



Preparing an effective creative brief

Great creative ideas rarely occur in a vacuum – they are more likely to be a response to a clearly defined problem. So whether you're dealing with an external agency or handling the job in-house, it pays to start with a comprehensive, detailed creative brief.

Take your time. Get it right. Cover all aspects of the project, and make the briefing information as complete as you can. This gives the creative team the best possible chance of producing work that gets results.

Who defines the brief?

The briefing team should certainly include whoever evaluates the brief, and whoever has the final say.

A comprehensive brief will need information about your product or service and target audience. Ideally, therefore, the team should also include people from marketing, sales and research.

TIP: Try and include the creative team in preparing the brief. They can be invaluable in making sure you cover all points, and produce a clear, focused document..

Measurable objectives?

The more specific the brief, the easier it is to assess the results of the creative work. Although it isn't always possible to set a measurable objective, this should be the goal.

Defining the Brief

The heart of a comprehensive creative brief should include:

- background information on your company and project
- project objectives
- competitor information
- description of the target audience
- main benefits of the product or service
- core message or propositions
- the response you want from the project.

1. Background information

- What is the overall aim of the project?
- What threats or opportunities does the business face?
- Why is the project being produced?
- What should it achieve?
- How does the project fit into the overall marketing programme?

Include any relevant research information – from press comments on the product or company to customer surveys and competitor analysis.

2. Objectives

Include the overall corporate, marketing and communications objectives as well as the project objectives and show how they interact.

Make the project objectives detailed and specific. For example:

- generate 3,000 prospects and convert 3 per cent of them
- ensure that the key decision-makers understand the product's business benefits
- raise awareness among 20 per cent of the target audience.

3. Competitor information

Give detailed information on your competitors and what they are doing:

- who provides a similar product or service?
- how does their offering compare?
- what are the key benefits of your product over theirs?
- how do customers perceive your competitors?



4. Target audience

Provide as full a description as possible. Describe why people buy, what factors they consider and how they view different products and suppliers. For a business audience, what types of company buy the product? Which business sectors are they in? Who are the main decision-makers? What are their business concerns?

5. Comprehensive product information

Describe your product or service in detail:

- what it is
- what it's used for
- how it operates
- the main benefits for the customer
- the advantages over competitor products

TIP: If possible, let the creative team use or experience your product or service in the same way a customer would. This will greatly enhance their understanding.

6. Core messages or propositions

Make sure the creative team is aware of any key messages that are important to the target audience. It is not the creative team's job to invent these messages. They have to communicate them as effectively as possible.

Set out the perceptions the target audience has now and those they should have after the project.

7. The planned response

What response do you want from your project? Should customers contact the company? Or send an order? Or simply absorb the information? Are you trying to reinforce your image, reassure existing customers or win new ones?

The Next Move

Getting approval

Circulate the brief to everyone involved in briefing and approving the project. Let them know that once it is approved, it cannot be changed without good reason.

When the brief has been signed off by everyone, the creative work can start.

Define the review process

Let the creative team know how their work will be reviewed and evaluated. This can take place at a number of levels:

- Review by the agency and client teams
- Evaluation in focus groups
- Pilot campaigns in test markets

What to Avoid

Don't make the brief too specific

If the brief is too specific, there's a chance you could be ruling out creative approaches that might achieve outstanding results.

The creative team needs information to focus their attention on the problem, not suggestions on how the problem should be solved.

Don't forget other creative work

Although the creative team should be allowed complete freedom, it's also important to make sure that what they do integrates with your company's other creative work.

For example, if advertising is the dominant medium, if a team is working on direct marketing they should relate their approach to the advertising theme.

TIP: Repetition of the same creative theme across different media reinforces the key messages and can improve overall awareness.

Don't concentrate too hard on creativity, and not enough on results

Creative work should be accountable.

The agency may have a brilliant, award-winning creative idea, but if it fails to produce the intended results it might be a waste of money.

So make sure the creative team is aware of the specific objectives of your campaign. It is not enough just to get attention.