



The Creative Brief: Why it's More Important than Ever

For years, social media chatter has centered around the use of a design brief when producing a creative marketing asset. Writing these briefs has always been a critical part of design project best practices — especially when it comes to reaching a target audience. No one's disputing that fact.

Recently, though, the discussions seem to focus on the fact that some design professionals are writing creative briefs less frequently. Why? They're simply struggling to find the time to get it done. At the same time that [marketing departments are becoming busier](#), briefs can feel increasingly time-consuming and inconvenient, maybe even bureaucratic.

Certainly there are circumstances where a brief may not be necessary — a very simple creative project or an add-on to an existing project that's already been well-vetted. And

when a designer and client have built up a deep trust and understanding of each other's expectations over time, it can be easier to work without a formal brief. But in the majority of cases, entering into a design project without a brief is like flying blind.



With many marketing departments producing large volumes of marketing assets and needing to be as agile as possible in how they deliver those assets, it's critical that the process to do so be as efficient as possible. And that starts with a well-written brief. Here is why a well-produced creative brief is a critical step in the marketing asset creation process:

1. **The obvious: you can't design something you don't really understand.** What problem is this project solving? What are the objectives and expectations? Does the client have a vision in mind and is it realistic? A design brief puts everyone on the same page. If a design project is unsuccessful, chances are good that the brief was insufficient or nonexistent. In addition, if you want to reach your target audience (and who doesn't?), it can only help to spend a few minutes at the very beginning of your project thinking about how to do that.
2. **A well-written creative brief will ultimately shorten the time it takes to complete a project.** It's a tool that facilitates clear and thorough communication at the beginning of the design process, heading off the inevitable revisions and course corrections that are a natural byproduct of poor planning. By trying to save time by cutting corners upfront, you may regret the time it takes to fix things after you've finished your project.
3. **Marketing teams today exist in an age of growing accountability.** Every bit of content produced today can be tracked through a code, followed via analytics, measured through an open rate and monitored via views and downloads. Like never before, marketing projects must demonstrate their contribution in

achieving business objectives. The design brief that clearly articulates those objectives serves as an anchor for the design team: do not stray from what is important.

4. **The approval process will be much shorter.** Ambiguous goals and unclear objectives coupled with vague statements like, "I'd like a really clean-looking design for this brochure," are a fact of life for design professionals. Working with management/clients during the briefing process forces clarity upstream, minimizing difficult confrontations during the [review and approval](#) cycle. And then, when a creative asset is produced with the ultimate business objective top of mind, defending design aesthetic choices becomes easier. Suggesting to the CEO that the font he likes better is not consistent with what appeals to the target persona brings the discussion right back around to what is important: designing an asset that is consistent with business objectives. The briefing process is as much about anticipating obstacles as it is about understanding and aligning objectives. Better to get clarification during the planning phase than when you're in the middle of [proofing](#).
5. **The end product will be of much greater quality.** This is a direct result of setting clear objectives, aligning with business objectives, and vetting expectations up front. If you're a project manager who is in charge of marketing campaigns, this is exactly what you're going for, but — let's be honest — this is what the entire creative team should want as well. Each person on the team has a vested interest in producing quality work for the sake of keeping their job. (Not to mention, everyone feels [more motivated](#) if they have a chance to be proud of their work.)

As David Trott, author of *Creative Mischief* says, "The brief was always supposed to be a springboard for great work. Not a straitjacket." So let the design brief act as your guiding instrument and understand that time spent on a well-designed brief is an investment paying handsome dividends: a greatly improved process, a higher quality of output, and, ultimately, a more trusting relationship with your team or client.

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