

From Free to a Fee

How to Price & Package Your Design Process Without Killing Your Close Rate

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THE PROBLEM

The \$50 / \$75 / \$200 Trap

Small fees don't qualify serious buyers — they keep options open.

Common Approaches

- \$50 to "weed people out"
- \$75 for a site visit
- \$200 for an estimate

The Reality

All noble.
All awkward.
All ineffective.

The Issue

These fees don't qualify buyers — they confuse them.

They weed out the wrong people.

They don't protect your time or communicate real value.

i Low fees don't hook buyers — they keep you replaceable.

So What Do You Charge for the Early Stuff?

Pricing Questions

- \$1,000?
- \$3,000?
- \$10,000?
- A percentage?
- A percentage of what?

Scope Questions

- What's included?
- What's not?
- How do you decide?
- Where do you **draw the line**?

Before pricing, we have to answer a harder question.

THE REAL ISSUE

Is the Early Work Actually Worth Anything?

Contractors Know

The work is valuable. Hours of expertise, measurements, planning, and problem-solving go into early deliverables.

Customers Don't Know

Why it matters, what it takes, or how it helps them make better decisions.

The Gap

Undefined value = uncomfortable pricing

- ❑ If you can't explain the value, you can't confidently charge for it.



MINDSET SHIFT

Stop trying to figure out how much to charge

Start figuring out what value to deliver — and when

Every business, regardless of industry, must master how it presents and values its offerings.

- ❏ Your ability to clearly define, package, and price your services directly influences client acquisition, revenue, and sustainable growth.



How We Figured This Out

Empathy Mapping & Customer Journey Mapping

We mapped:

- What customers ask
- When they ask it
- What decisions they're trying to make

Not what we wanted to deliver — what they needed next.

This revealed:

- Where clients actually feel value
- Where we were wasting time with no return
- Where we **overdelivered too early**
- Where projects got stuck or stalled

❏ **The Estimate Matters to Us — Not to Them.** Estimates are expensive to create. Numbers without context create stress. Customers don't want a number. They want to understand the number.

You're Not Selling Design

You're selling:



Clarity

Understanding what's possible



Confidence

Trust in the numbers and the plan



Direction

A clear path forward

 **Design is the vehicle — not the product.**

At the start of the journey, clients want to know:

- Is this project feasible?
- Is this roughly in our budget range?
- Can we trust this team to guide us?
- Are we going to get ripped off?
- What else?
-

 Everything you say, do, and present, needs to keep these three things in mind.

Early-Stage Value is all about Clarity

Later stage value is where precision, decisions, and details matter.

Why This Matters

- Customers aren't ready for final decisions
- **Too much detail too early = confusion**
- High-precision work upfront is expensive and misaligned

They're NOT Asking For

- Final selections
- Construction drawings
- Perfect precision
- Contractor-level detail

Unknowns create anxiety. Anxiety kills deals.

Quick Recap

The Trap of Low Fees

Small, ineffective fees don't qualify serious buyers; they merely keep options open and make your service easily replaceable.

The Power of Clarity

Customers primarily seek clarity and confidence. Your early deliverables must precisely define value and illuminate a clear path forward.

So, how do you intentionally deliver this valuable clarity and confidently charge for it?

CRITICAL EXERCISE

The Horizontal Line Exercise

We listed everything we deliver — then drew a line.

1

Start

Develop a comprehensive list of every task you **can** do for a customer.

2

Question 1

What would a customer pay to get this far?

3

Question 2

What does it cost us to deliver?

4

Next

Bundle, or package, deliverables or processes together

i By bundling high-value with low-value items, you make the package more valuable without needing to change the price to compensate.

Phase	Activity	Value Type	Time Intensive (low/med/high)	
Qualification & Discovery	Initial inquiry / lead intake	Relationship	Low	
Qualification & Discovery	30-minute discovery call	Trust / Fit	Low	
Qualification & Discovery	Budget framing conversation	Alignment	Low	
Qualification & Discovery	MOSCOW report (Must / Should / Could / Won't)	Clarity	Low	
Qualification & Discovery	Design inventory (goals preferences constraints)	Understanding	Low	
Data Capture	On-site visit with developer	Confidence	Medium	
Data Capture	On-site visit with designer	Confidence	Medium	
Data Capture	Architectural context review	Risk Reduction	Medium	
Data Capture	Field Measure (Comprehensive)	Accuracy	Medium	Use RENDR w/ only critical dims
Data Capture	Existing condition photos	Reference	Low	
Data Capture	CAD As-Builts	Reference	Medium	RENDER + Chief Integration
Conceptual Design	Ballpark estimate	Feasibility	Low	
Conceptual Design	Space planning (bubble diagrams)	Direction	Low	
Conceptual Design	Low-fidelity 2D plan	Visualization	Low	
Conceptual Design	Low-fidelity wireframe	Understanding	Low	
Conceptual Design	Initial 3D model	Visualization	Medium	
Early Estimating	Medium-fidelity estimate with allowances	Confidence	Medium	Use Templates
Design Development	Concept review meeting	Buy-in	Low	
Design Development	Medium-fidelity 2D plan with notes	Clarity	Medium	No cabinet lines
Early Estimating	Medium-fidelity 3D model (no finishes)	Buy-in	Medium	Vector View
Design Development	Design revisions (round 1)	Refinement	Medium	With caveats for architectural visit
Design Development	Primary selections	Commitment	Medium	
Construction Prep	Architectural site visit	Risk Reduction	High	
Design Development	High-fidelity 2D plans	Precision	High	
Design Development	Design revisions (round 2)	Refinement	Medium	
Design Development	High-fidelity 3D designs (materials & patterns)	Emotional Value	High	
Design Development	Mood boards	Emotional Value	Medium	
Design Development	Kitchen design layouts	Functionality	High	
Design Development	Cabinet layout development	Precision	High	
Design Development	Cabinet revisions	Precision	High	
Design Development	Cabinet appliance coordination	Integration	High	
Design Development	Showroom visits (tile stone plumbing)	Confidence	High	
Design Development	Secondary selections	Completion	High	

The First Pass Package

Bundling Clarity (Not Perfection)

\$1,500–\$2,500



Accurate Floorplan

Lower-fidelity 2D plan with key dimensions



Select 3D Visuals

Visual representation for context and emotional buy-in



Budget Range

±10% accuracy with allowances — numbers became understandable



Clear Direction

Expectations were clear — confidence to move forward



7-Day Turnaround

Speed matters — especially today

Afterwards — The 5% Pre-construction Fee

A client can continue with the "Pre-construction Phase", where we fine-tune the plans, make selections, host trade walks, and firm up the "No Surprises" build estimate.

How We Lowered Cost & Raised Value

- Faster plans with better tools
RENDR scanning replaced manual measurements assisted CAD work
- Templated estimating
JobTread templates accelerated takeoffs and pricing
- Lower fidelity early, precision later
No cabinet design or exact dimensions until in Pre-construction

Same outcomes. Less waste.

📄 "But We Need Accuracy Up Front" — We used to think that too. Precision still matters, just later. **We didn't remove precision — we sequenced it.**





BEAUTIFY THE DELIVERABLE

Make the Value Visible

First Pass Proposal Template

Professional, branded document that looks intentional — not rushed

Visual Layout + Inspiration

Include imagery that shows the possibilities and creates emotional connection

Clear Language, Not Jargon

Write for the customer, not for other contractors

- ☑ Professional presentation increases perceived value. The packaging matters as much as the content.

Other Sales Aides

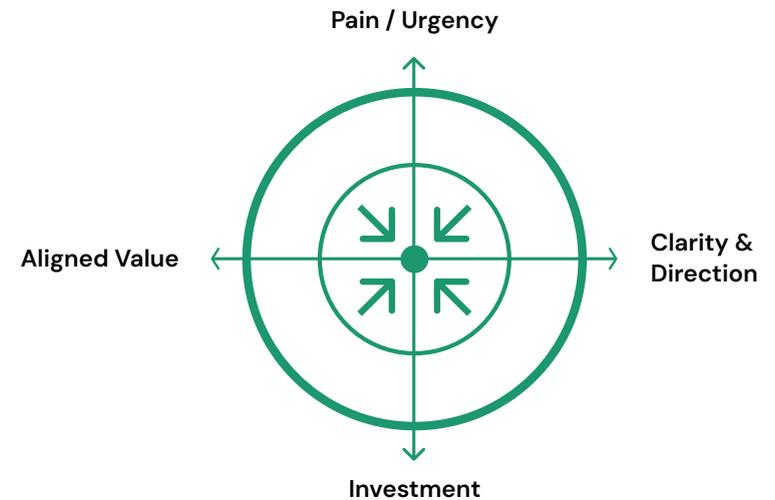
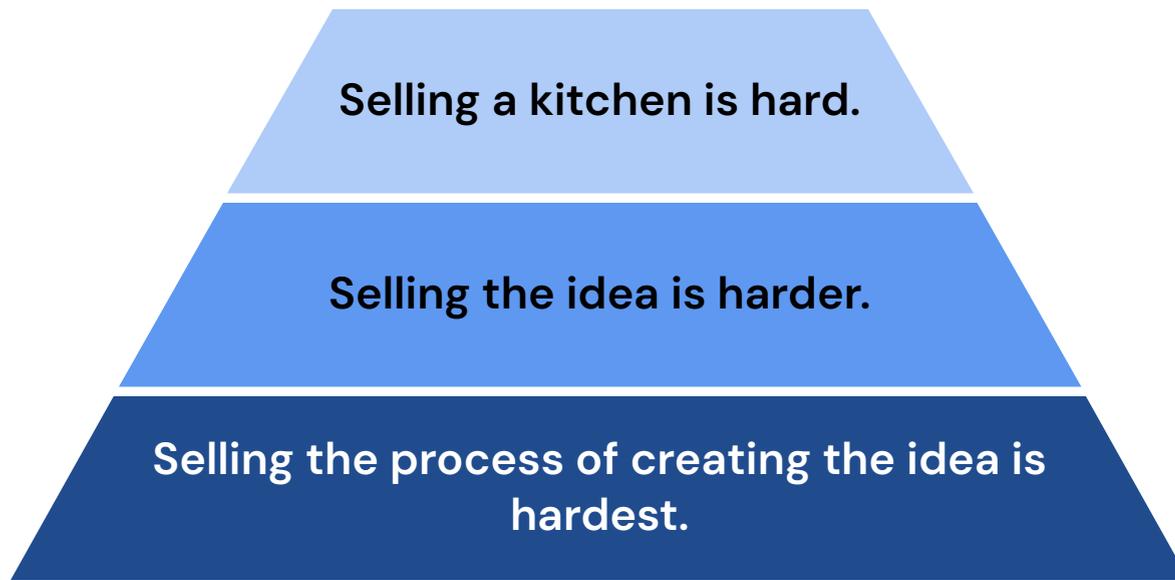


Sample Collateral:

- Journey book
 - Showcases projects from ideation
—> Build
- Deliverables
 - Design and Architectural samples
- Digital MoSCoW report
 - Top-down approach to design and scope
- Expectation guide
 - Delivered at every stage for the "What's Next" step

Sample Design Deliverable digital pdf Cornerstone Designers create to show how designs evolve throughout the process, from concepts, revisions, selections, and final construction drawings

A Needed Bonus: Sales Training



Price is never the problem — misaligned value is.

Sandler helped us:

- **Uncover the real budget upfront**
No surprises later; discuss money early and honestly
- **Stop over-educating too soon**
Deliver value strategically, not all upfront for free
- **Set expectations early**
Clear process education before pricing discussion
- **Get comfortable with 'no'**
A clear 'no' is better than a drawn-out maybe

Point Their Eyes Downfield

Everything Leads to the Next Step

- 1** — **Discovery Call**
30-min qualification and education — clear explanation of our First Pass requirements and deliverables
- 2** — **First Pass Agreement**
Prior to or during the initial site visit, client signs and pays before we invest more time
- 3** — **First Pass Deliverable**
Includes scope/design guided by the MoSCoW, clear roadmap to next phase included in proposal
- 4** — **Design & Development**
Pre-construction Gantts — architectural visits, trade walks, selection timing, high-fidelity plan deliveries
- 5** — **Construction Contract**
No-surprises pricing with complete clarity, with construction timing attached.

Clarity builds trust. Trust builds commitment.

What Changed

\$10M

Revenue Growth

From \$5.8M to \$10M in just 3 years

\$500K+

Design Revenue

Annual design revenue stream created

60%

Close Rate

Up from 35%—nearly doubled conversion

18

Team Size

Down from 24 employees—more efficient operations

Faster delivery

7-day turnaround vs. weeks for competitors

Less wasted effort

Qualified prospects only, strategic value delivery

Happier clients

Clear expectations, confidence in decisions

Same team. Better system.

What You Can Do Next

In the next 30 days:

1

Map the Customer Journey

Collaborate with your team to put the customer in the driver's seat. Identify their needs, questions, and decision points at each stage.

2

Audit & Sequence Your Services

List every deliverable and task. Determine its optimal placement in the customer journey and label it by its cost to you and its **perceived** value to the client.

3

Package for Value

Design a "First Pass Package" based on your audit. Play with numbers: what does it cost to deliver, and would the client perceive it as fair value?

After 30 days:

Boost Value & Speed

Use technology ([RENDR](#) + [JobTread](#)) to deliver faster. Speed + clarity = trust.

Invest in Sales Training

Get sales training. Practice delivering *your* First Pass. Master the process.

 In just **three months**, you can significantly reduce unpaid work and boost your closing percentages.

Thank You!

Connect With Me

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R E N D R

Built by contractors with a mission of giving remodelers their time back to *be present for what matters.*



SCAN TO DOWNLOAD THE PRESENTATION