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## **Resourceful Designer Episode 322 Designing Success: Applying 'Selling the Invisible' to Your Graphic Design Business**

What if I told you there was a question you can ask your design clients that can simplify your job, make projects more memorable, and strengthen your client relationships. Would you be curious to know what it is? Well, stick around to find out. Now I hope it's not a letdown, but the question that I teased about in the opening is actually a very simple one. In fact, it's such a simple question that it's usually the first question that young toddlers utter. And anybody who has been a parent knows what question I'm talking about already. And that question is, why? Asking why can open up so many doors whenever you're working with your clients. It is such a powerful question, which is why young, curious, inquisitive kids ask it over and over and over. It's time to eat your meal.

Why? Well, because you wanna grow strong. Why? Because if you're strong, you'll be able to play hard and run and do all sorts of stuff. Why? Kids just ask it because they want to absorb. They're like little sponges, just absorbing all this information. And they do that by asking, why? And just because we're grown up, just because we're professionals in our industry, doesn't mean we should stop asking that all important question. Because asking a client why at the appropriate time, can get them thinking about things. It can get them to change direction. It can get them to acknowledge things they hadn't thought of before, and in some cases, it may even get them to change their mind.

Take a website client, for example. Client comes to you and says that they need a website. And you can just ask the simple question, why do you need a website? Don't just say, okay, you need a website? Sure. I'll do that for you. Why do you need a website? Because the answer to that question could change the direction the website goes in. And sometimes, the client may not even know why they need a website. They just know, oh, I'm starting a new business, and every business needs a website, so I should have one built. Why do you need a website? And then you discuss with them.

You talk it over with them. That's where discovery questions come in. I did an entire episode. Episode 15 of the podcast was all about questions I shared 50 of them that you can ask. But why should be the most important one? Does the client need a website because they need exposure for their business? Do they need it because they're trying to get leads? Do they need it because they're using it to sell something? Do they need a website as a repository for resources that people may be interested in or may need to visit to see? Or do they need it for some other reason, perhaps like building an email list? I recently had a client who came to me saying they needed a website. And when I asked him why they need a website, he said he wants to build an email list. And that's the only reason. He didn't need it for anything else.

He wanted a website in order for people to sign up for an email list. So instead of building an entire website, we settled on a simple landing page because that's all they needed. He was gonna be giving presentations, and he just needed some place for people to go to sign up for his email list. So asking why he needed a website went from a full fledged website that he didn't really need to a simple landing page with an email opt in form on it. And this is the sort of thing that I said in the intro where it could simplify your job. I didn't have to go and build an entire website. All I had to do was build a landing page. And, yes, that means I made less money on it.

But the other thing I mentioned at the beginning is how asking this can strengthen your client relationship. And in this case, this client trusted me a lot more because I could have built him an entire website and charged him for it. But when he told me what he needed, I told him he didn't need a website. We can just build a landing page for him. It would cost

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him a lot less money, and he really appreciated that. And that was just asking why. I had another client that came to me for podcast artwork. Through podcast branding at [podcastbranding.co](http://podcastbranding.co), the company that I run that does podcast branding, obviously, clients usually purchase upfront.

I productize my services there, so clients actually purchase before I even talk to them. And this gentleman had purchased podcast cover artwork. And as part of purchase process, I have everybody set up a Zoom call because I wanna talk to every single client. And when we got on the Zoom call, I asked him because this guy had an established podcast. His podcast had been around for a few years. He was doing very well, and I asked him, why do you want artwork? Why did you order artwork through me? And he said, well, I'm getting a little tired of my artwork, and it's something I did myself. I'm not a Professional designer, I did it myself, and I thought maybe I should use a professional designer to design something new and unique for me. And I looked at his artwork, and I couldn't find anything wrong with it.

I told him that even though he said he's not a designer, he followed every design rule, everything that had to do with, you know, the hierarchy, the layout, the color choices, the whole bit. His artwork was great, and the fact that he said he was tired of it, that's what happens to most people when they are involved. They see it on a regular basis. They get tired of it much, much faster than their clients or, in this case, his listeners do. So I told him that, no. I'm not gonna do a new artwork for you. I'm gonna refund your money. Thank you very much for your order, but here's your money back because you don't need new artwork.

Now I could've just taken that money, created something for him, and be done with it. But by asking him why he wanted new artwork, I ended up strengthening the relationship I had with him. And a couple of weeks later, he reached out to me and said, Mark, I've got this other business here. I need a new website. Would you be interested in giving me a quote? And I ended up building a very large website for his company that has really nothing to do with his podcast. And the only reason I got that was because of me being honest with him about his podcast cover artwork that he didn't need to have it redesigned. And the reason I got to that conclusion was by asking him why. Why does he need new podcast artwork? I remember a lawyer contact me.

This is going back quite a few years ago. A lawyer reached out to me. They had heard from me from another one of my clients. It was a referral. And this lawyer was new to the area. He specialized in business law. And he wanted me to design a 3 page flyer for them or a 3 fold, trifold flyer or brochure, whatever you wanna call it. He wanted me to design one of these for him, and I said, okay.

That's great. You know, a lot of businesses have a little flyer they can put places, and that's great. And when I was asking him, you know, what was the reason? Why does he want this flyer? He said that he was told that locally, we have this thing called the ad bag. And the ad bag is, it's distributed along with a weekly mag, newspaper that we have. It's a free newspaper that comes out every week, and it's distributed in this bag that has all sorts of other flyers. And Basically, it's a junk mailbag that is delivered to every door in the city. And he was told that it's a great way to get his name out there is to put his things in the ad bag and then distribute it to everybody. But then we were talking and I says, well, why do you wanna do that? You're a business lawyer.

The ad bag goes out to homes. And, yes, you are gonna reach some business people, but the majority of people that get that, they they don't run their own business. So your information, being a business lawyer, is useless to them. And I told

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him, says, why don't instead I'd asked him if he was a member of the Chamber of Commerce, and he said he had just joined the chamber. And at the time, and this just goes to show you how long ago this was. At the time, the chamber would do, I think it was bimonthly fax newsletters. It was kind of they would send out a a I think it was called the Chamber Fax Blast or something like that. And you could pay the chamber to send out basically your flyer via fax.

And I told him, all the people that are receiving this are business people. They are his target market. So I convinced him that he didn't need this trifold brochure that I was gonna design for him, and then pay for the printing, and then pay for the distribution, which was gonna reach the majority of people it was gonna reach wouldn't be his target market. Instead, I could design something for him that would then be sent via fax to his target market. And he did that. He fall he he agreed. I ended up designing it for him, so I got that job. I lost out on the print brokering, which would have been a a nice lucrative job.

But this lawyer was so appreciative because He didn't know about this fax blast that the the chamber sent out. And when he did send it out, he got so many leads and so many clients from it that it it it paid off tenfold where the other way might not have. And we came to this conclusion that this was the best option for him because I asked him why. Why do you need this flyer? Now I could have just said, sure. I'll design a flyer for you, and went ahead and designed the flyer. He would have said I need I forget what the number was. 20,000, 30,000 of them, and I could have just said, sure. I'll do that, and I would have made a lot of money off of it.

But I always ask why. Why do you want something? And when I found out, I realized there was a better solution for him. And when I shared it with him, he agreed. And that goes back to the client relationship thing. That lawyer remembered what I had done for him. And the next time he needed something, who do you think he called? And I remained his designer until he retired. I had a similar situation with a, hearing aid clinic that I do work for. They also wanted a flyer.

No. They wanted some sort of postcard. And it was a similar thing. It's not the same. They're not in my area. They're in Ottawa. And they also have a similar ad bag type thing. And they wanted me to design a postcard that they were gonna have printed and put it in the ad bag to go out to all these neighborhoods around their area, advertising this new hearing aid clinic.

But again, I got that information by asking why. They just contacted me and says, Mark, we need you to design a postcard for us. And I asked them, well, why do you need a postcard? Card. What are you planning on doing with it? Again, that's information, you know, I didn't have to ask for. I could have just said, sure. I'll design a postcard for you. No problem. This is how much it's gonna cost.

But no. I asked why. And in doing so, in hearing their story, I then turned to them and said, instead of spending money, again, same situation as the lawyer, and putting stuff in this ad bag, which you will reach a lot of people, then, yes, some of them will need hearing aids, but the majority of them won't need hearing aids because, you know, a lot of young families in the area. It was a newer neighborhood. A lot of young families buying the homes in the area they were gonna target. And a lot of these young families, they're not in the market for hearing aids, at least not yet. And, yes, it would have been good exposure. Get the name out there.

I asked them. I says, why not instead buy an ad in a local magazine? They there's A magazine that comes out there, it's

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called Senior Living. It's a free magazine. I I think that's what it's called. I I might be wrong on the title. But it's a magazine aimed at people 55 years and older. And it's a free magazine. One of those ones you pick up at the grocery store or whatever.

You know, it's just on a stand there, and you can pick it up for free. And it's a very popular magazine. And I said, instead of paying to have these postcards printed and then paying for the distribution, and all that, why don't you contact the magazine and see how much it would cost to put an ad in that magazine? And that's what they did. It ended up working out to almost the same price. And yet, now, they were hitting their target market. The magazine is geared at people 55 years and older. Well, who are the people that are gonna be looking for hearing aids? The majority of them are over the age of 55. So in this case, I help the client out again just by asking why.

And asking why doesn't have to be about changing the product or changing the project direction like I've been sharing. Some cases, I had a a website that I did or I was in the proposal process for a website, And I had sent the proposal or I presented the proposal. I was in person. I presented them with the 3 tier pricing strategy, which if you're not familiar with, go back and listen to episode 145 of the podcast. The 3 tier pricing strategy, in a nutshell, is you offer 3 prices for the same product or same thing, but slightly different. So in this case, they wanted a website, and it was a new business, and they needed a website. And, I I gave him 3 prices, an entry level website, a mid level website, and a high end website. And the client looked at that.

They were very impressed with everything I'd presented them, what I can do, and all that. And they looked at the prices, And they said, you know, that low end one is just not it wouldn't cut it. They really like the high end. The mid one would probably do for now, but they really like that high end one. But they said, you know what, Mark? I just can't afford that right now. And, I asked him. I said, okay. You know, you had an idea what things were gonna cost.

Can I ask you why you're saying that? You know, what is it about it, this thing that you're you're you're hesitant? And during my question on why he was saying he can't afford it, it turned out that it wasn't that he thought the the website was expensive. And that's not what he was telling me. He didn't say this is too expensive. He just said he couldn't afford it. Well, it turned out that the reason he couldn't afford it is just the day before the presentation, He found out he had just, they had bought a new building and they were in the process of renovating the building to get things up to, you know, ready for start. And, this was gonna be a a brick and mortar place. And the building they bought had a ramp on it. And that's one of the reasons he bought the building was because This was it it was a medical clinic.

And this medical clinic thought, you know, this ramp for accessibility, people with wheelchairs. Well, when they had the place inspected for their renovations that they're doing on the inside, they found out that the ramp that was on the outside of the building was too steep of an angle that it didn't qualify for a good accessibility ramp because of the angle of the incline. And they turned out that the previous owner didn't have clients coming to the place. They were using it as a place of business, but they didn't have clients coming. And the ramp was built just as a loading. It was easier to move their their product in and out via a ramp, So they built a ramp, but it wasn't built for wheelchairs. So long story short, this client of mine, they couldn't afford the website solution I was offering them because they just found out they had to spend more money to tear down the ramp that was there, and this was a concrete ramp, tear down the ramp and put in a new one. So here I was in a situation where I had a client that wanted a website, and they knew the how much they should spend on a website.

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It wasn't that wasn't the issue. The issue was is this unexpected expense had just came up and they just didn't have the money for the website. So because of that, I offered them a payment plan. I said, instead of paying this big amount, and usually, I ask for a 50% deposit up front and 50% upon launch, So instead of doing that, why don't we just break that payment up and do it over the course of I think, in that case, I did it over the course of 8 months. I said, you give me this much now and then the same amount every month for 8 months. I said, is that doable? And the client said that would be perfect, and we'd ended up moving forward. So this turned into a case of the client saying, sorry, Mark. You know, this, we just can't afford this right now.

In which case, you know, a lot of people would just say, okay, well, that's it. I and and and chalk this up to another client that says no, to me asking, you know, why? Why can't you afford this right now? And him explaining his situation, which was an easy thing to remedy. In the long run, he got a beautiful website, and I ended up getting the money that I was asking for. He did go for the higher end, the 3rd tier on the proposal. So we were both happy. And all it took was me offering him payment plans because I had asked him why. So those are just some of the stories, some of the experiences I've had over the years where a project has changed. Something has become more memorable, and especially strengthening client relationships, all because of asking why.

Why do you want that project? Why do you need this website? Why do you wanna move in that direction? Why are you asking for these revisions? Asking why is such a powerful question. Young kids use it as a way to gather, soak up all the information they can about this beautiful world that they've come into? Why shouldn't we keep using that same question in order to better our lives and better the lives of our clients. So why don't you try it? The next time you're talking to a client and they ask you for something, just ask them. Don't just say, why, and leave it at that. But ask them, you know, why are you thinking this way? You know, get give let me understand you a little bit better. Why are you saying that? Why do you need this? Why do you think that way? And the answer they give you may educate you, in which case you learn something, which is great. Or it may give you an opportunity to educate them, in which case they will be grateful. So that's why I think asking why is probably one of the most powerful questions you can ask your clients, and it can open up so many opportunities for you.