



A {design} brief overview

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When it comes to commercial design and art in the modern marketplace the brief has moved from a “nice-to-have” firmly into the realms of the “must-have”. A brief outlines exactly what the expectations and deliverables are to be, consolidating and purifying the verbal “clutter” that invariably builds up before the onset of the project. The majority of the pains caused by failed projects in our industry today started with a non-existing or poor brief, to quote an expression oft used by the account team; the parties not “singing from the same song sheet”. More than half of the task is *writing a good brief* and the following points form a rough guide that will set you on the road to a land of successful projects and happy clients

KEEP BRIEFS WRITTEN

When it comes to creating a brief, there really is nothing quite like putting it down on paper. Simply, this allows all parties involved in the creative project the ability to always refer to the agreed direction. It also assists the design team who are infamous for “forgetting” your very well thought out marketing strategy.

INCLUDE THE CREATIVE DIRECTOR

The Creative Director is a great mediator for turning marketing strategies and speak into a clear creative direction that can be interpreted by the design team. One must not forget that the typical creative does not use the same side of the brain as the client or the marketer. The Creative Director assists in getting these two parts working together.

A VISUALLY STIMULATING BRIEF

It can be rather difficult for a creative to understand what the end result should look like when using marketing terms such as “early-adopter” and the like. Rather use profiling that paints a picture. E.g. “This

person was the first to buy an original iPod and has chucked it away since the big marketing campaigns, because it’s just not cool anymore”

USE PLENTY OF VISUAL REFERENCE

Include brands, hyperlinks, colours, flavours – anything that cues a specific visual. It’s important to try and get under the client’s skin. Too many times we hear the words “But, I don’t even like purple!”

OUTLINE EXISTING CREATIVE RESOURCE

It’ll help the process if it’s known up front if there are any visual assets existing which can be used. For instance, a previous photo shoot. This helps in reducing creative overlap, and maximises on the client’s investment. It is also important at this juncture to outline any existing creative brand guidelines that may be in place that need to be respected.

LET THE BUDGET BE KNOWN

Do tell the creative team what the budget is. If it’s a sensitive issue, use hours as a

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currency. Include external allowances such as budgets for photo shoots, copywriting and fulfilment. It's no use the creative getting big ideas about using the latest New York fashion photographer on location in Maui, if the client barely has enough budget to use royalty-free stock.

TIMINGS AND DELIVERABLES

It goes without saying, yet it still can be a murky area. It is critical for timings to be outlined and also deliverables in terms of finished art and format, if the client has been precise about this up front. Even down to the number of colours and paper used – as this is all relative to the agreed budget and will help avoid the possible “creative tangent”. It will help to try and ascertain how the client would like to be presented too. I.e. Scamps, mock-ups or finished visuals.

BE HONEST ON THE CLIENT'S / PRODUCT SHORTFALLS

The brief is not a public advertisement. It is an internal strategy document. It should therefore not gloss over what may be the projects weak points. It's very important for the creative team to know this, as steps can be taken to not focus on these weaknesses visually

THE COMPETITION

List the business's competitors and align them to the clients. Rate them on business effectiveness vs. brand aesthetic. The client will be able to help with this process.

THE CLIENT'S REAL INTENTION

This has a large impact on the creative direction and is typically not communicated down the chain. Projects will have underlying intents that may not be clear merely by reading the copy. I.e. Is this to shift more units and make money, or to flex some brand muscle in the pretext of a corporate takeover. Two very different strategies that require different creative angles.

THE OVERALL MARKETING STRATEGY

Whilst this may seem like unimportant information to be passed on, it will give an idea of the creative bigger picture and will give the project credibility once it is aligned and supporting the overall campaign.

SCOPE CREEP

Whilst a brief should form the basis of a design direction, we still need to be flexible in terms of change of tactic and direction; this is sometimes unavoidable and is strategically merited in certain situations. If in doubt about the objectives, re-agree, re-write the brief and re...

SIGN OFF THE BRIEF

This is where it all comes down to a measurable creative contract. Once the brief has been written and encapsulates all the client's guidelines, feelings, opinions and input, a copy should be placed in front of the client for sign-off. This is a real test for the client's visual direction as it involves a real commitment and is almost contractually binding. On the upside, it makes for a very firm and clear direction for moving forward and creating an outstanding and focussed piece of work.

ALL HAIL THE BRIEF

All creative output should be judge against the agreed criteria set out in the brief. Do not take on-board feedback and comments from those who are not privy to the brief. Everyone has an opinion on design. It's whether or not it is a qualified opinion that counts.

BEING A GOOD DESIGNER

A good designer, other than obviously being gifted with heaps of talent, is a disciplined individual. They will relish in such clear guidelines. It is vitally important for the designer to have a printout of the brief in front of their noses all the time. Internal reviewing procedures against the brief are important to make sure that the concepts head in the right direction. They can, if appropriate, form a mood board which turns the words into a visual brief. They must check their creative against the brief's requirements at every stage. If the brief is adhered to, there is very little unexpected creative movement away from the core requirements, resulting in very happy people all round.