

Exposure meets designer's vision: A job well done!

Ok, here are my two cents on free exposure: As a designer, I believe that every creation is a piece of art in itself. Whether someone likes it or not is subjective, and I try not to pass judgement on what is considered good or bad in general. Of course, I have my opinions on the creations I encounter, but those opinions do not have to be true for everyone else.

That's why I developed a formula that helps me determine if something is objectively "good" or "bad". It's simple: "Did the finished product achieve what the developer intended it to be?" If the answer is yes, then the product cannot be criticized as "bad" simply because it may not be to one's personal taste. On the other hand, if the answer is no, then the product is not successful because it did not achieve its intended purpose, regardless of how visually appealing it may be.

For example: If all a designer wants to create a well-formed pile of poo on a silver tablet with a small cocktail umbrella on top and they succeed, then they have done an excellent job. It is not for us to judge the art form, even though one could question the creator's intention.

So, why am I sharing this with you?

The principle of exposure is no different. If the result of the exposure meets the designer's vision, it is a job well done. If not, the designer should analyse why it fell short of expectations. Was it a foreseeable error? Was the exposure not presented in the best way possible? Where and when did things go wrong? Were there false expectations or promises? Did either party underdeliver in some way?

Ultimately, it is the designer who knows best about their creation, and it is their responsibility to ensure that the outcome aligns with their vision.

Let me share with you an early example of falling into the "exposure trap". When I opened my escape room (Nexus Exit, 2016), a so-called "escape room blogger" (Escaperoomgames, 2016) approached me and asked to play for free in exchange for a mention on his blog. I agreed, thinking that any exposure would be good exposure. He brought his five friends; they enjoyed the game and he wrote a review. However, when I read his review, I realized it was poorly written with numerous grammar mistakes and lacked professionalism. I checked his other reviews, and they were equally unimpressive. Ultimately, I lost potential revenue of 150 euros and valuable time, while gaining nothing. By the way, even if this was mainly a big thing in the early times of escape rooms, there are still self-proclaimed influencers running around and asking for free services just for the potential exposure. I find this kind of "scrounging" generally annoying, and this "exposure" is only beneficial in the rarest of cases.

From that day on, I became wary of anyone who asked me to do something for free for the sake of exposure. Even other escape room owners who I allowed to play for free had to start paying, because I realized that quality has its price, and good work deserves compensation. People will talk about your experience, whether you charge them or not, so it's essential to charge what you're worth. I learned that even as a fresh startup, you should value your work, and others will recognize and appreciate it.

A year later, an "upcoming rapper superstar" wanted to use the scenery of one of my rooms for his video, claiming that it would expose my rooms to a wider audience. This time, I checked everything thoroughly before agreeing to anything. I examined his Spotify and Instagram following, reviewed his communication style in emails, and eventually asked for a fair price. We negotiated, and in the end,

he got his video, and I got paid, with a little bit of exposure on social media. While I don't think anyone came to my rooms because of that video, it was still a nice social media event.

So, exposure can be a tricky thing. It's not always a bad thing, but it's important to consider the potential outcomes. You want to make sure that it's a win/win situation for everyone involved. For example, when a startup documentary company approached me about making an episode on my escape room, I was initially cautious. But after doing my research and making sure they were a serious company, we came to an agreement that ended up being great for both of us. They got great content for their series, and I got amazing videos and pictures to use for my own company. (Escape Room Stories, 2022)

It's important to remember that not all exposure offers are created equal. You need to consider if the offer is realistic and beneficial for you, or if it's just empty promises. One good rule of thumb is to evaluate if the exposure offerer is as professional as you or less professional, or if they're a big player in the industry. If they're on your level or below, you should consider charging them. If they're above your level and the exposure is promising, then it might be worth it to work with them. They will probably want to pay you anyway.

At the end of the day, you need to remember that your work has value. Even an unpaid internship can be considered a valuable exposition opportunity at the entry level, as it allows you to showcase your capabilities to potential future employers. However, I strongly believe that all internships should be paid, especially if you are working for a reputable company.

So, I close with these final words:

Even if you're just starting out, you shouldn't sell yourself short. Don't be afraid to say no to exposure offers that don't feel right or don't offer you anything of real value. I mean if you are a newbie and you have nothing else to do, or nothing to lose, do it. But don't miss the sweet spot. Because your work has value. Even if it is a pile of poo.

References:

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