

Considerations for briefing a designer

Business context

Give a verbal snapshot of your organisation, who you are and what business you're in.

Describe the main goals and activities of your organisation, its market position, the position to which it aspires, and its overall 'character': are there specific brand attributes which should influence the design?

Competition

Explain where your organisation stands in relation to its competitors, and what the design is expected to achieve in terms of differentiation.

Bring awareness to existing communication material which you think reflects your organisation's practices and values.

Communications objectives

What messages do you want to communicate, and what kind of response are you looking for? Direct response? Purchase? Heightened brand awareness? Greater brand loyalty?

What emotional response would you like to achieve from the audience such as "excited," "proud," or "scared".

Target audience

With whom do you want to communicate? Summarise what you know about this group of people, and what part they play in the acquisition of products and services you have to offer. Are they buyers, opinion formers or authorisers?

Product features and benefits

What is unique about your product or service? What are the key benefits on offer, and why should your target audience be interested?

What should the designer stress visually, and should anything be played down?

Format and style

Specify the type of product you have in mind (eg direct mail campaign, customer magazine, e-marketing, brochure, branding, identity programme, simple invitation to an event). Are there any house style guidelines which the designer should observe?

Describe the qualities you think the product should have (eg serious, cool, colourful, assertive, witty, contemporary, innovative, established etc).

Design and production schedule

When do you need the finished product? Also specify any critical pre-production stages which could affect the schedule.

If you plan to show initial concepts to colleagues, for example, allow time for them to consider the options, and time for any reworking as a result of their input.

Budget

Tempting though it is, it is not usually helpful to start with the idea: 'I need to achieve this; how much will it cost me?' The variables which can affect the cost of a design project are too many and various to itemise in any meaningful way before the exercise has begun.

Instead, state your budget and ask what can be achieved within it. Remember that the budget must cover all stages of the project – concepts, development and implementation.

Pitfalls

Are there any particular commercial or cultural sensitivities of which the designer should be aware? Or is there a competitor's monopoly of a certain colour or typographic style?

Ownership

Will you want copyright of the design? Establish at the outset what rights you expect; the design agency may negotiate a one-off fee for unrestricted use of the work.

Further items to consider

Restrict the number of people involved in approving design work – to one or two people, ideally. Committee decisions introduce delay.

Try not to let personal taste affect your opinion of a design. Consider whether the design will reach your target audience and whether it will achieve the intended result.

Supply text in as complete a form as possible. 'Author's corrections' can be costly once the project is underway.

Try to stick to the essence of the brief, once agreed – mid-project changes often incur extra charges.

Communicate frequently with your design agency, to check that the project is proceeding to your satisfaction. This way any wrong directions can be headed off early.

Most importantly, keep the brief simple and, ideally, inspirational! Don't get too bogged down in detailed descriptions of the final form of the design. Leave room for the designer's input – that's what you're paying for.

