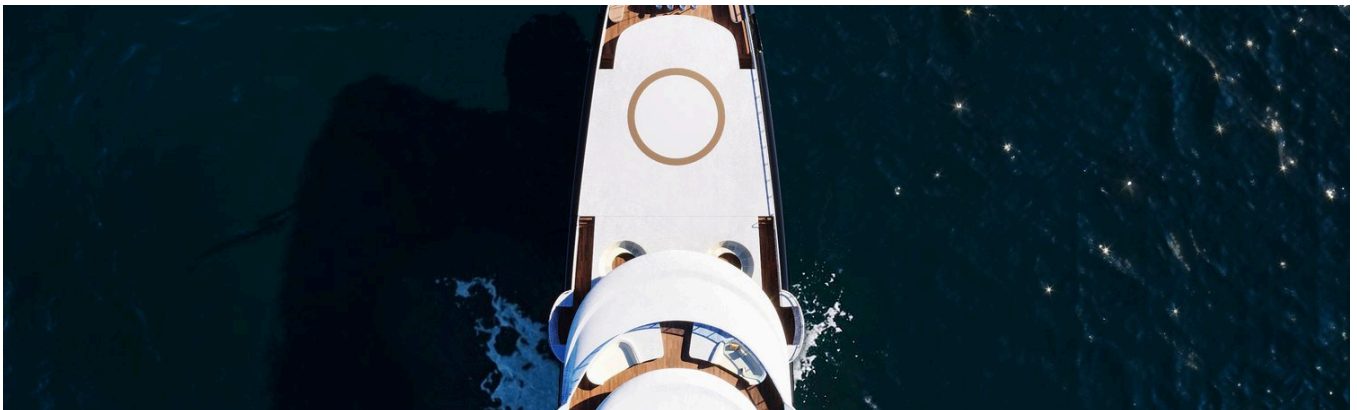
Two points where the answer is clear and good, one where it is partial, nought where it is missing or evasive. Maximum 40.

- **32–40** — brief them
- **24–31** — viable, ask about the gaps
- **Below 24** — not for work that matters

The red lines, first

Five answers end it regardless of score. Check these before spending time on the twenty:

- Cannot show work made from real construction drawings
- Will not name who does the work, or where
- No written revision policy of any kind
- Cannot supply a print-resolution file on request
- The same project appears on other studios' sites



Maverick Frame production render.

SECTION 01

Capability

Can they do the specific thing you need, as opposed to something adjacent to it?

CHECK		WHAT A GOOD ANSWER LOOKS LIKE
01	Work of your exact type in the portfolio	Your building class, your project scale, your region's construction language — not "we have done architecture".
02	Both interiors and exteriors, in depth	If you need both, the weaker one is where your project will suffer. Judge the weaker half.
03	Motion, if you might ever need it	Real animation or 360 examples, not a service-list entry. Over a third of commissions now include motion.
04	Work made from real construction sets	They can show drawings next to the image they produced. This separates concept illustrators from production studios.
05	People and context handled convincingly	Especially for sales, hospitality and public buildings. Total absence across a portfolio is a capability statement.
06	Named, specified products rendered accurately	A real window system, a real tile, a client's own furniture — not a lookalike from a library.

Weighting note

If the images will be used for planning, sales or anything contractual, check 06 is worth double. A convincing lookalike in a marketing image is a small problem; the same lookalike in a document somebody relies on is a different category of problem.

SECTION 02

Process and risk

This section predicts your experience in weeks three to six, which is where projects actually go wrong.

07	A written revision policy	How many rounds, what counts as a round, and what is chargeable. Vagueness here is never in your favour.
08	A stated brief requirement	They tell you what they need from you. A studio that asks for nothing will ask for everything later, at the worst moment.
09	Named point of contact	One person, named, in a stated time zone, with stated hours.
10	Where the work is actually done	In-house, a partner studio, or freelancers. Any of the three is fine. Not knowing which is not.
11	Milestones before the final image	Grey-box or clay view, then draft light, then final. Studios that show you only the finished image are betting your deadline on getting it right first time.
12	What happens if you change the geometry	Ask directly. The answer reveals whether there is a model behind the image or just an image.
13	Capacity for your peak, not your average	Ask what else is in their studio during your window. A yes with no hesitation is worth a follow-up question.

Check 11 is the one people skip

A clay or grey-box view costs the studio almost nothing and catches the expensive errors — wrong storey height, missing window, misread stair — while they are still cheap to fix. A studio that does not offer one is either very confident or has not been burned yet. Ask for it either way, and put it in the schedule.

SECTION 03

Commercial

14	Price per deliverable, not per project	You can compare it, and you can add to it later without renegotiating everything.
15	What is explicitly excluded	The most informative line in any quote. A quote with no exclusions has not been thought about.
16	Rights and usage stated	Print, web, third-party marketing, resale to a developer. Get it in writing before, not after.
17	Source files and archiving	Who owns the scene, how long they keep it, what a second batch costs later. This decides the price of your next phase.
18	Confidentiality terms	An NDA they will sign, and a sensible answer about where files are stored.
19	Payment staged against milestones	Not all up front, not all on delivery. Staged payment is a sign of a studio that has run projects before.
20	A reference you can actually call	One past client, contactable. It is a small ask and a very reliable filter.

Scoresheet

Studio	Cap. /12	Proc. /14	Comm. /14	Total

One thing the score cannot see

How they answer. A studio that says "we outsource interiors to a partner in another country, here is their work" scores lower on check 10 than one claiming everything in-house — and is usually the safer choice, because you now know something true. Weight candour above the number.

And the timing rule. Run this on a shortlist *before* you have a live deadline. The scorecard is a good tool and a bad rescue: nobody scoring studios at 11pm the night a supplier collapsed has ever chosen well.

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.

START HERE

maverickframe.com/contacts

SEE THE WORK

maverickframe.com/gallery

WRITTEN BY

Dim Kuzmenko

Co-Founder



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