

DESIGN AGENCY STAFF READY TO QUIT DISABILITY A 'BLIND' SPOT FOR DESIGN AND DIGITAL AGENCIES

(London, 7 January 2013) The number of staff working in digital and design agencies intending to move job next year is at a four year high, according to a new report published today.

The Design Industry Voices report by Fairley & Associates, Gabriele Skelton and On Pointe Marketing is now in its fourth year and shows how small firms have suffered during the ongoing economic crisis. It reveals increasing instability with fewer permanent staff, more freelancers, more unpaid interns and agencies being asked by clients to do more work for less money.

The annual survey - of almost 500 agency staff - paints a picture of the squeeze experienced by small firms during the UK's double dip back into recession this year.

- Almost nine out of ten (87%) say that **clients expect more work for less money**
- Eight out of ten (80%) say **client budgets have been reduced**
- Seven out of ten (70%) say **clients expect more work in pitches for free**
- Almost two thirds say agencies are employing **fewer permanent staff** (61%), using **more freelancers** (66%) and more than two fifths are using **more unpaid interns** (41%).

Agencies are experiencing more staff turnover than ever, since the recession began in 2008:

- More than half (59%) of staff intend to change job in the next twelve months
- More than a third (34%) have been with their agency less than a year.
- More than a third (35%) are writing their personal thoughts about work on blogs and social networking sites, almost twice as many as four years ago.

Businesses and design agencies are also failing to seize the opportunity of the 'Blue Pound'. They are not designing websites or communications to be accessible to people with disabilities. 10 million disabled people live in the UK with a combined annual spending power in excess of £80 billion - the Blue Pound.*

- Less than one in ten (9%) say that clients ask for all designs to be accessible to people with disabilities
- Fewer than a quarter (21.9%) agree that clients ask for website designs to be accessible to people with disabilities
- Fewer than half (45.7%) agree that they understand how to design in a way that improves accessibility for people with disabilities.

Rachel Fairley, lead author of the new research and MD of Fairley & Associates, said:

"Design and digital firms are feeling the squeeze from the UK's double dip into recession during the last year. Businesses are demanding more work from agencies for less money to make up for their budget cuts. They are also demanding safer work and solutions, which will not achieve the business objectives and do nothing to enhance agencies' or clients' reputation as being at the forefront of innovation. The opportunity to address the needs the 10 million disabled people who live in the UK has yet to be seized. Less than one in ten clients ask for designs to be accessible to people with disabilities and less than half of agency staff know how to design in a way that improves accessibility."

Karina Beasley, co-author and MD of Gabriele Skelton, said:

"59% of design and digital agency staff say they are ready to quit. They perceive a crisis of leadership within their agencies, and part of the issue is that owners have a rosier view of agency performance than their staff. The soaring use of freelancers is driving many permanent workers to take contracts, so talent is harder to find. Agencies are busy and there is work out there, but it's definitely a case of 'more for less'. There is a general sense of instability. We hope 2013 will be better as agencies adjust to working with smaller budgets and more smartly. But it's vital that their business strategy is better communicated so that staff know what to expect."

Stef Brown, co-author and MD of On Pointe Marketing, said:

“Seven out of ten say clients expect more work in pitches for free. Social media was rife with free pitch examples in 2012, and some agencies are even beginning to name and shame those brands that are asking for free pitches. Times are tough, and it’s all too easy to over-deliver in pitch and give too much away, especially when your peers have jumped on that bandwagon. But consider this - the act of giving Intellectual Property away commoditises services. This undermines clients’ appreciation of the value of agency expertise and they then may refuse to pay a premium for those services. If enough agencies take a stand and stop this practice, clients will follow suit.”

Ends.

Notes to Editors

From 00:01h Monday 7 January 2013 see www.designindustryvoices.com to access the full report. For more details and an embargoed copy of the full report, contact **Stef Brown, 07773 886 543, stef@onpointemarketing.com**

We asked 459 people who work within digital or design agencies to anonymously share their views online between 3-7 October 2012.

* Business Disability Forum website www.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk

Fairley & Associates works with companies and agencies to effect change, solve immediate business challenges and build long-term capabilities in brand, marketing and engagement. www.fairleyassociates.com

Gabriele Skelton is a specialist design and digital recruitment agency. www.gabrieleskelton.com

On Pointe Marketing works with agencies to build external and internal reputation to drive the business development pipeline and retain and attract talent. www.onpointemarketing.com