



THE SECRETS TO  
**DESIGN  
MAGIC**

**GETTING THE BEST FROM YOUR DESIGN AGENCY**

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LIKE PULLING  
OUT OF

A RABBIT  
A HAT



All businesses need an edge. Often we believe our products and services are better than others when they rarely are. The truth is that to stand out from the crowd businesses need a little magic.

Design can add the glamour that turns something that's only functional into something that's beautiful.

The fact is that good design remains a constant for top-performing businesses. People often confuse design with style. Design is about more than 'surface' appeal—it's about the structure of communication and underlying messages. All businesses need to convey information and capture

and hold the attention of their customers over the din of their competitors.

The best results come from designers working closely with their clients in an individualised way, to produce something unique that solves a specific problem or fulfils a particular need. A business may need to upgrade a website, launch a new product or refresh a brand. This short guide is written to help you on your journey to buying design. Getting it wrong can be painful and expensive. Getting it right can be rewarding at many levels.



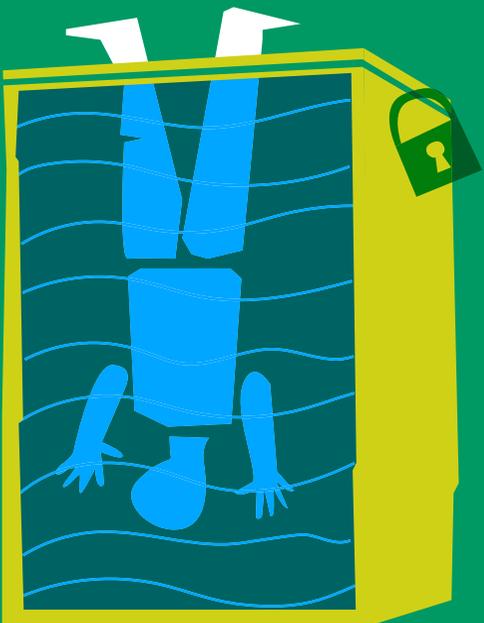
ACCURACY  
MATTERS

## SETTING CLEAR OBJECTIVES

It is important to establish precisely what the design needs to achieve—beyond just ensuring that you are presenting your brand, products or services appropriately. If you have a new product that needs to be branded, what do you want sales to be in the first year? Why will people buy it? What's the key message you need to be telling your target audience about it? Design agencies need to know

the numbers – 'last year I had 12 leads from my newsletters. This year I want to double that'. The clearer your objectives, the easier it is to create the right design and then to measure its effectiveness. Assessing the performance of a brand isn't easy, but as with websites, if you define your metrics it can be done.

BE REALISTIC



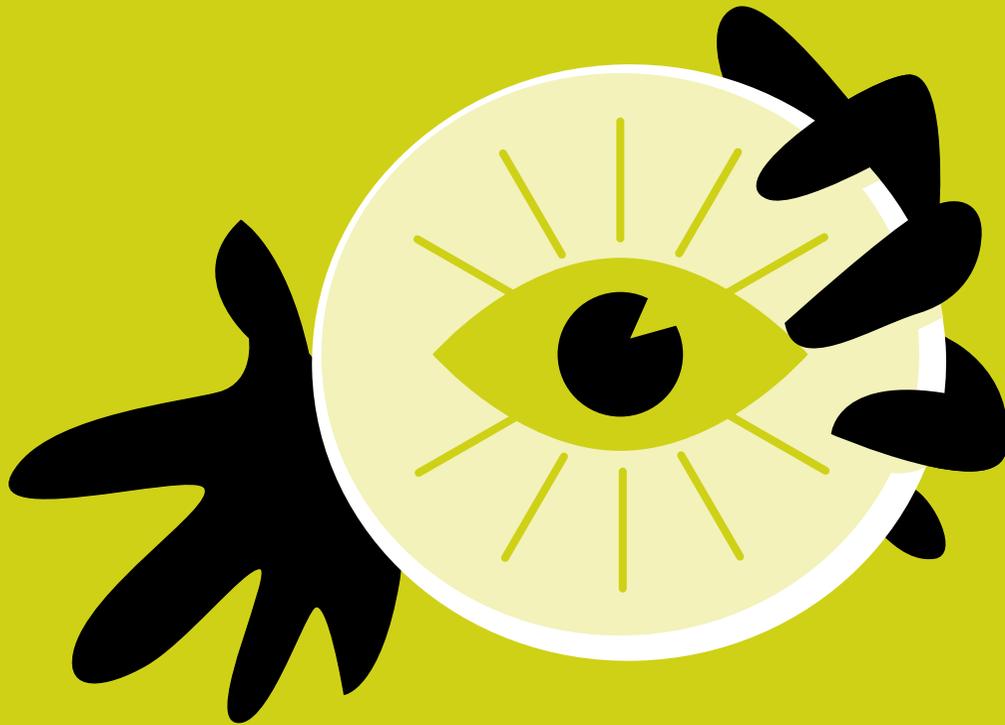
# HAVING SENSIBLE EXPECTATIONS

Some design work can provide instant payoff and some design can take longer. For example, designing a web page with a clear call to action can double your leads whereas refreshing a brand can take longer to deliver a return. Consistent, positive customer experiences over time will build brand equity. So it helps to be realistic about time frames.

Design takes time and time is money so it also helps to balance your expectations against your budget. The best projects tend to come out of good collaboration between the client and the design agency and this involves trust. If you are up-front

about the level of investment you are prepared to make then your design agency can advise you on what you can expect to achieve and where to concentrate your spend.

Often the easiest way to set a budget is to think of the end result you want to achieve: if you are considering a refresh of your brand, how many sales/new clients do you need in the first year to make a return on your investment? Say the refresh is going to last for 5 years. When does the design investment pay for itself? What's a sensible amount to invest in the process to achieve the right results?



KEEP AN  
**OPEN MIND**

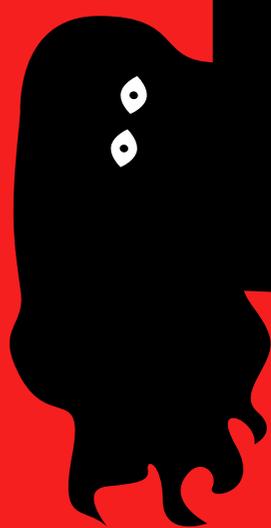
## TRUSTING YOUR AGENCY

If you are clear on your business issues, keep an open mind on how the design agency can provide a solution. Clients often tell us they need a new website because it looks out of date when the real issue is that their brand is out of date and that's what people are seeing on their website. A good agency will challenge you (when required) to ensure you get what your business needs—not just what you want. The agency should have a wealth of

experience in dealing with these issues and will be able to work out what you need to make a positive impact.

Remember that although design is “subjective”, this is the agency's area of expertise—it's what you pay your designer to know about. Listen to them and trust them.

NO NASTY  
SURPRISES



# UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS

Good solutions don't come easily and the more you, the client, understand about the process, the better the collaboration will be with the agency. That means you'll get a better result.

Be clear about the stages (and some of the jargon). If you don't understand anything, ask.

Design work broadly falls into 5 stages.

**THE BRIEF OR STRATEGY**—the better the brief, the better the outcomes. The agency should ask you questions relating to you, your target audience, the key message to convey and desired outcomes.

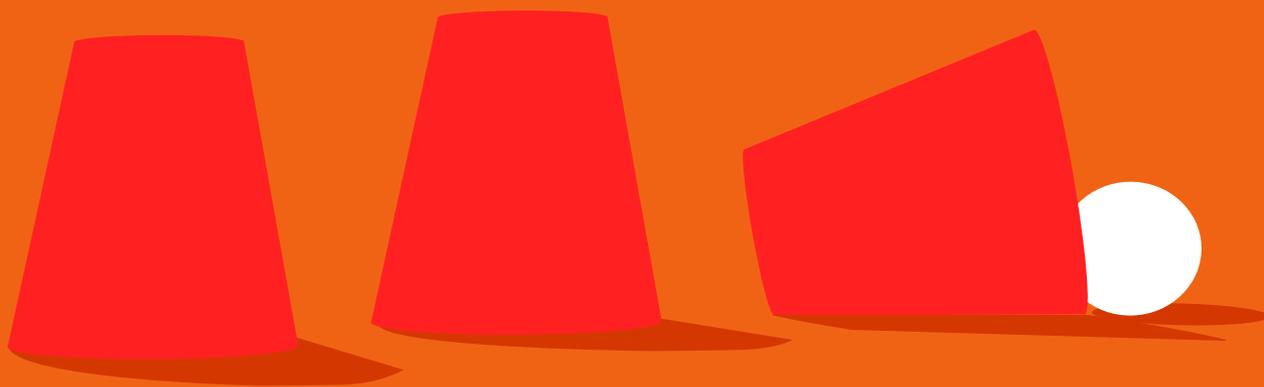
**THE INITIAL DESIGN CONCEPTS**—this is where the magic really happens. Although your deadlines might be tight, there needs to be enough time for research, looking at competitors and creative spark.

**THE PRESENTATION**—including feedback and refinement (as necessary). Demonstrating that the idea will meet the brief requires working this up to a level of realism. For you to see that it's going to work for you, it may take time.

**IMPLEMENTATION**—if working on a brand, rolling out the design across the various brand applications needs to be done so that you can see how each concept will come to life.

**PRINTING/PRODUCTION**—this speaks for itself. You need to agree with the designer whether they will manage suppliers on your behalf. It's usually better that they do as they understand the issues involved, but they will usually charge their time for this or add a mark-up. Make sure you agree this in advance.

PICK A  
WINNER



## FINDING THE RIGHT DESIGN AGENCY

When you invest in design services you need to be satisfied your design agency will be able to execute your project efficiently, cost-effectively and fulfil your goals. Here are some criteria which should help you in your selection:

**EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE**—if you are an insurance company looking for a refresh you don't need to find an agency that's worked with lots of insurance companies. You just need to see that they are used to working with professional service firms such as lawyers or accountants.

**STRATEGIC PROCESSES**—most design projects require a level of business understanding to ensure that the brief is written correctly and sets out

the objectives and desired outcomes. If you don't provide a written brief to the agency, make sure they have someone who can interview you and ask the right questions to get a meaningful result.

**PROJECT AND COST MANAGEMENT**—although design is a creative process which should not be stifled by paperwork, it is essential to get clear estimates for each stage. As the relationship grows this may be less necessary.

**STANDARDS OF PRACTICE AND INTEGRITY**—this one's easy—just get a few references and call them up. Find out from others what this agency is like to work with.

**NOTHING  
UP OUR  
SLEEVES**



## WHY BRAND COUNSEL?

**EXPERIENCE**—over the years we’ve worked with clients in many sectors and we’ve developed of breadth of knowledge and understanding of what businesses need and how they need to communicate with their customers. We’ve also developed ways of thinking that offer great solutions that can often be unexpected and innovative.

**CREATIVITY**—we are always being inspired and we make sure to take time to see what’s going on around us and our clients to keep our design fresh and relevant. Our work speaks for itself.

**FRESH ATTITUDE**—we never make assumptions. We will challenge your thinking when we feel the need. We don’t just agree with our clients because they are paying the bills.

**SOUND STRATEGY**—great outcomes come from a robust brief. We dig deep and set out the path which the design needs to take to meet your objectives.

**LONG TERM**—many of our clients have come back to us for rebrands or ‘refreshes’ 7-10 years after we helped them start out.

**PROVEN PROCESS**—we have been working with businesses for over twenty years and have developed processes that achieve consistently great outcomes.

**COST-EFFECTIVE**—we know how to work within budgets and to ensure your spend is concentrated on areas of maximum impact. We can develop innovative options, when necessary, to keep production costs down.

**WE BUILD WEBSITES**—often the most important brand application, we’ve found the only way to ensure your website showcases your brand in its full glory is to design and build it ourselves.

**FRIENDLY**—a lot of clients feel the need to take money off me on the golf course and I don’t mind!

The background is a solid yellow color with a slightly irregular, torn-paper-like edge. It is decorated with several white outline stars and yellow lightning bolts scattered around the text.

# SOME QUICK TRICKS

### **KNOW WHAT TYPE OF DESIGN BUYER**

**YOU ARE:** some see design tasks as a necessary evil, others as an opportunity to take a business to a higher level. Although processes remain broadly the same, projects can vary depending on the level of involvement clients want. If you think a higher degree of personal involvement would better suit your organisation then let us know and we can accommodate this.

**SET UP YOUR TEAM:** involve everyone who needs to be part of the process from the start (business advisors, marketing people etc.) and agree to their inputs from the beginning.

**DECISION-MAKING:** decide how you are going to decide and stick to it! Agree on your approvals processes and time-frames. Guard yourself from the opinions of those who are neither your target audience nor members of your branding team (i.e. those who don't understand the strategy). Everyone has an opinion but not all are relevant. Any feedback should be positive and meaningful.

**KEEP UP THE MOMENTUM:** projects that maintain their momentum and involve timely decision-making tend to be the most successful.

**TIME:** give yourself sufficient time to consider the work, the process and to make decisions. Also, be prepared to be available when needed and to provide content when requested.

**COMMUNICATION:** let us know what you're thinking and if you have any qualms or queries tell us as soon as possible. It helps us give you the best service if we know what you are thinking.

**STAYING WITHIN BUDGET:** if we know what we have to work with, then we can advise you how best to plan and prioritise.

**PRINT AND PRODUCTION:** we can help you ensure this is handled most cost-effectively whilst maintaining quality and timely delivery. You can either handle this yourselves or we can advise you and project-manage.

**CLIENT AMENDMENTS:** there are key milestones within projects beyond which amendments can be costly. Plan for these 'cut-off' points to ensure any changes you need are done before it gets too expensive.



**brand  
counsel**

Strategy | Brand | Web | Graphic

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**IS THIS  
YOUR CARD?**

If you think you would like to work with us, we'd love to hear from you and find out about your project. Call Richard Wheatley on **09 445 7444**

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