

Dear Sir / Madam

There are currently no opportunities at Public and won't be for the foreseeable future, but that doesn't mean there won't be opportunities for you elsewhere.

We receive a lot of submissions and mostly enjoy the privilege of seeing new work by young designers. However, many of the approaches we get are badly considered, to say the least. We'd rather be helpful than condemning, so here are some of the things we regularly see and some tips for getting them right.

Starting the email with 'Dear Sir / Madam'

The big one. Most agencies will automatically trash any email that starts like this. It's lazy and rude – contact details are readily available on company websites, and if they're not, a phone call is all it takes to establish the right person to send your stuff to. 'Dear Sir / Madam' or 'Hello' means you couldn't be bothered to do this, even in expectation of a career opportunity / salary. This is universally interpreted as ignorance. It also looks like you sent out hundreds of identical emails to hundreds of companies. 'Dear Sir / Madam' is the equivalent of asking 100 members of your preferred sex to sleep with you until one of them says yes. Not flattering.

Research

Pick out a couple of pieces of the agency's work that you like, generally let them know that you want to work specifically for them (and why) and ask politely for feedback. This means a lot to an agency – it shows that you've been following their work rather than chanced upon it.

Spelling

Spelling mistakes indicate laziness and no eye for detail. If you don't care enough to get your own text right when asking for a job, what are the chances you'll care properly for the agency's work? If you have difficulties with spelling, get someone else to check it before you send it. There are colourblind designers: they get someone else to check and manage colour. They acknowledge the problem and solve it. This is what a designer does.

Badly taken / boring images

PDF folios are fine. Websites are better. But even if the work is good, if the images are bad you'll look lazy and careless. If you spent 30 hours on a project, why destroy its impact with a crap photo? Go the Magma bookshop (or visit www.itstnicethat.com), look at some design images, borrow a digital SLR, make your images just as beautiful. It's not hard – A0 backing board, natural daylight (no sun and not in the shade), hold steady, shoot downwards, shoot some details. Or shoot it in use or context – whatever you like as long as it's good. And in focus. I can't believe we have to tell people this, but you'd be amazed at how many we see.

No website

It's the 21st century. A designer without a website puts you at the back of the queue. No HTML / Flash knowledge? No problem. Use Eatock's Indexhibit template available at www.eatock.com. Think it's a boring website? Look at the work. It's what counts. Or, make what you consider a better one. Equally, having a 'funny' hotmail or gmail email address indicates a lack of knowledge about the web and a lack of professionalism. Your own website and email address will indicate the opposite.

Being 'wacky'

Nobody wants to hire an office clown. What is funny to you is probably not funny to that many other people. An email to a prospective employer is not an opportunity for a stand-up routine. Good manners and good communication beat so-called humour hands down, every time.

The recession

Asking for a job in a recession can lead to every imaginable response, from straight-to-trash, to apologetic rejection, to tentative invitation to visit. We think that the best solution is not to ask for a job, or even an interview, but to ask for a brief. Highlighting your willingness to work and the opportunity to prove yourself while expanding your professional portfolio ticks a lot of boxes, and will begin an extremely valuable dialogue between you and the agency in a no-pressure environment.

Do it while you're a student

Make a website, add high-quality images, continually edit, contact agencies, start dialogues while you're at college. Don't wait to graduate. Doing it in your (late) first or second year will put you at a tremendous advantage.

Why you?

For everything that we've said here, the most important aspect of your work – and your communications – is that it came from you, and couldn't have come from anyone else. Learn to make yourself and your skills valuable.

We have had only one email in the last six months that avoided all of these mistakes. That person is now in regular contact with us, and we'll do everything we can to help their career.

If you have committed any or all of the above in the past, don't be too hard on yourself, or on us for pointing them out. Take the opportunity to be better – this is what all designers do. Also, these comments are based on our experience and represent what we think. They are not facts, but generally accepted as being relevant and useful.

Good luck and best wishes from Public
www.wearepublic.co.uk