

## Writing a brief

Writing a brief for a web design agency can be a difficult process, but it doesn't have to be. This section should help guide you through the process.

In the first part of your brief you need to explain why you want a website. Let's make this simple and break things down into three short questions. If you answer these clearly, your brief will have a strong foundation.

### What are your business objectives?

If you're not clear about what your business does, you won't be clear about what your website should do.

Keep it simple – example objectives might be, 'To sell frozen meals to the elderly', or 'To film important lectures for academic institutions'.

### What are your website objectives?

Your site objectives can be related to your business objectives directly ('I want to sell more frozen meals') or indirectly ('I want more academic institutions to sign up to my newsletter').

You may only have one objective for your website, but often you'll have several. Spend some time on these, think them through carefully, and express them in simple terms.

### What are your success criteria?

This is the most important question when writing your brief. Success criteria are 'real world' ways of measuring whether your website has met its objectives.

For example, 'My website will be a success if there has been a 30% increase in sales of frozen food by the end of the year', or 'By March next year I want a 300% increase in the number of people signed up to my newsletter'.

To develop success criteria, take your site objectives and make them **measurable**, decide on the **amount of change** you'd like to see, and give it a **deadline**. It's important to be specific like this. If you're not specific, your success criteria will be useless.

Be realistic though – there's no point in setting unrealistic dream-world success criteria that could never be met unless your website suddenly became as popular as Google.

Success criteria help you justify your investment, because they give you a way of measuring the success of your website. They also improve communication (between you and the design agency, and between you and other members of your company) by clarifying the purpose of the website, and ensuring that everyone knows what they're aiming towards.



You've written down your business objectives, your site objectives and your success criteria – it should now be very clear why you want a website, and what that website needs to do.

You're nearly ready to take your brief to a design agency, but before you do there are a couple of other things you need to decide.

### **Your budget.**

It's a big mistake to avoid talking about your budget, yet many of you will try to do this for as long as possible.

Think of it like this – if you're looking for a house and an estate agent asks you your budget, you tell him. If you don't, they'll have no idea what sort of properties to show you.

Websites aren't all that dissimilar to houses – their price can vary hugely, and they can have a wide range of different features.

Once you start talking about your budget, you might find it suspicious that all the proposals you get seem to come in just under your budget. Don't worry – remember that an estate agent will only show you houses that you can just about afford. The design agency isn't trying to rip you off – they're trying to give you the best they can for your money. A website really can cost however much you've got to spend.

### **Prioritise a wishlist.**

People write big wish lists of features they want their website to have. That's fine, but it's not too useful for the design agency, and could make things more expensive.

You need to decide:

- Which features are vitally important.
- Which features are important.
- Which features you'd like to have.

Prioritise your wish list in this way, then get your web design agency to give you multiple quotes, one for the main content (the vitally important features) and then separate pricings for the 'important' and 'like to have' features on your wish list. This way you can pick and choose.

If you've gone through all the stages detailed above, you've got a brief and you're ready to take it to some web design agencies. The next step is tricky – how do you select an agency?

Agencies should try to get your work by looking at your brief and providing solutions to the objectives and criteria you've set out.

Firstly, feel free to ask them questions – ask them what they understand about your business and site objectives, and ask them how they'll achieve your success criteria. It's up to them to convince you.



Secondly, take their track record into consideration:

- What experience do they have in developing the kind of website you're looking at?
- Have they got experience in your sector? If they're used to designing websites for companies that sell frozen foods online, they'll already understand a lot about your business objectives.
- Have they been willing to challenge and innovate? You want a company that can suggest things you'd never have thought of, a company who can challenge and develop your success criteria to come up with new solutions to your site objectives.

Finally, think about value for money. This comes last, because it shouldn't be your primary consideration. It certainly doesn't mean 'which agency is the cheapest'. You need to decide which agency provides the best service (most important) at the best price (slightly less important).

### **Relevant Guides:**

Choosing the right website for your business - <http://www.businessitguide.com/guides/view-guide/65/>

Getting someone to build your website - <http://www.businessitguide.com/guides/view-guide/66/>

