

SMALL BUSINESS ROUNDUP: Tax-Savers and Time-Savers for Graphic Artists

All right, it's that time of the year again where we either dread the hours it takes to fill out tax forms, or look forward to the rewards of keeping those books accurate. Here are a few quick applications and some other not-so-obvious items that have helped me at tax time.



iBank 3.4
Software - Mac OSX
\$59
www.iggsoftware.com

Like many graphics folks out there, I started my business on a PC because of the lower entry price. As business increased, and Apple's market share increased, moving over to a Mac made more sense. (That, and Adobe's awesome cross-platform upgrade policy that allowed me to port everything over.) However, moving over the financial info that I'd been storing in my PC's financial program was a different story.

I researched several financial apps on the Mac. Many of the apps looked good, but didn't have the features that I wanted. The one that had the feature set closest to what I was looking for ended up being **iBank 3.4** (www.iggsoftware.com). Not only did it seamlessly import QIF data from the former PC money app, but it also had a dashboard widget and iPhone app for quick entries on the go.

Yeah, it takes a little time to enter stuff and categorize expenses and such, but once you've got that going maintenance is a snap. The real money saver in **iBank** comes around tax time. With the data that you're able to compile in **iBank**, and with a reliable tax person, this \$59 app will save you countless hours. If you're like me, it will pay for itself four or five times over the first time you file your taxes.

There are still a few features that I'd love to see included (sorting options, batch renaming, etc.), but their customer service was top rate in explaining ways around or features in-the-works. Great software, great company.



Making It Look Great - 5
Training for Motion Graphic Artists
\$79
www.motionworks.com.au

This product may seem like a little bit of a stretch in

terms of a “tax saver.” Before you think I’m too far off my rocker, check with your CPA or tax consultant on write-offs for “continuing education.” In many cases, you are whacking the cost of educational items like this right off your total taxable income figure. (In other words, you are being taxed on less income.) Again, check with the experts before claiming anything.

“Making It Look Great” is on its fifth round of cutting edge training and tutorials from John Dickinson and company. This latest offering is hosted by After Effects guru Jerzy Drozda (a.k.a. Maltaannon), and covers everything from gyroscopes to mammoth screen effects and film grading. Awesome content that pays immediate dividends.

What I like about **MILG 5** is that not only do you get to learn how to create from another artist’s point of view, but you also get the assets to tweak and re-create to your heart’s content. There are 10 projects plus bonus tutorials and extras included in the \$79 price tag.

Again, if you are making taxable income by creating graphics, educational products like this can help you out at tax time. Consult your resident tax expert or tax software.



Sorenson Squeeze 5.0

Software: Mac/PC

\$499

www.sorensonmedia.com

As a freelance graphics guy, I work with people from all over the place. With the internet, it’s a breeze to send both low resolution approval copies and final renders to clients no matter where they live. The trick is to balance what the client’s needs vs. the appropriate resolution of the video output.

Enter **Sorenson Squeeze**, as in “squeeze-your-video-down-to-something-manageable-to-upload-somewhere.” With a multitude of presets into several different outputs (Quicktime, AVI, Real, H.264, AC-3 audio, etc.) you can quickly drop your final renders into Squeeze and output multiple versions at the same time. Very cool.

One feature we use quite a bit here is the “watch folder.” We designate one folder to render to out within After Effects, then launch Squeeze to convert all those files in the folder into various web-friendly outputs for our management or clients to approve. It can even automatically upload them to our ftp site. Very little hassle, freeing us for more time to create.

Again, if you are claiming income from productions that can use **Squeeze 5.0**, software expenses are a legitimate way to bring down your year-end tax liability. (Have I mentioned yet to talk to your tax advisor?) Still, the price of the software can be a bit prohibitive. \$499 is a chunk of cash. However, if you are spending several hours over

the course of a week trying to down-size your renders to the right file size and quality setting, then the time savings you get from the batch renders and automated uploads may pay for it quicker than you think.



Logo Design Works
www.logodesignworks.com

Small business owners wear a lot of different hats. On any particular day I'll not only create motion graphics, but I'll also knock out invoices, reconcile bank statements, review contracts, and a host of other stuff.

It's not necessarily by choice, it's just what needs to be done as a one-man band.

When you're blessed with consistent business, however, it makes sense to let other people focus on their specialties. The "assembly line" mentality lets the print people focus on print, motion people focus on motion, etc. Less time is taken on specific areas, resulting in more overall profit. Wearing too many hats (doing it all yourself) can water down productivity and the end results may not be as good as they could be.

One of the places I've found that fits well into the "assembly line" scenario is a place out of Cleveland called Logo Design Works. For prices starting at \$147 I can have access of up to 20 graphic artists knocking out design projects large and small. (Taking a look at the gallery on their site will give you an idea of the quality you're looking at.)

I've worked with a few of the on-line logo shops, and this is the one I'll be staying with. Best bang-for-the-buck, in my opinion, for the type of work that I need done. Again, keep a careful record of the work that you sub out. These tax deductions will help out quite a bit at the end of the year.

Even in difficult financial times, you can streamline your small business or freelance income by choosing the right software and training that will keep you a step ahead of the competition. Keep your business organized and flexible enough to adapt to whatever financial situations you may encounter. The products and services above have helped me out in my own business. Continue researching these markets to find the best match for you and your company.

Tim Johnson works for KUTV 2 News in Salt Lake City during the day, and builds a small freelance business on the side at night. Occasionally he needs to reintroduce himself to his wife and five daughters.