

701—285.27(422) Advertising agencies, commercial artists, and designers.

285.27(1) Nontaxable services. Tax does not apply to charges by advertising agencies, commercial artists, or designers for services rendered that do not represent services that are a part of a sale of tangible personal property, or a labor or service cost in the production of tangible personal property. Examples of such nontaxable services are: writing original manuscripts and news releases; writing copy for use in newspapers, magazines, or other advertising, or to be broadcast on television or radio, compiling statistical and other information; placing or arranging for the placing of advertising in media, such as newspapers, magazines, or other publications; billboards and other facilities used in public transportation; and delivering or causing the delivery of brochures, pamphlets, cards, and similar items. Charges for such items as supervision, consultation, research, postage, express, transportation and travel expense, if involved in the rendering of such services, are likewise not taxable.

285.27(2) Agency fee or commission. When an amount billed as an agency “fee,” “service charge,” or “commission” represents a charge or part of the charge for any of the nontaxable services described under 18.27(1), the amount so billed is not taxable. Such charge by an advertising agency will be considered to be made for nontaxable services.

285.27(3) Items taxable. The tax applies to the entire amount charged to clients for items of tangible personal property such as drawings, paintings, designs, photographs, lettering, assemblies and printed matter. This includes the cost of typography and reproduction proofs when the latter is used as part of a paste-up, “mechanical” or assembly. Whether the items of property are used for reproduction or display purposes is immaterial.

285.27(4) Preliminary art. “Preliminary art” as used herein means roughs, visualizations, comprehensives and layouts prepared for acceptance by clients before a contract is entered into or approval is given for finished art. (“Finished art” as used herein means the final art used for actual reproduction by photo-mechanical or other processes.) Tax does not apply to separate charges for preliminary art, except where the preliminary art becomes physically incorporated into the finished art as for example, when the finished art is made by inking directly over a pencil sketch or drawing, or the approved layout is used as camera copy for reproduction.

The charge for preliminary art must be billed separately to the client, either on a separate billing or separately charged for on the billing for the finished art. It must be clearly identified on the billing as preliminary art, of one or more of the types mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Proof of ordering or producing the preliminary art prior to date of contract or approval for finished art shall be evidenced by purchase orders of the buyer, or by work orders or other records of the seller.

The following situations are examples of when the sale of “finished art” is taxable:

a. Finished art which is sold to customers to be used for advertising purposes in newspapers, magazines or the like. After the advertiser contracts with the ad agency for the development of an advertising message or theme, the agency devises ideas (preliminary art) and produces the finished art. The finished art is then delivered to the advertiser or to an agent of the advertiser such as a printer or publisher who is under contract with the advertiser to publish the ad.

b. Finished art which is sold to customers, or their agents (e.g., printers), for use in producing printed material. The charge for finished art is taxable even though the art work may later be returned to the ad agency by the purchaser or the printer or used by the customer or the customer’s agent to produce a nontaxable item. Since the finished art is not a part of the printed materials, the ad agency’s customer is consuming the material and not buying it for resale, or using it in an exempt manner.

c. Finished art which is used to produce other tangible personal property sold by the ad agency such as letterhead stationery and business cards. The charge for such art is taxable as part of the selling price for such stationery or business cards. This is true whether or not the agency separately itemizes the charge for such stationery or business cards.

285.27(5) Items purchased by agency, artist or designer. An advertising agency, artist, or designer is the consumer of tangible personal property used in the operation of its business, such as stationery, ink, paint, tools, drawing tables, T-squares, pens, pencils, and other office supplies. Tax applies to the sale of such property to the agency, artist, or designer. Tax also applies where the agency, artist or designer is the consumer of taxable services.

The agency, artist, or designer is the seller of, and may purchase for resale, any item resold before use, or that becomes physically an ingredient or component part of tangible personal property sold, as, for example, illustration board, paint, ink, rubber cement, flap paper, wrapping paper, photographs, photostats, or art purchased from other artists. Tax also applies where the agency, artist, or designer is the seller at retail of taxable services.

In the event that an agency, artist, or designer is both a consumer and a retailer of such items of tangible personal property as noted in this subsection, such agency, artist or designer should:

a. Purchase such items without tax liability if the majority of the items are sold at retail and remit the tax at the time of resale or at the time such items are consumed in the operation of the business.

b. Pay tax to suppliers at the time of purchase if the majority of the items will be consumed in the operation of the business and deduct the original cost of any such items subsequently sold at retail when reporting tax on their returns.

285.27(6) Construction. Nothing contained in this rule shall be construed to provide for an exemption from tax for services expressly taxable in rules 701—26.17(422) and 26.39(422).

285.27(7) Advertising agencies, commercial artists and designers as agent of client or as a nonagent.

a. In general. A true agent relationship depends upon the facts with respect to each transaction. An agent is one who represents another, called the principal, in dealings with third persons. Advertising agencies, commercial artists, and designers may act as agents on behalf of their clients in dealing with third persons or they may act on their own behalf. To the extent advertising agencies, artists and designers act as agents of their clients in acquiring tangible personal property, they are neither purchasers of the property with respect to the supplier nor sellers of the property with respect to their principals.

b. When advertising agencies, commercial artists, and designers act as agents of their clients in purchasing property for their clients, the tax applies to the gross receipts from the sale of such property to the advertising agencies, commercial artists, and designers. Unless such advertising agencies, commercial artists and designers act as true agents, they will be regarded as the retailers of tangible personal property furnished to their clients and the tax will apply to the total amount received for such property. Further, nothing in this rule should be construed to be in variance with the opinion of the Iowa Supreme Court in *Rowe vs. Iowa State Tax Commission*, 249 Iowa 1207, 91 N.W.2d 548 (1958).

c. To establish that a particular acquisition is made in the capacity of an agent for a client, advertising agencies, commercial artists, and designers (collectively herein referred to as agency) shall act as follows:

1. The agency must clearly disclose to the supplier the name of the client for whom the agency is acting as an agent.

2. The agency must obtain, prior to the acquisition, and retain written evidence of agent status with the client.

3. The price billed to the client, exclusive of any agency fee, must be the same as the amount paid to the supplier. The agency may make no use of the property for its own account, such as commingling the property of a client with another, and the reimbursement for the property should be separately invoiced or shown separately on the invoice to the client.

d. Some charges may represent reimbursement for tangible personal property acquired by the agency as agents for its clients and compensation for performing of agency services related thereto. When an advertising agency, commercial artist, or designer establishes that it has acquired tangible personal property as agents for its clients, tax does not apply to the charge made by the agency to its client for reimbursement charges by a supplier or to the charges made for the performance of the agency's services directly related to the acquisition of personal property.

e. Advertising agencies, commercial artists, and designers acting as agents shall not issue resale certificates to suppliers.

f. Advertising agencies, commercial artists, and designers act as retailers of all items of tangible personal property produced or fabricated by their own employees when they sell to their clients. Advertising agencies, commercial artists, and designers are not agents of their clients with respect to

the acquisition of materials incorporated into items of tangible personal property prepared by their employees and sold at retail to their clients.

285.27(8) Scope. The scope of this rule is not confined simply to advertising agencies, commercial artists and designers, but also applies to all other businesses whose activities would bring them within the scope of this rule (e.g., printers).

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code sections 422.43 and 423.2.

[Editorial change: IAC Supplement 11/2/22]