



FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

The Images That **Win** the Interview

How many to bring, the one-image rule, showing unbuilt work without overselling it, what a panel looks at first, and what to do about NDAs.

[START HERE](#)

The panel decides earlier than you think

A competitive interview is not a portfolio review. The people in the room have already read the submission, they have four or five practices to see, and their attention is at its highest in the first two minutes and never returns to that level. What you show in those minutes does most of the work.

This guide is about that room specifically — the shortlist presentation, the client interview, the competition jury. Not your website, not your Instagram. The rules are different because the audience is captive, tired, and comparing you against someone they saw an hour ago.

The one-image rule

Decide, before you build anything, which single image you want them holding when they walk out. Everything else in the presentation supports it or gets cut.

Practices routinely arrive with forty images of equal weight and leave having communicated nothing. A panel that remembers one image and the practice attached to it has given you the only outcome that matters at this stage.

How many images, roughly

Fewer than you want to bring. For a typical shortlist interview, a small number of large, deliberate images beats a survey of everything you have done. Count them against speaking time: if you cannot say something specific about an image, it is filling a slide, and the panel can tell.

Large, and in the right order

One image per slide, full bleed, no captions competing with your voice. Images shrunk into a grid are read as a mood board, and a mood board is scanned rather than looked at. The hero goes early, not saved for the end — attention does not wait for you.

STEP 01

What a panel looks at, and in what order

Attention in a selection room follows a fairly predictable sequence. Knowing it tells you what to put where.

01 Is this the right kind of building?

Typology recognition happens in under a second and it is mostly unconscious. If your first image is a house and they are procuring a school, you have spent your best moment arguing that you are relevant.

02 Does it look like our place?

Context, scale, climate and materials. A panel reads whether the image belongs to their world before it judges the design. Local-feeling context does more for credibility than another interior.

03 Is it real?

Here the room splits. Some panellists want to know whether it is built; others want to know whether it is achievable. Both questions are asked about the same image and you should answer both before either is voiced.

04 Who actually did it?

Especially if you are a small practice, or if work was done at a previous employer. Say it plainly and early. Vagueness here is the single fastest way to lose a panel that was otherwise with you.

05 Can they do it for us, on our constraints?

Only now does the panel look at the design on its merits. Almost everything before this point was a credibility check — which is why the ordering of your images matters more than their individual quality.

The implication most practices miss

Your best image and your most relevant image are often not the same image. When they differ, relevance wins the first slot. Keep the beautiful one for a moment when the panel has already accepted that you belong in their category, and it will land far harder than it would have at the start.

STEP 02

Unbuilt work, and work you cannot show

Showing unbuilt work credibly

Panels do not object to unbuilt work. They object to being unsure what they are looking at. Four habits remove that entirely:

- **Label every image with its stage** — competition, consented, under construction, completed. On the slide, not only in your voice.
- **Put a drawing next to the render** for at least one project. A plan or section beside the image says the thing behind it is real and resolved, which is the claim a visual alone cannot make.
- **Say what changed.** If a consented scheme differs from the image, show both. Volunteering it reads as rigour; being caught on it reads as something else.
- **Never let a render imply a photograph.** If a panel discovers mid-presentation that the building they admired does not exist, you lose the room, and you deserve to.

When your best project is under NDA

Common, and solvable. In rough order of how much you should try them, and check each against your actual agreement and, where it matters, your own legal adviser — we are describing options, not telling you what your contract permits:

- **Ask.** Clients refuse less often than practices assume, particularly once the project is consented or complete. A specific request for one image, one room, one panel, is usually granted.
- **Ask for a redacted version.** No client name, no location, no signage — often acceptable when the full image is not.
- **Show it stripped.** Massing, plan diagrams, a greyscale model view or a detail crop carry the thinking without identifying the scheme.
- **Describe it and show a comparable.** State plainly that you cannot show it, say what it taught you, and show a project of the same typology that you can.
- **Bring a reference instead.** A client willing to speak to the panel is worth more than the image you could not bring.

Saying “our largest project of this type is confidential, here is what I can tell you about it” costs nothing and is heard as discretion. Showing it anyway costs you the next client, who is sitting in the room wondering how you will talk about them.

STEP 03

Pitch preparation checklist

Run this the week before, not the night before. Most of it costs time rather than money.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ The one image is chosen, and everyone presenting knows which it is | ☐ One image per slide, full bleed, nothing shrunk into a grid |
| ☐ First image matches their typology, not your favourite project | ☐ Resolution checked on the actual room's screen or projector if possible |
| ☐ Every image labelled with its stage, on the slide | ☐ A printed leave-behind with the one image on the cover |
| ☐ One project shown with a drawing beside the render | ☐ File formats and sizes confirmed against the organiser's own instructions |
| ☐ Attribution for prior-employer work stated out loud, once, early | ☐ Timed out loud, with the questions you expect built into the run |
| ☐ Any image cut that you cannot say something specific about | ☐ An answer ready for "is that built?" on every single image |
| ☐ Confidential projects handled — permission asked, or a substitute ready | ☐ A backup copy that does not depend on their network |

THE ONE IMAGE — WHICH PROJECT, WHICH VIEW

WHAT WE WANT THEM TO BELIEVE AFTER SEEING IT

THE SENTENCE WE SAY OVER IT

ITS STAGE — COMPETITION / CONSENTED / BUILT

Fill in the four lines above as a team before anyone opens the deck. If three people write three different answers to line two, the presentation is not ready and no amount of image quality will fix it.



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

WRITTEN BY

Dim Kuzmenko

Founder



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

