

How to brief a web designer

Overview

Get your web site project off to a flying start with a well thought out brief

Why preparing a brief matters:

- ➔ Knowing what you want from your web site will make it easier and quicker to make decisions about the content and presentation – you will get your web site online faster.
- ➔ You will find it easier to compare different design companies services and fees.
- ➔ The brief will form the starting point for your designer to draw up a clear project specification.
- ➔ You'll be in a good position to judge the success of the project.

What will be in the brief?

The essentials:

ideally your brief should provide the following information:

- ➔ A profile of your business
- ➔ Project objectives
- ➔ Web site content
- ➔ Target market
- ➔ Project scope
- ➔ Project constraints
- ➔ Point of contact

The key elements of a brief

A profile of your business:

even if you are a household name the designer still needs to hear your own view of your business. Include a succinct description of your company, products and services, its history, unique selling points and who it's main competitors are. Also include a few words on the company image, brand or personality.

Project objectives:

identify the main reason for having a web site as well as any secondary objectives. Here are some typical reasons:

- ➔ Marketing – improve brand awareness, expand on traditional marketing materials such as brochures, advertising and direct mailers.
- ➔ Selling – sell products, advice or services.
- ➔ Customer services – provide clients with information or support.
- ➔ Recruitment – advertise vacancies and attract suitable candidates.
- ➔ Public service – make information accessible to a local, national or international community.

Web site content:

- ➔ List the main elements that you want to see in the site, for example, company background, news and press releases, client list, project portfolio, product information (specify how many products both now and in the future)
- ➔ Contact details including location map, enquiry form, etc
- ➔ Identify any elements which already exist and in what form, and which will need to be created specifically for the site
- ➔ **Also think about how often you want to update the content and whether you want to be able to do this in-house.**

Target market:

briefly describe your traditional market and who the web site will be targeting (if it's not the same thing).

Scope:

specify what you are expecting the design company to do (or not do). For example, do you want them to provide you with:

- ➔ A domain name (e.g. www.mybusiness.co.uk), web site hosting (a host provides the online computer space for your web site) and e-mail to go with it.
- ➔ A new logo – and remember to specify if you want it suitable for using in other media as well
- ➔ Copy writing or proof reading
- ➔ Photography
- ➔ Illustrations
- ➔ Animation, video or sound
- ➔ Database development
- ➔ Search engine optimisation and registrations

Also describe the scale of the project – either estimate roughly how many pages you expect to be in the site or the number of individual products or services it will cover. The figures can be very general since a few pages more or less will rarely alter the cost or timing of the project.

Project constraints:

set deadlines for appointing a designer and for the site to go live. Time scales for the stages in between can be worked out later. A rough idea of the budget will make sure that you don't waste time with companies who will turn out to be too expensive.

Point of contact:

provide the name, phone number and e-mail address of one person that the designers can approach with any questions that they may have about the project. Ideally this person will be their point of contact throughout the work and will have the authority to make decisions and sign off each stage. Note that if the designers are not dealing directly with decision makers the process will tend to be slower.

How to use the brief

Use the brief in your first approach to web design companies:

extract the main points into a couple of paragraphs which you can use in your initial letter, phone call or e-mail. The companies' responses should enable you to draw up a short list of 2 or 3 consultants.

Use the brief to request a fee proposal:

invite each of your short listed companies to a meeting to discuss the full brief so that they can provide a detailed fee proposal. Don't expect costings on the spot – good designers will need to go away and put some thought into their proposal. This raises the question of whether you need to meet face to face. Personally, I prefer to meet the people I'm planning on doing business with. However, if you're on a tight budget, the designer may be able to save time (and money) by taking your brief by phone and e-mail. You wouldn't expect to pay up front for briefing meetings but whoever wins the job will certainly have calculated the cost of travel and meetings into their fee proposal.

Your chosen designer can use the brief to draw up a project specification:

this will explain how the design company is going to meet your brief. For a simple site the brief and the designer's fee proposal document may do the job. For more complex sites there will be additional information such as timings for different stages and technical specifications. Note that a major project may require a research phase before the final specification can be written.

In conclusion:

a well prepared brief saves time and makes sure that everyone knows what you expect from the project.

Checklist for website brief

1. Details (*Exact name of organisation and anything that needs including. Example: contact details, logos. etc*)
2. Overview: (*Background information, goals, measurable objectives*)
3. Target Audiences: (*Who are they, what should be avoided in talking to these audiences*)
4. Tone and Image: (*Funny and casual, or formal, what do target audiences believe before your organisation communicates with them, what tone and imagery will be most effective, what do you want them to think and feel? What response do you want?*)
5. Messages: Features, Benefits and Value (*Prioritise the top features and/or facts about your organisation, and its value to target audiences. Outline how it compares to similar organisations. State a single-minded word or phrase that would appropriately describe your organisation.*)
6. *What do you want/ need your website to do for you?*
7. Likes and Dislikes: (*Colour, tpestyles, particular images/ideas.*)
8. Communication Strategy (*What is the overall message you are trying to convey to your target audience? For example: cost-effective, secure, reliable, caring, efficient, etc.*)
9. Competitive Positioning (*How are you different from similar organisations? How are you perceived in the community and media now and how would you like this to alter?*)
10. Future Plans (*What issues are affecting your organisation now and in the future? How would you like your organisation to be seen in 2 years?*)
11. Budget and Schedule: (*Has a budget been approved? Are there any dates that are crucial for the finished website?*)
12. How many main sections will the website need and how many pages per section?
13. Who will supply the content for the website? (*The content will need to be written with an eye to clear and relevant text for each page and should contain the specific keywords that will ensure that your site is easily referenced by search engines. I will need content provided before commencing the build.*)
14. How would you like to be able to update your site? (*Regular updating ensures that people return to the site.*)
15. I would recommend that you should have a contact page with a form and not an email address that can directly link through to send an email. (*The reason for this is to avoid spam from people skimming off email addresses using automatic software.*)
16. The website should be built in a way that conforms to web accessibility standards. It will be able to be read by screen reading software used by visually disabled users. Disability rights legislation applies to websites as well as things like access to premises.

