

Factsheet

How to write an agency brief (as part of a successful relationship)

Why is a good brief important?

If you are briefing an agency on a project, the quality of their response will largely be based on the detail and information you give them. The result of a better brief is that the right work is delivered faster.

A good brief creates a framework for a partnership, although it is only one component of engaging an external agency and in-depth discussions around any proposal or challenge are also very important.

For an agency to understand where you're aiming and what your business challenges are, you have to share the bigger picture. If some aspects of the project or business are sensitive then ask the agency to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement in advance. Be transparent about any insights you have already on the topic by sharing research or broader information about your business as well as the technical details of the task.

In addition, a good brief saves you time and effort further down the line, with an agency that understands the challenge, the environment and context for the project, and can therefore give you a more accurate proposal, quote or response – all leading to a smoother, successful delivery.

Put it in writing

A written brief is best. The process of writing the brief can help to clarify your own understanding and objectives, and to review the background information available.

Even if there has been a verbal conversation with the agency to talk about the project beforehand, writing the brief down provides clarity and avoids any misunderstanding.

If you are briefing more than one agency for a potential project, this also means you can more easily compare suggestions, ideas and quotes.



What's in a good brief?

1. What's the why?

- What are your objectives? Can you pinpoint why you need the project? What is the problem you're experiencing that you believe it will solve? Can you explain why it plays into your business strategy?
- What are your key messages? What's the single most important thing?
- What does success look like for the project? Outline why this is important for you.
- When does the project happen and for how long? It is helpful for the agency to know if this will be short-term project, or more of a long-term commitment.
- How will you evaluate the agency's response? Are there key performance indicators or criteria such as proven expertise on similar projects, quality and creativity of the response, or cost?

2. Audience

The more closely you can define the target audience you're trying to reach, and the response you require, the more accurate and effective your project will be.

- Who is the key audience you want to communicate with?
 - Where are they located? (all within the same country or global?)
 - Are there different languages involved?
 - Are there considerations such as unions or special interest groups?
- Are there other stakeholder audiences to consider?
- What are the benefits to your audience(s)? What's the 'what's in it for me?' factor to drive engagement?
- What could be their concerns?
- What do you want the audience(s) to think, feel or do as a result of the communication?

What's in a good brief?

3. Delivery

- What barriers or challenges (physical or otherwise) are there to getting the message across?
 - All in English or Multi-lingual?
 - All in the UK, or Europe, Global?
- Which channel(s) are going to be best to reach your audience(s)?
- What is the tone you are going for for your project – is it factual, lighthearted, or more of a storytelling approach?
- How does the project link to your strategic communications approach? Consider other related materials, communication strategies/programmes or channels.
- How is the effectiveness of the communication to be measured? Do you want the agency to recommend measurement tools as well?
- If you want the agency to produce physical assets such as print, can you give them quantities, locations, or the size and orientation required?

4. What do you want the agency to *actually do*?

- What are the fixed elements? Separate the 'must haves' from the 'nice to haves'.
- By letting the agency in on your long-term strategy, you give them the opportunity to consider the wider perspective, rather than just creating specific functionality. Are you happy for the agency to bring a fresh perspective and to suggest additional ideas and solutions, or is it more set than that?
- What do you want to see back from an agency? If it is a detailed quote and no visuals, then say so. Also, be clear if you want a response that is no more than two-sides of A4. Agencies are looking for a chance to shine, to convince you that they are the one to work with, so can spend time and effort in creative treatments.
- Ask for proof points to demonstrate expertise and skill. Ask for case studies or details of similar projects with outcomes, not just examples of outputs.
- How do you want them to share the response with you? Would you prefer the response to be shared via an email, or do you want them to present it to you and/or other colleagues?

What's in a good brief?

5. Budget

Reputable agencies are asking about your budget because then they can deliver back a realistic proposal or quote. There's no benefit to anyone of being wowed by a Ferrari-level proposal when you only have the budget for a Fiesta.

6. Background and supporting information

What other supporting or background information do you have that could add value to the brief?

Your business purpose, vision and values are useful documents, as are assets such as existing logos or other related programmes/initiatives. Are there tone of voice or brand guidelines available? What can you share about the audience(s) such as personas, or existing feedback?

Also consider if providing context for the wider business is useful – have you recently published financial reports or have there been headlines in the media? The more an agency understand your business, the better they can align to what you want to do.

7. Constraints

Are there any no-go areas? It might just be that you've tried something before and it really didn't work, or audience feedback or sentiment would be a barrier.

8. The timescales

Be realistic about timescales. If you have a project delivery deadline, say so up front. In responding to you, a rough guideline (and an agency will always be grateful for more time so they can deliver their best creative) is to allow at least five working days from the issuing of the brief to the expected proposal or quote, response depending on the complexity of the brief.

What's next?

You've received the agency/agencies responses, digested and evaluated. For the successful agency, think about the feedback you will give – what really resonated with you – what you loved or perhaps weren't as wowed by that needs further work on when you agree the scope of work? It is always helpful to discuss and agree how you want to engage initially, to agree how best to get the agency up to speed, and then further discuss how you want to engage over time.

If you asked a few agencies to submit ideas and costs, do share feedback. Even if it is disappointing news, to know how they compared and can improve is valuable insight for an agency. Also, although they may not be right for this project or initiative, they may work well for other activities in the future, and it is always useful to have good resource alternatives available in future.