PRINT SKILL & PRICE GUIDE

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USING THIS GUIDE

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In the highly specialized and ever-changing creative arena, it becomes increasingly difficult to objectively quantify talents' skills. As technology improves, the lines between production, design, art direction and an array of creative specialties become blurred.

The purpose of this guide is to help clarify, for our clients and talent, the distinctions between the many specialties and the levels of expertise within those areas. We hope that this will aid our clients in accurately determining their staffing needs and help our talent plan their personal career paths.

This guide should not be considered an absolute, however. Every person has a unique set of skills and abilities that must be assessed on an individual basis and often does not fit neatly into a category. With that being said, we think this guide will prove to be an invaluable resource for understanding the complexities of having a career in these disciplines or hiring creative talent today.
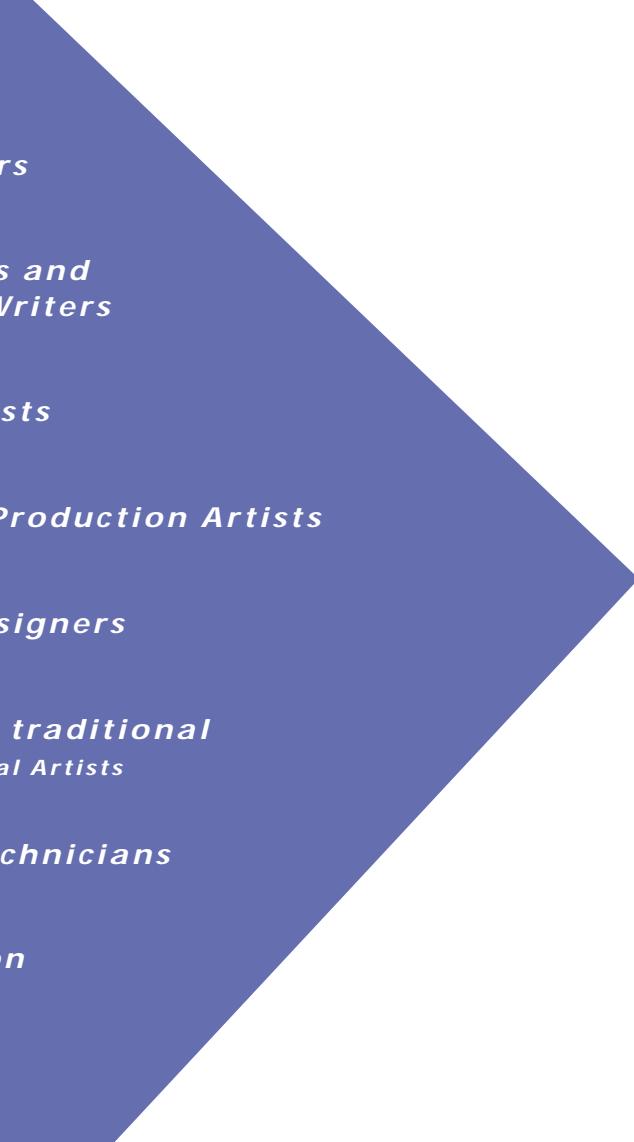
Listed in alphabetical order

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	Level	Skills	Portfolio	Years	Client Rate
	I	Good general graphic-design skills (see "Graphic Designers" table). Good eye for layout, type, and color. Understands projects on a tactical level (design, production, basic supervision, and project coordination). Can display conceptual ideas either as rough pencil sketches or in electronic form.	A wide range of low- or mid-budget work, mostly designed as well as art-directed by this individual. May have significant percentage of spec work in portfolio.	1	$30–$40 per hour $25–$35K per year
	II	As above. Also, experienced at brainstorming with writers and helping to create effective headlines. Can sketch rough storyboards that are clear enough to be followed by a comp illustrator. Can orchestrate a wide range of vendors and staff, but may not have experience taking responsibility for large-budget items. Understands tradeoffs for different reproduction methods. Experienced at checking contract proofs and supervising press runs.	Mid-budget projects and campaigns, some of which involved supervising other designers. Rough pencil sketches and marker storyboards to show conceptual abilities. More actual (produced) work rather than spec work.	2–3+	$30–$50 per hour $30–$45K per year
	III	As above. Also, experienced at managing and taking responsibility for large-budget items (e.g., high-end vendors, large-quantity press runs, etc.). Experienced at art directing complex photo shoots, both on-location and in photographers' studios. Knowledgeable about many different illustrators' styles, and which styles are appropriate to different projects. Understands different trends and "looks" in graphic design, but has a thoughtful and flexible attitude (does not pick just one currently fashionable design style and apply it to everything regardless of context). Extensive experience on press.	High-budget printed projects and campaigns, many of which involved supervising other designers. Probably some video reels with accompanying storyboards. Web-site URLs.	3–5+	$45–$75 per hour $45–$75K per year Sometimes quotes by the project.
	IV	At this level, "Art Director" and "Creative Director" may be virtually synonymous. Creative conceptual initiator. Strategically oriented: relates design work to clients' overall business plans and goals. Communicates effectively and gracefully with clients. Exceptional presentation skills. Can interact and brainstorm well with creative directors, senior marketing executives, and other team members. Often helps account managers with new-business development.	Stunning work for a wide variety of clients, demonstrating industry, conceptual, and technical diversity. Probably some nationally recognized or award-winning projects. Likely to show unusual or unconventional formats, e.g., die-cut or shaped print pieces, novel portfolio presentation, etc. Brochures, video reels, storyboards, ad comps, showing evidence of "thinking outside the box" while achieving marketing goals.	5-10+	$75-$150 per hour $65-$200K per year Often quotes by the project.

ART DIRECTORS

Level	Copywriter Typical Tasks and Skills	Years	Client Rate	Technical Writer Typical Tasks and Skills	Years	Client Rate
I	Creates copy for in-house corporate materials such as departmental memos, handbooks, inventory notes, sales scripts, business forms, etc. Writes copy for local newspaper ads, chain-store newspaper sectional inserts, etc. General proofreading and copyediting skills.	1+	$20-$35 per hour $20-$35K per year	Writes instruction sheets for in-house company procedures, minor technical operations and equipment, logging on to company network or the Internet, etc. Writes assembly or instruction guides for simple consumer products.	1+	$25-$40 per hour $20-$35K per year
II	Writes copy for bill-stuffers, small-to-midsize promotional campaigns, mail-order catalogs, smaller annual reports. Writes print ads or sectional inserts for upscale retail and service industries.	2+	$25-$45 per hour $25-$45K per year	Writes assembly/instruction manuals for complex consumer equipment or for computer hardware. Writes manuals for relatively simple software. (Requires understanding of product or software.) May have minor illustration skills (simple diagrams).	2+	$30-$55 per hour $30-$45K per year
III	Creates scripts for broadcast, print, or Web. Writes ads for national campaigns, Fortune-500 annual reports, other high-end collateral. Speechwriting for senior executives or for national politicians. Ghostwriting of major books.	3-5	$50-$200 per hour $45-$125K per year Often quotes by the project.	Writes instruction manuals for complex software. Writes automobile or heavy-equipment repair guides, or other materials requiring significant mechanical or technical expertise, ability to "break down" complicated processes into component parts and explain them clearly. May have some illustration skills; experienced at working with technical illustrators.	3-5	$50-$100 per hour $45-$65K per year Often quotes by the project.
IV	Develops strategy and creates script for major national advertising campaigns including broadcast, print, and Web components. Possibly supervises other members of creative team; at this level, "copywriter" may be synonymous with "creative director."	5+	$75-$300 per hour $60-$300K per year Often quotes by the project.	The writer may be an engineer or computer programmer who also has the ability to document clearly. Alternatively, a tech writer at this level may actually be creating new processes out of existing components — for example, devising a new pre-press or Web-development workflow complete with templates and documentation for end users. May have some illustration skills, and probably knowledge of drawing or CAD software; experienced at working with technical illustrators.	5+	$75-$200 per hour $65-$100K per year Often quotes by the project.

Note: Software used may be any word processor (plus, of course, any software being documented). Knowledge of software with GREP capabilities (such as BBEdit or Nisus on the Macintosh) is useful for power search-and-replace operations. Experienced tech writers may use FrameMaker rather than conventional word processor, especially for structured longer documents. Helpful related skills for all writers include: rapid touch-typing; good knowledge of syntactical, grammatical, spelling, and formatting issues; general desktop publishing skills.

Level	Artistic Skills	Technical Computer-Graphics	Portfolio	Software	Years	Client Rate
I	Basic digital retouching and color correction of photos. Can customize clip art, but may not be able to draw.	**Object**: Basic Bézier-curve (PostScript) drawing using manual (pen) tool, not just autotrace or freehand tool. Can use many features of drawing programs. **Bitmap:** Basic Photoshop skills, working with preexisting materials.	Has created elements used in Web sites, presentations or multimedia projects.	**Object ("drawing"):** Illustrator, FreeHand, CorelDraw, Canvas **Bitmap ("painting"):** PhotoDeluxe	1+ 1+	Per project or $20-$45 per hour $20-$35K per year
II	Has basic drawing skills. Can create attractive new images, usually in mannered, iconic, or flat clip-art styles. Has some digital photo-montage experience. Can create realistic drop shadows, beveled buttons, "warp" existing artwork in perspective. Under-stands lighting for 3D objects and can maintain consistent lighting throughout a scene.	**Object:** Multilayered Bézier-curve drawing, optimized for printing. **Bitmap:** Intermediate-level Photoshop skills include layers, ink modes, simple mask and channel operations, filters. Understands all Unsharp Mask parameters in Photoshop.	Editorial illustrations in smaller publications. Advertising illustrations for smaller company campaigns.	**Object ("drawing"):** Illustrator FreeHand **Bitmap ("painting"):** PhotoDeluxe	2+ 2+	Per project or $35-$55 per hour $30-$45K per year
III	As above. Also, can create specific moods through lighting, shadows and color. Can integrate object and bitmap elements seamlessly. Intermediate-level drawing skills. Can create numerous objects in several styles without looking at reference.	**Object:** As above. Also, can trouble-shoot problem files. **Bitmap:** Advanced Photoshop skills include color separation; understanding of dot gain (for press) and gamma (for Web); real understanding of resolution, line-screen, and color-palette issues. Can perform a range of moderately complex channel and masking operations.	Editorial illustrations for national publications. Advertising illustrations for Fortune-500 campaigns.	**Object ("Drawing"):** Illustrator FreeHand **Bitmap ("Painting"):** Photoshop Painter	3+ 4+ 2+	Per project or $45-$100 per hour $40-$85K per year (unusual to be salaried employee)
IV	As above. Also, can create work digitally, from scratch, that is indistinguishable from traditional illustration. Can alter photographs as desired, so that only a forensic specialist could tell they have been altered. Results comparable in quality to a Level IV traditional illustrator (see Illustrators). Note that Level IV digital artists are much less common than Level IV traditional illustrators.	Can create stunning effects with the program(s) used, most likely a bitmap program (Painter or Photoshop). Has complete mastery of a wide range of computer graphics programs, operating at the "unconscious skill" level (achieves desired effect rapidly without consciously thinking about how it's being done). Mastery of issues and tradeoffs related to graphic file formats, compression algo-rithms, color management (calibration, etc.), advanced prepress, and much more.	Illustrations have been reproduced in much the same contexts as a Level IV traditional illustrator; and/or in major CD-ROM games or TV animations, top Web sites.	**Object ("Drawing"):** If any, possibly Illustrator FreeHand **Bitmap ("Painting"):** Photoshop Painter	3+ 5+	Per project or $75+ per hour (very unusual to work by the hour) $70K+ per year (unusual to be salaried employee)

PRODUCTION ARTISTS

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Level	Technical Skills	Experience and Typical Tasks	Software	Years	Client Rate
I	Can build basic desktop publishing files. Troubleshooting high-resolution prepress files is not a forté, but can check that all pieces are in place (fonts, linked graphics, etc.) and set up files for laser printing or screen display. May be able to perform noncritical scanning, as well as word processing and proofreading.	One year of experience on-screen. Typically has produced materials for laser printing, presentation, and perhaps black & white printed jobs.	QuarkXPress or PageMaker Possibly: Illustrator, FreeHand	1+	$15-$40 per hour $20-$35K per year
II	Can produce a Quark or PageMaker file that will image to prepress film without extensive rebuilding. Specific Quark or PageMaker skills include: Style Sheets; Master Pages; all Preference items; Tabs; H&J (Hyphenation and Justification) parameters; Tracking and Kerning. Knows basics of different file and font formats. May have basic understanding of CMYK (separation) issues. Can perform a decent scan and sharpen the image.	1–3 years' experience on-screen. Has worked with designers to produce 2-color jobs for press.	QuarkXPress or PageMaker Illustrator or FreeHand Photoshop	1+ 2+ 1+	$25-$45 per hour $30-$40K per year
III	As above. Also, good eye for typography; can make judgement calls that visually improve typographic values in Quark or PageMaker document. Experienced at building complex layout files with linked color photos and EPS graphics, to be printed with variable page shapes (for example, die-cut tabs) and/or variable page sizes from same file. Can perform trapping in Quark or in drawing program. Truly understands relationship between scanner resolution, print linescreens, color depth, and similar issues. Scanning skills include unsharp masking with numerical understanding, descreening, color correction, etc. Can create good color separations from Photoshop, Quark, or PageMaker. Good familiarity with a wide range of commercial (third-party) Quark XTensions or PageMaker Additions.	3–5 years' experience creating complex files. Has built 4-color process jobs to a designer's specifications. Has successfully troubleshot numerous prepress problems.	QuarkXPress or PageMaker Illustrator FreeHand Photoshop DeBabelizer	3+ 3+ 2+ 2+ 1+	$35-$60 per hour $35-$45K per year
IV	As above. Also, can work with cross-platform files, including Windows-to-Mac and raster-to-vector conversion issues. Expert with high-end workflow extensions such as the Quark Publishing System. Expert in prepress issues. Understands relationship between production of graphic files and things that can happen (and go wrong) in later stages (prepress, press, and bindery). Can troubleshoot and design graphic production workflows, not just the files themselves.	5–10 years' experience in every phase of graphic production, both on computers and traditionally.	QuarkXPress or PageMaker Illustrator FreeHand Photoshop DeBabelizer ScanPrepPro, binuscan ColorPro, Presswise or INposition TrapWise or Trapper, various RIPs/drivers *See note on "Prepress" page*	5+ 4+ 3+ 4+ 2+	$45-$100 per hour $40-$60K per year

Level	Artistic Skills	Technical Computer-Graphic Skills	Portfolio	Software	Years	Client Rate
I	Has decent eye for layout, spacing, and type. Color experience may be limited but may have worked with spot color (e.g., charts and graphs).	Uses graphic elements and clip art provided by others. Troubleshooting prepress files is not a forté, but can set up files for laser printing or screen display. May not have experience on press.	Comps and art-school drawings. Black & white or 2-color printed flyers, postcards, mailers.	QuarkXPress or PageMaker Possibly: Illustrator or FreeHand	1+	$20-$40 per hour $20-$35K per year
II	Good eye for layout, type, and color. Can integrate supplied photos and illustrations attractively with text. Can organize fairly complex and chaotic source materials into simpler, integrated, coherent printed piece.	Can usually produce files that will image to prepress film without extensive rebuilding. Understands basics of different file and font formats. Very basic understanding of CMYK (color-separation) issues. Limited experience on press.	One or two full-color brochures, perhaps without color photos. One or two logos actually executed for clients. Stationery, labels, simple packaging design or design comps.	QuarkXPress or PageMaker Illustrator or FreeHand Photoshop	2+ 1+ 1+	$30-$50 per hour $30-$60K per year
III	As above. Also, has understanding of readability issues in typography. Can montage photos attractively; decide when to use various effects. Some drawing skills.	Can produce files that will consistently image properly to film in prepress stage. Understands color separation, optimization of scanned images. Can perform trapping in page-layout or drawing program. Extensive experience on press.	Full-color, even 6-color brochures or other printed pieces, some with color photos. Various bindings, die-cuts, varnishes, inserts, etc. Possibly complex packaging designs.	QuarkXPress or PageMaker Illustrator or FreeHand Photoshop DeBabelizer	3+ 2+ 2+ 1+	$40-$75 per hour Sometimes quotes by the project. $50-$80K per year
IV	Creative conceptual initiator. Draws well. Strategically oriented; relates design work to clients' goals and business; can persuade or influence clients effectively. Can produce stunning polished comps (comprehensive layouts) for clients. Understands different trends and "looks" in design; can alter style for different contexts. Experienced at art-directing photographers, retouchers, and illustrators.	Designer tech-wizard. Understands PostScript troubleshooting of problem files. Knowledgeable about page-layout shortcuts, third-party extensions, and prepress, press, and bindery issues. Can create multipage die-cuts. Can create duotones in Photoshop. Can optimize "fake spot color" (in a CMYK job) better than Pantone's own guide. Supervises printers with skepticism and expertise, driving them to achieve the highest quality within the project's budgetary and equipment limits.	Brochures, annual reports, posters, and/or coordinated packaging suites or other polished work for Fortune-500 clients. If publication designer, has created the "look" for glossy magazines, daily newspapers, "coffee-table" books, or best-selling children's books. Possibly work is in major design annuals. Has own Web site.	(prepress; MacOS) QuarkXPress and PageMaker Illustrator FreeHand Photoshop DeBabelizer Probably has knowledge of numerous other programs and utilities, and system troubleshooting.	10+ 5+ 4+ 3+ 4+ 1+	$65-$150 per hour $1000+ per page Sometimes quotes by the project. $60-$125K per year

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GRAPHIC DESIGNERS

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Level	Artistic Skills	Portfolio	Client Rate
I	Has basic drawing skills: can create attractive new images, usually in mannered, iconic, or flat clip-art styles.	Mostly art-school drawings and paintings. Perhaps a few reproduced pieces for smaller clients, such as black & white spot drawings for newsletters.	$20-$40 per hour $25-$35K per year or per illustration
II	As above. Also, drawing skills include 1-point and 2-point perspective, some anatomy; probably has some formal training in drawing and painting.	Illustrations scanned into computers and used on Web sites, CD-ROMs. Editorial illustrations: in trade or smaller magazines, weekly neighborhood newspapers, company newsletters. Advertising illustrations: smaller-company annual reports, vertical-market direct-mail campaigns, store signage, packaging.	$25-$45 per hour $30-$40K per year or per illustration
III	As above. Also, understands 3-point perspective, can achieve atmospheric perspective. May have a "signature style," but is also versatile and can draw both realistic and stylized images of people. Can draw and paint convincing poses and actions; can roughly sketch a wide range of objects from the imagination without reference materials.	Editorial illustrations or infographics: on inside pages of major national magazines or major metropolitan newspapers. Advertising illustrations: Fortune-500 annual reports, national direct-mail campaigns, billboards, posters, backdrops for film and television credits.	$55-$80 per hour (somewhat unusual to work by the hour) $35-$65K per year (somewhat unusual to be a salaried employee)
IV	Has a recognizable, known "signature style" and national reputation. May have won awards. Style is totally consistent and predictable. Paradoxically, artists at this level may be less versatile than lower-level artists, since Level IV illustrators usually work in one style only. The client is essentially "buying" this style when hiring a particular illustrator.	Mostly editorial illustrations for covers of mass-market glossy magazines, inside quarter-page illustrations for top-paying magazines (*Rolling Stone*, *New Yorker*, etc.). Illustrations for entire children's books by major publishers. Other things to look for: typically the client wants a Level IV illustrator's signature to appear legibly, even prominently, and gives the artist credit on the same page with the article.	$40-$100+ per hour (somewhat unusual to work by the hour) $35-$85K per year (somewhat unusual to be a salaried employee)

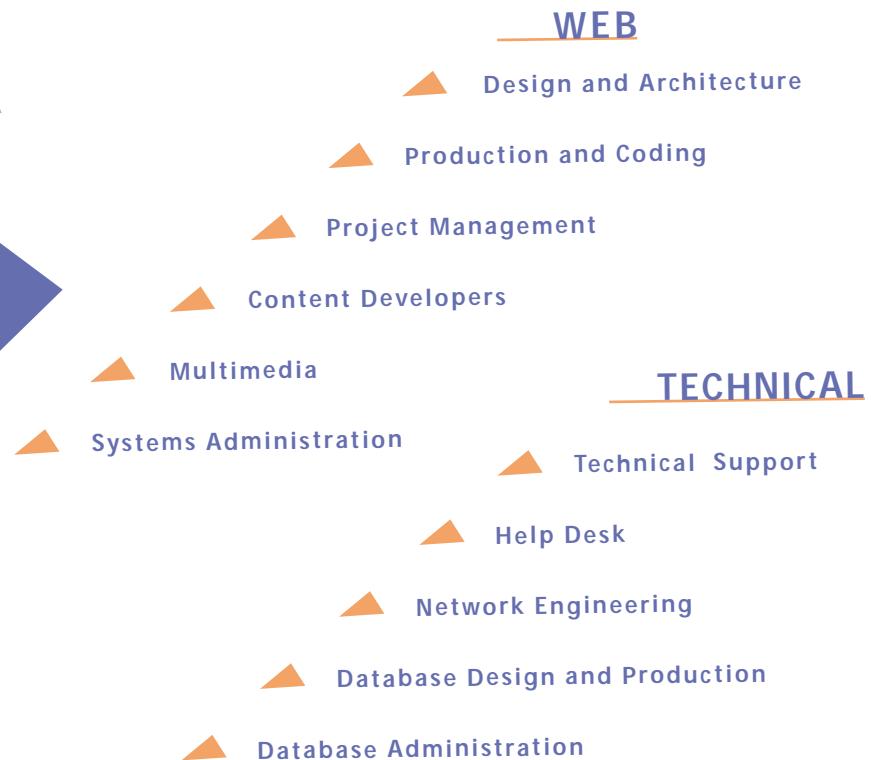| Level	Technical Skills	Prepress Industry Experience	Software	Years	Client Rate
I	Can operate imagesetters, flatbed scanners, and related equipment. Can perform daily imagesetter calibration; tweak basic settings for hardware- or software-based PostScript RIPs; chemically process film; track customer jobs. Can perform simple system trouble-shooting. Can create various kinds of color proofs including digital proofs, laminated proofs, ColorKeys, and bluelines. Can do simple preflighting of jobs.	One year in service bureau or small corporate imaging department.	QuarkXPress or PageMaker Illustrator or FreeHand	1+ 1/2+	$20-$30 per hour $20-$25K per year
II	As above. Also, can preflight jobs using specialized preflight soft-ware. Can troubleshoot moderately difficult file problems. Scanning skills include unsharp masking with numerical understanding, descreening, basic color correction, use of slide scanners (removing and replacing slide mounts if necessary). Can adjust for dot gain.	3–5 years' experience, including a variety of tasks in a midsize or large prepress shop (using high-end equipment).	QuarkXPress and PageMaker Illustrator or FreeHand Photoshop	3+ 2+ 2+	$30-$40 per hour $25-$35K per year
III	As above. Also, can troubleshoot very difficult file problems. Knowledgeable about Windows-based prepress, and Mac/Windows conversion issues. Truly understands relationship between scanner resolution, print linescreens, color depth, and similar issues. Can create high-quality color separations from RGB files; understands GCR, UCR, dot gain, Pantone-to-process conversion, ink trapping, unusual screening and separation methods, and similar issues. Can perform trapping in page-layout program or in specialized trapping programs. Can operate various imposition software. Can achieve highest quality possible from drum scanners, and produce magazine-cover-quality scans in CMYK. Can judge color of difficult prepress images "by the numbers" on monitors that are not calibrated.	5-7 years' experience.	QuarkXPress and PageMaker Illustrator FreeHand Photoshop DeBabelizer ScanPrepPro, binuscan ColorPro, TrapWise or Trapper, various RIPs/drivers	4+ 3+ 2+ 3+ 1+	$40-$50 per hour $35-$40K per year
IV	As above. Also, prepress consultant/guru. Can analyze prepress systems and recommend upgrades and replacements. Can develop cost-justified strategies for purchasing and installing entire new systems, including altered prepress workflows, high-speed net-works and graphics servers, etc. Can plan and set up a complete high-end prepress department from scratch. Understands RIP issues and tradeoffs including various hardware/software RIP combinations, Adobe vs. clone RIPs, etc. Experienced with high-speed networks including 100Mb Ethernet and Fibre Channel. In-depth understanding of troubleshooting problem files, perhaps including some direct editing of raw PostScript code.	7–10+ years' experience. Probably also has traditional (precomputer) prepress experience.	QuarkXPress and PageMaker Illustrator FreeHand Photoshop DeBabelizer ScanPrepPro, binuscan Color Pro, TrapWise or Trapper, various RIPs/drivers	5+ 4+ 3+ 4+ 2+	$75-$150 per hour $50-$90K per year

Level	Typical Venue	Typical Physical Product	Typical Communication/ Artistic Skills	Software	Years	Client Rate
I	Small internal company meeting.	Overheads, handouts.	Organize materials utilizing bullet points.	Microsoft PowerPoint	1+	$20-$40 per hour $25-$40K per year
II	Company pitch to prospective clients (minor). Stockholders' annual meeting. Courtroom (minor).	Overheads, handouts.	As above. Also, understands basic marketing strategy.	As above. Possibly: Director, SuperCard, HyperCard, or other authoring environment, HTML	2+ 1+ 1+	$25-$50 per hour $30-$45K per year
III	Company pitch to prospective clients (major). Small trade show. Courtroom (major).	Interactive booth display.	As above. Also, understands advanced marketing strategy, plus copy/design integration.	Director, SuperCard, HyperCard, or other authoring environment HTML Possibly: Digital Video software such as Premiere, or After Effects	3+ 2+	$40-$100 per hour $35-$85K per year
IV	Major trade show. Shopping mall.	Major trade show exhibits. Kiosk displays (including digital video or animation).	As above. Also, has flair for drama, storyboarding/ scripting/capturing and holding audience attention.	Photoshop Premiere After Effects Director, including advanced Lingo Authorware, HyperCard, or SuperCard	2+ 4+ 4+ 4+	$75-$150 per hour $50-$120K per year

Note: At higher levels, "presentation artist" may be almost synonymous with "multimedia developer."

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Who we are

Aquent Partners is

one of the largest and fastest

growing specialty talent agencies that

focuses on Print Creative and Production, Web,

and Technical experts. For both contract and permanent

work, we make the best matches for our talent and our

clients. With offices in over 40 markets and 10

countries, Aquent Partners provides global

solutions for specialized

`staffing needs.

WEB

Design and Architecture

Production and Coding

Project Management

Content Developers

Multimedia

TECHNICAL

Systems Administration

Technical Support

Help Desk

Network Engineering

Database Design and Production

Database Administration

Amsterdam
Atlanta
Baltimore
Boston
Chicago
Cleveland
Dallas
Denver
Detroit
Houston
London
Long Island
Los Angeles
Manchester
Melbourne
Miami
Minneapolis
Munich
New Jersey
New York
Northern Virginia
Orange County
Paris
Philadelphia
Phoenix
Pittsburgh
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