

The true value of working for free - Making pro bono work for you

 By [Jessica Hopley](#)

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When clients hit you with "We've got a really exciting project, but we don't have budget" or "I can't pay you, but this job will get you great exposure"... along with vague feedback, like "I'll know when I see it", and requests to "make the logo bigger", do-me-a-favour jobs tend to make us all feel a little antsy.

Despite the inconvenience of having to field off the perpetual stream of family, friends, distant connections, and even total strangers asking for help and freebies, there are some big benefits to taking on pro bono projects. Here's how to make sure you're choosing the right one, and how to make it work for you.

Finding the right fit

Identifying the right project is key. It's essential that both you and your client reap benefits. And that you both enjoy the process as much as the final outcome.

Does this project give you the feels? If the answer to this is not a "hell yes!" then it's got to be a "no". This is a passion project after all. To make this work, it needs to be something that really interests you, makes you feel damn good, or that your client is so mad about, that they've infected you with their joy.



Image Credit Studio Bolland

Do you love 'em? Seriously though, do you? Since you have the choice, this should be a client that you actually like. Not just the product or organisation, but the individuals that you will be working alongside. Not only will you feel less resentful down the line when you are sacrificing lunch breaks and YouTube time to make this thing happen, but you will have made a strong ally. Someone happy to give referrals and grow your businesses reputation.

How (and when) to say no to the wrong project

For as much as a beautifully chosen pro bono job allows us to hone skills, push the boundaries, liberate our creativity, get recognition for doing good, and generally be awesome. Every now and then a job comes along (for your uncle's pie shop) that really isn't going to be worth your while. Perhaps it's the sheer amount of time it will take, the difficulty involved, or it's

just not something you feel very passionately about... but we need to know how to say no when pro bono isn't really for any good.

If you're suddenly faced with having to turn down free pie for a year and disappointing your favourite uncle, it's going to help having a rational response to ease your guilt. I'd recommend choosing one of these avenues:

The truth hurts: Tell the client that the job doesn't align with your company's vision. If this isn't the kind of work you love to do, you shouldn't be doing it. Taking on a job that's not the right fit causes frustration and pressure, and can have a negative impact on your team's creativity, working hours and stress levels.

Time/studio availability: Tell the client that you simply just don't have the time right now, or that your studio is at capacity with existing work. That you, therefore, are not able to take any additional work on at this stage without incurring freelance costs.

Existing charitable interest: Tell the client that although you'd like to help with the project for their charitable organisation, you already have a pro bono client signed on and have dedicated your available time in this regard to assisting them.

Get as much as you give

Pro bono can provide a platform for radical expression and creative growth. Make this project work as hard for you as you do for it. This is your chance to master that new technique you've been meaning to teach yourself, or finally get to show off some of the skills you've had shelved for far too long. For many agencies this is chance to feather their awards nests.

Have a conversation with your client right upfront about the amount of creative flex they're willing to give. It's essential that you find a medium where your client feels safe, and you have the creative latitude that paying clients don't usually allow.

In this same conversation, come to an agreement that your studio gets the full credit they deserve, in whichever way possible, when the final product is distributed. Insure that your new potential client is happy for you to add the project to your portfolio, and distribute as part of your own marketing before you agree to take the job on.

Take control of timing and project management too. Make sure that this project is going to happen on a timeline that is comfortable for you, and that the way the project will run is a way that you love to work.

Now, you have generated a beautiful piece of content! Don't rely on the client exclusively to generate exposure for your work. Take matters into your own hands, and use your social media network to make sure that your good work does not go unnoticed.

Go forth! And pro bono!

ABOUT JESSICA HOPLEY

Producer at Studio Bolland. Jess is the self appointed mother hen, with 8+ years of industry experience creating, managing and producing. When she's not producing for Studio Bolland, she loves to share her experience teaching classes to advertising students.

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