

# A Fresh Approach

To getting the best results from your creative agency

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Creative agencies can do wonderful things for your brand or project, helping you succeed in your role, reach your targets and grow your business or function. But if you haven't had much experience working with agencies, you might not always know how to get the most from them. Here are some top tips to successful collaboration and getting the best results for your budget.



*Fresh*  
COMMUNICATION

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## Understand the agency process

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Every agency has its own way of working, but there is a basic process that all agencies will follow.

# 1

### GETTING THE BRIEF RIGHT

Where you and your agency agree project, timing and costs.

# 2

### THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Where the agency takes your requirements and turns them into creative deliverables, normally in an order a bit like this:

- Copy and concept: Scripts, website content, PowerPoint slide content etc.
- Design: Turning copy and concept into a look and feel.
- Production: Turning an approved design into print, web build, video animation etc.
- Delivery of final material to client.

# 3

### DEBRIEF

- Budget reconciliation.
- Final invoicing.
- Regroup, look for the lessons, make sure everyone's happy.

# 01

## Getting the brief right

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### PRE-BRIEF: GET YOUR AGENCY INVOLVED EARLY

- Invite your agency to join early discussions – they will be able to give strategic input, comms advice, digital ideas, new creative angles and help you decide formats and deliverables.
- This is the perfect time to discuss budget as this will guide formats.
- Come to meetings armed with ideas, examples and inspiration and be open to suggestions from your agency – their suggestions might move your project on from good to great.
- Know your goals and make sure you communicate them. If you don't know what success should look like at the end of this project, your agency won't be able to deliver it.
- Think about measurable objectives and communicate them clearly: who are you talking to and what do you want them to do or think as a result of this communication?





# 01

## Getting the brief right

### AGREE THE BRIEF (1)

If you don't provide a written brief, ask your agency to create one for you, based on your verbal briefing (this is often called a reverse brief). This can be included as part of the statement of work or be a separate document, and should be signed off by both parties before work begins.

### THE BRIEF SHOULD INCLUDE:

- **Background:** Why are you doing this? Does the job align to a bigger strategy? The more you share, the better your creative will be.
- **Objectives:** What do you want to achieve?
- **Audience:** Who are you talking to and what is their attitude/motivation? What do you want these people to think and do as a result of this communication? What channels do they use/prefer?
- **Key messages:** As few and as pithy as possible, including a call to action.
- **Creative mandates:** Any brand guidelines, tone of voice or logos that must be used – and make sure you share these as they will influence the creative work from the start.
- **Deliverables:** Include formats here, e.g. if you need PowerPoint slides, what size? For video, what format and file size do you prefer? Consider how you will share the materials as this will impact file sizes.



# 01

## Getting the brief right

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### AGREE THE BRIEF (2)

- **Timing:** Include key milestones, sign-off stages and final deadlines. When discussing timing, consider any stakeholders that need to be involved, and what their availability is like. Once you have a timing plan, it's worth booking the time in with them in advance so you don't hold up the project.
- **Costs:** Most agencies include up to two rounds of client comments in their costs. If you have a big project team or difficult stakeholders, ask the agency to include more changes in their costing so that you don't go over budget.

### DURING THE BRIEFING PROCESS, YOU SHOULD ALSO DISCUSS:

- **Contacts & stakeholders:** Who is the main point of contact – agency and client – for every stage? Are there any other stakeholders that will need to be involved at any stage? If so, when is best to involve them?
- **Ways of working:** How to work around flexible hours, different time zones and any other considerations.
- **Roles and responsibilities:** Who's responsible for what and when? Do you need a Subject Matter Expert to approve the copy? Does the Function Lead need to approve the look and feel before the design is finalised?

# 01

## Getting the brief right

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### SIGN IT OFF

- Provide signed or written approval of the brief so your agency knows that they have permission to start working.
- Also make sure your agency has everything they need: if design can't start without brand guidelines or a logo, make sure your agency knows that you are on the case and when they can expect it. They have busy studios – if you miss your slot, you might miss your deadline.



# 02

## The creative process

(Where the magic happens)

The creative process should be fun. It's where goals and objectives are turned into vibrant posters and videos, interesting infographics, rich content... anything could happen! Here are some top tips to make sure you get the results you want on time and on budget.

### SIGN OFF EACH STAGE

Sign-off should be obtained by senior stakeholders at each key step, before progressing to the next step:

- Copy and concept
- Design look and feel
- Final design
- Production (video, SharePoint build, app development, print etc.)

If changes are made after sign off – e.g. if you change copy during the design process, or change design during the SharePoint build or video animation – it is likely to impact budget.



### CONSOLIDATE FEEDBACK

- Where you have more than one stakeholder giving feedback, the key contact should be responsible for consolidating all feedback into one document or checklist, and resolving any conflicting feedback before giving it back to the agency.

### MAKE YOUR FEEDBACK COUNT

- **Speak up:** If you're not happy, say so. If you are happy, share that too – your feedback will impact the creative direction, so make time to review work and share your thoughts.
- **Talk solutions, not specifics:** Avoid subjective feedback (e.g. "I don't like blue" – if you remove every colour every stakeholder doesn't like, you might end up with a black and white poster 😊) and work towards finding solutions.

### ASK YOUR AGENCY FOR SUPPORT

- If you have difficult stakeholders, ask your agency to support you in getting the job through key milestones: they will be happy to present creative work, attend meetings, or support you with creative rationales and any further info you need to keep the project on time and budget and achieve the best creative result.

# 03

## The debrief

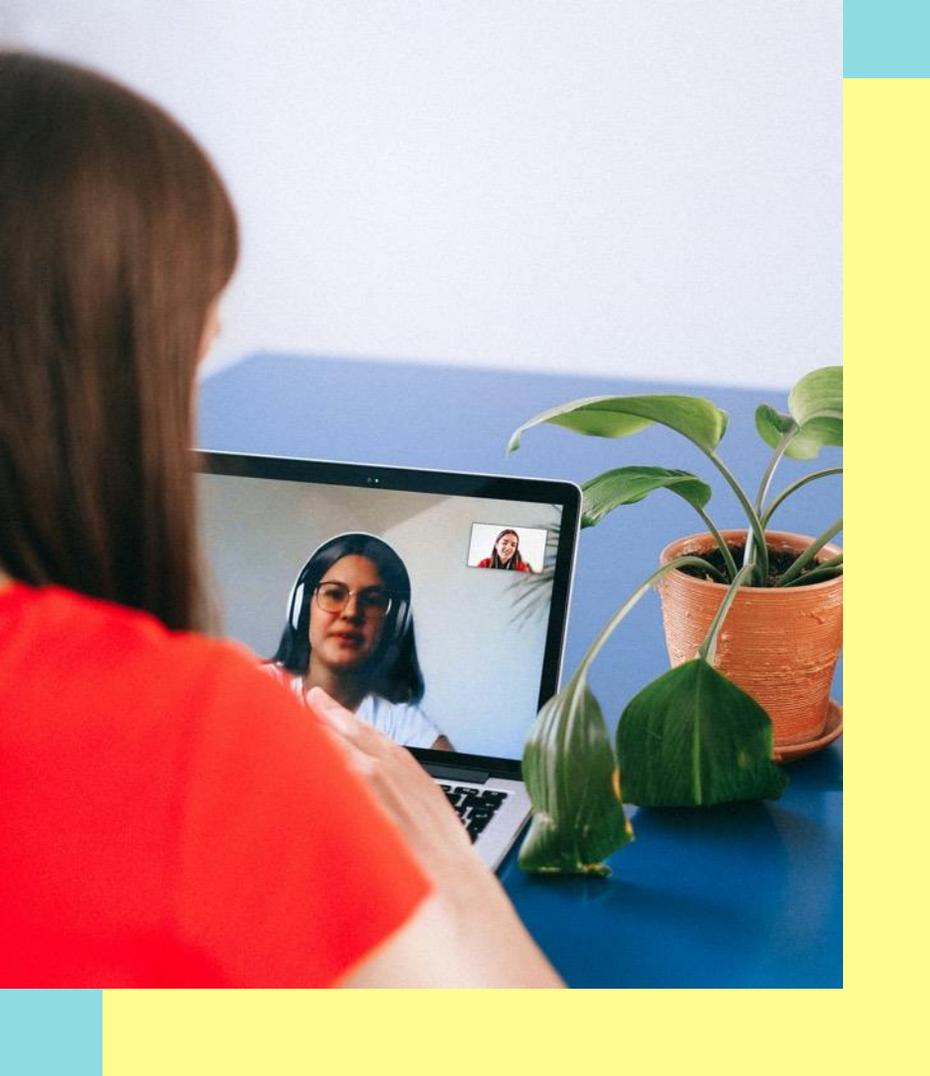
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Like all relationships, you get out what you put in to your relationship with your agency.

Regroup at the end of the project to discuss what went well and how it could be improved on from either side. Review the budget and see where you overspent or saved money so you can use that learning going forward.

This investment of time will make sure you get even better results next time you work together.





## Top tips

- 1. TURN UP:** If you schedule a meeting, turn up for it – or cancel with notice. Your agency may charge you for booked time whether you turn up or not.

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- 2. SPEAK UP:** Tight budgets, screaming deadlines, difficult stakeholders? If you are worried about anything, speak to your account handler. Agencies are there to help and support you throughout the process.

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- 3. ADD UP:** Your agency should provide regular financial reconciliations to make sure the project is on track. These are your early warning system for budget issues, so do keep an eye on them. If your agency doesn't offer them as standard, ask for them – nothing sours a relationship faster than an unexpected large bill.

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- 4. HAVE FUN:** Working with a creative agency should be enjoyable. You should feel a weight lift off your shoulders as you move a project off your to-do list and hand it over to your agency, trusting that they will surprise and delight you. Enjoy!

# Need more help?

If you need a Fresh Approach to your communications challenges, drop us a line. We're always happy to lend an ear or a hand.



You can also ask us for a copy of our bullet-proof Creative Brief Template. We never take a brief without it!

Email [getfresh@nowthatsfresh.com](mailto:getfresh@nowthatsfresh.com)

