



3 Paths to Scaling Your Interior Design Business

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You've built a stable business. Your pipeline is predictable, your systems are in place, and you are profitable. But now you've hit a ceiling. You see the opportunity to take on more work, but you are maxed out on time.

Do you let go of the design? Do you hire? Do you just raise your rates?

According to Kate O'Hara, there isn't one right answer, but there are **three distinct paths** you can take when you reach this crossroads. Here is a breakdown of each path and how to set yourself up for success along each one:

Path 1: Stay Client-Facing and Outsource the Business Side

In this model, you remain the face of the brand and the lead on all design work, but you ruthlessly delegate the back-end operations.

Who is this right for?

- The designer who *loves* the creative process and client interaction and isn't ready to give that up.
- Solopreneurs or small teams who want to maximize revenue without managing a large team of creatives.

Top Tips for Success:

- Find your outsource opportunities. You likely have a bookkeeper, but are you still handling purchasing, tracking, fulfillment, and post-install customer service? Hire a procurement specialist or expeditor. Find the ways you can outsource things that take up your time so you can stay focused on design and grow the business.
- Dig into your gut reactions. If your first thought is "I can't give that up," examine why. It's often a fear that your processes aren't documented well enough to teach someone else. Document the process, then delegate it.



- Stay strong in your processes: When you have systems in place, outsourcing becomes much more seamless.

Path 2: Put Trust in Another Designer

This is the true scaling model. The Principal shifts into a CEO role, allowing Senior Designers to take projects from start to finish. The client views the *employee* as their primary authority, not the Principal.

Who is this right for?

- Designers ready to scale volume significantly.
- Principals who are willing to trade creative control for business growth.
- Those who enjoy mentoring and building a team culture.

Top Tips for Success:

- “We,” not “Me.” You must position the *firm* as the expert, not just yourself. Feature your designers on your website, social media, and in blog posts. Create unlisted pages on your website featuring specific designers' portfolios to send to prospective clients during the sales process.
- Start small: Hand over “low stakes” projects first—either smaller scopes, fast turnarounds, or “VIP” clients who trust the firm implicitly.
- Establish expectations: Give autonomy on *project* decisions, but keep tight control on *business* decisions (e.g., designers cannot open new vendor accounts or change contract terms without approval).
- Stay strong in communication. Implement weekly stand-up meetings to review every project’s status and profitability.

Path 3: Stay Small, Get Selective

You don’t always have to take on more work to get more profitable. If you want to stay solo, focus instead on getting selective and saying no to the wrong opportunities.

Who is this right for?

- Designers who are happy as a solo and want to stay that way.



The Strategy: Top Tips for Success:

- Start saying no. That often includes saying no to the clients who got you where you are today.
- Keep a waitlist of smaller, good-fit clients (the "sand"). If one of your massive luxury projects (the "boulders") gets delayed or falls through, you can fill the gap with the waitlist clients.
- Raise your rates. This model only works if the financial yield per project increases significantly to offset the lower volume.