



FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

What AI Actually Changed in the **Job**

An account for working 3D artists: which parts of the work compressed, which did not move at all, what a studio still pays for, and what a portfolio now has to show.

START HERE

Written for artists, and written straight

Most writing on this subject is either a sales page for a tool or reassurance aimed at clients. This is neither. It is what we see in our own production, said to the people doing the work, with no attempt to make it sound better or worse than it is.

Two things are true at once, and most arguments collapse because they only hold one. Parts of this job have genuinely compressed, and they are not coming back. Other parts have not moved, and they are the parts a studio is actually paying for. Knowing which is which is the difference between adapting and panicking.

What this guide will not do

- Quote rates, day rates or what anyone is charging
- Claim how many artists are being hired anywhere
- Predict a year in which something happens
- Tell you the field is fine, or that it is over

What it will do

- Separate the tasks that compressed from the ones that did not
- Say what a studio is still buying when it books an artist
- Name the skills that got more valuable, not less
- Say what a portfolio has to prove now that it did not have to prove before

AI cannot build the model. The tools promising a finished render straight from a drawing set read construction drawings badly. That is not a forecast — it is what happens when you feed one in.

DIM KUZMENKO, CO-FOUNDER, MAVERICK FRAME STUDIO

That single sentence decides most of what follows. **If the model is still built by a person, everything upstream and downstream of the model is still a person's job** — but the finishing, the filling and the variation around it are not what they were.

STEP 01

What compressed, and what did not move

Task by task, honestly. The left column is where hours came out of the day. The right column is where they did not.

TASK	CHANGE	WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE
Concept and mood exploration	Compressed hard	Twenty directions before lunch instead of two. The skill moved from producing the options to judging them.
Entourage and filler	Compressed hard	Background vegetation, skies, distant context, people. Assistance helps most exactly where nature carries the frame, and least on a bare urban block where every surface is built geometry.
Post: cleanup, extension, small fixes	Compressed	Patching, extending a plate, removing an object. Minutes rather than an afternoon, on the class of fix that used to be tedious.
Texture and material starting points	Compressed	A usable base to develop from. Still needs correcting to real-world scale, which is where most generated material fails.
Denoise, upscale, versioning	Compressed	Cheap frames make experimentation cheap, which changes how you work more than it changes what you deliver.
Render time on motion	Collapsed	Separate from AI, and bigger: animation that took roughly a week in a production renderer can come back in minutes through a real-time path. That changed the economics of motion work before AI did.
Building the model	Unchanged	Still geometry, still by hand, still the slow part, still what the rest of the image is built on.
Reading a drawing set	Unchanged	Sections, levels, revision clouds, the detail that contradicts the plan. This is the part the tools are worst at.
Getting a set consistent	Unchanged	Eight images of one building that agree with each other about light, materials and geometry. Generation pulls against this by design.
Being answerable for it	Unchanged	Somebody signs, and somebody fixes it at eleven at night when the client counts the windows.

Read the two halves together: the compressed tasks are the ones where the frame tolerates invention, and the unchanged ones are the ones where it does not. **The job did not shrink evenly. It shifted towards the parts that have to be right.**

STEP 02

What a studio is still paying for

When we book an artist, none of these are things a prompt produces. They are also, without exception, learnable.

01 Geometry built from a real drawing set, at real scale

Including the parts where the drawings disagree with themselves. Noticing the contradiction and asking one clear question is worth more than modelling speed, and it is the first thing a lead notices about a new artist.

02 Knowing what the frame has to prove

A sales image, a planning image and a technical image of the same building are three different pictures. An artist who asks which one this is, before choosing the camera, saves a revision round that nobody budgeted.

03 Consistency across a set

One sun, one material library, one set of cameras, eight frames that belong to the same building on the same afternoon. This is craft and file discipline, and it is what separates a deliverable set from a folder of nice pictures.

04 Light as a decision, not a preset

Choosing an hour and a direction because of what the building needs shown, and keeping it when a client asks for something brighter. Generated light is average by construction; a deliberate lighting decision reads as authorship.

05 Correcting what the assist gets wrong

Texture scale, repeated detail, invented geometry, planting that does not grow there, reflections that do not agree with the scene. Using the tools well mostly means knowing precisely where they fail and fixing that before anyone sees it.

06 Flagging a problem while it is small

In writing, early, with the option you recommend attached. Every studio has artists who deliver and artists who deliver with the problem already solved. The second kind gets the next job.

07 File discipline other people can inherit

Real scale, stated units, named objects, separated materials, linked textures, versions that go up and never sideways. It is unglamorous and it is the most reliable reason an artist is rehired.

08 Saying no, with a reason and an alternative

A camera that will not work, a material that will not read, a deadline that forces a worse image. Saying so plainly, once, at the start, is a professional act, and it is the opposite of what a tool does.



Maverick Frame production render.

STEP 03

What a portfolio has to prove now

A folder of finished frames used to be evidence. It is weaker evidence than it was, for the simple reason that a beautiful still is no longer proof that anyone built anything. So show the part that cannot be generated.

- ☐ A complete set from one project, shown together, consistent
- ☐ One project built from a supplied drawing set, with an extract shown beside the frame
- ☐ A clay or wireframe pass next to at least one final image
- ☐ One undramatic, well-lit daylight frame with no atmosphere to hide behind
- ☐ A revision pair: what was asked, what you changed, why
- ☐ A plain line per project on what you personally did
- ☐ A stated position on where assistance was used and where it was not
- ☐ Software you work in, and software you can open
- ☐ Nothing under NDA that you have not been cleared to show
- ☐ No weak frames. A portfolio is judged at its floor, not its ceiling

PROJECT NOTE — one of these per project, three lines maximum

Built from	supplied drawing set / survey / own design
My part	modelling / look dev / lighting / animation / post
Assistance	where used, and what was rebuilt by hand afterwards
Shown here	final + clay pass + the drawing it came from

On declaring assistance

Say it plainly and without apology. Studios use these tools too. What a lead is reading for is whether you know which parts of your own image were generated, and whether you corrected them. An artist who cannot say is a risk; an artist who overclaims is found out at the first test brief.

Send us your work

If any of this sounds like how you already work, we would like to see it. Send a link to a set rather than a single frame, one line on what you did on each project, and what you work in. That is enough to start a conversation, and we read everything that arrives with a set attached.

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.

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maverickframe.com/contacts

SEE THE WORK

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

