

DESIGN FACTSHEET: CHOOSING A DESIGNER

Selecting a designer should follow a four point process:

- Prepare a brief
- Draw up a shortlist of designers
- Assess proposals
- Agree terms

Prepare a brief

Before you can start your selection process you must prepare your outline brief. This should contain a clear description of the project's objectives and what you expect it to achieve for you. It should also outline the project's success criteria and how these will be measured. This outline will then give consultancies sufficient information to prepare a detailed proposal. This process will also clarify the project in your own mind.

Draw up a shortlist of designers

Look at a designer who specialises in the kind of design you are looking for – although multi-disciplined consultancies are now increasingly popular. Invite around three designers to look through their portfolio of previous work, paying particular attention to recent achievements. Remember that you are not simply looking for work that you like, but for work that has answered a specific brief given for the project and achieved business results.

Many designers are happy to meet face-to-face to discuss their credentials and this will allow you to see if you have complementary working styles. At the end of the day, you must get on with the designer you eventually choose. Remember that projects can take months or years sometimes and so getting on with a designer on a personal level is important from the outset.

Ask three companies to each submit a proposal based on your brief. This will then give you a chance to compare like with like.

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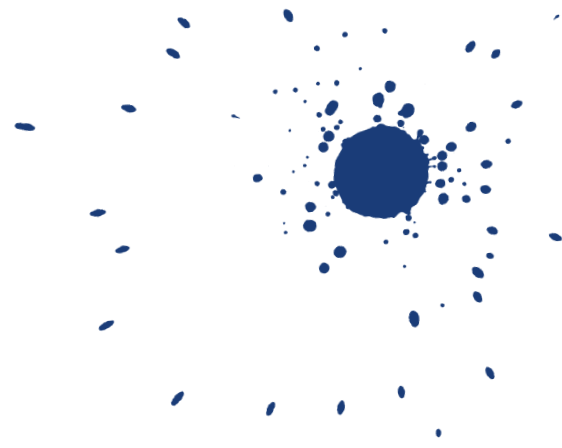
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Assess proposals

How will the consultancy tackle your brief? Don't expect visual solutions to your brief at this stage. Instead, go back to the designer's portfolio. This will tell you far more about the suitability of the designer's style. Design is a key business process and a designer should demonstrate their professionalism in the proposal. They should show interest in your company and be proud of their own. But most essentially, an acknowledgement of your project aims in their proposal shows that they have understood your brief and tried to meet your objectives.

Agree terms

Appoint your chosen design consultancy and put your agreements in writing, to make sure you are both aware of contractual requirements and obligations. Be explicit in outlining and agreeing costs from the outset of the project – to avoid misunderstandings that might jeopardise the project's completion.

A Business Link design adviser can be a great help to you throughout this process. They can determine your need for a consultancy, recommend appropriate companies, advise about costs and help oversee the project to a successful completion.

You can use design to improve your business through the products and services you offer, and you can double its effectiveness by planning for and using design strategically. By thinking the big design picture, rather than focussing on one single product or service, you can link together all of the parts of your company that benefit from design and create a powerful business response that is irresistible to your customers. And check out the resources available on web design and pitch reviewing on the Design Council web site.

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