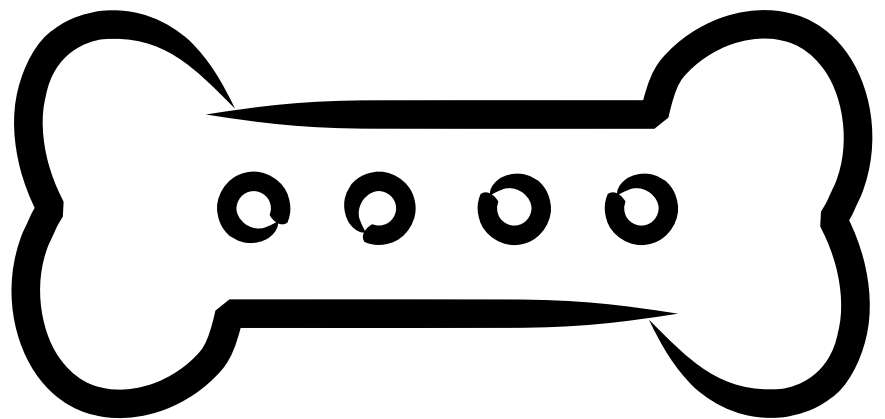


Getting the most from your agency

**Maximising the value of your marketing
spend through effective management of
the creative agency**



Setting the scene

Let's start at the very beginning

You decide where to start. Do you want to kick things off with nailing down your objectives which will determine the sort of team you want to build around you, or would you prefer to begin with deciding upon your ideal team that, with you, could help develop your objectives? If you're confident that your objectives are sound and don't need outside input, then you'll likely want to just get on and build the right team to meet those goals. On the other hand, you may want to be offered an alternative perspective on your stated objectives – or the methods of meeting those objectives. In either case, it's obvious that you'll need to know the capabilities and parameters of your chosen agency from the outset.

There are many kinds of agency – some remain within a narrow field of expertise (such as design or consultancy), while others offer a wider range of services, often thrown in at no additional cost. The first step in embarking on a briefing spree is the same as any marketing campaign: know who you're talking to.

If your selected agencies aren't interested in the strategic side to your next campaign, there'll be little point in wasting time compiling a comprehensive background – but if they are positioned to get involved at a deeper level, and you want that, then engagement at pre-briefing stage can be extremely helpful for all parties. Why not ask one or two agencies to help develop the pitch brief with you?



**it's important
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Who are these guys?

It may sound obvious, but asking the question 'so what exactly does your agency offer, and what have they done before?' is one that's often missed during early conversations. And, if it's missed at the start, chances are it won't ever get raised.

Whether or not you're interested in getting your selected agency involved in objective setting, it's important to get all role parameters set from the beginning. Ask: 'what do I want from the agency... strategic input? copywriting? design only? email marketing management? print quotes? events expertise?...'

It's entirely possible that your agency will be keen to lend a hand with objective setting or strategy at no additional cost – especially since getting involved from the beginning will help all parties enjoy a smoother partnership across the duration of the campaign. And this doesn't have to mean that you need to give the agency freedom to take control – rather, they could simply become a temporary extension of your marketing team.

Would I lie to you, baby?

How can you be sure that the agency can be trusted to perform as promised? If you've never worked with them before, it's not inappropriate to ask your agency to supply references or testimonials. Even if you're confident that you can trust the agency, it's a good idea to meet face-to-face and grab a coffee or lunch now and then.

Of course, everyone's busy – but occasional out of office contact really does help oil the wheels of a good working relationship. The next time you need to meet with your agency, feel free to arrange it at your favourite coffee shop (they may even treat you).

So, what's really going on?

It's very helpful for the agency to understand the behind-the-scenes processes that go into making a decision about branding and/or marketing plans. Your agency should realise that internal buy-in is as important as the messaging being appreciated by the market.

Put the agency in the picture – let them know who has influence, and the marketing philosophies they love and hate. Of course, as with most of their business with you, the agency should treat any such information with strict confidence.

Methods

Less is less

The more information you're able to share about the show, audience profiles, last years' campaign methods and results, and pretty much anything else that factors into your campaign decision making – the better the agency will be positioned to provide input.

Bite-sized briefing

Thinking of your marketing variables as singular entities can help break down their characteristics. Of course, you don't have to be limited to just one, but considering each characteristic one at a time will help identify precisely who you're targeting which will enable you to place weightings on each identified segment. For example, let's say you're marketing a trade show:

- Your show character, is it Angelina Jolie or Christopher Biggins?
- Your audience character, is it Gordon Brown or David Brent?
- How does each audience character prefer to be contacted: post? email? mobile phone? Does the medium depend more upon the particular message, or the particular audience?

**evolution
before
revolution
unless
absolutely
necessary**

This time last year, and the year before that

Regardless of whether or not you think the brand identity of your product should change from the last campaign, be sure that your agency has seen the stuff that was produced in the prior months/years (assuming at least one prior campaign exists). Do they know what worked or not, and why? Do they know the sorts of solutions to not come up with? The general rule of brand development is 'evolution before revolution unless absolutely necessary'. Of course, sometimes a revolution is required – but rarely.

Take it to the max

If the agency is required to explore beyond the parameters of the current branding, they'll need to know roughly how far things can be pushed. What are the essentials that must feature within the brand identity? What are the faux pas for the audience?

The curse of objectivity

Ok, so once upon a time you made the decision to buy the cheaper brand of tan-in-a-can and you subsequently called in sick for two weeks – and now, if anyone so much as mentions the word 'orange' you start twitching. We're genuinely sorry about your trauma, truly, but here's the real rub... perhaps your audience loves orange. Here's one methodology for helping decide whether or not a particular brand visual is appropriate:

Think of five people who have bought your product and who will be exposed to this particular visual identity or campaign. Then ask:

- 1.** Will they get it?
- 2.** Will they at least like it – even if only a little?
- 3.** How many of them (if any) will love it?

Free market research

Of course, if there's time, it's easy to arrange a focus group. You could even ask your agency to arrange one. Invite-only online focus groups are available at no cost, can be set up in minutes, and a simple email invitation to a 'one week window to express your opinion about these two campaign options' could produce enough information to proceed with confidence (or go back to the drawing board before it's too late).

A dozen ways to eat a pie

However we eat it, we're always forced into the stark reality that there's just one pie. When it's gone, it's gone. You may be entirely confident about how and where your marketing budget should be spent – but it can never hurt to throw the question to your agency: 'If you had a budget of £50k (or whatever) to meet our objectives, how would you spend it?'. Again, it's entirely likely that your agency will share their opinions for no additional fee. They may not come up with better ideas than you – but either way, more hands on deck means that you'll be getting more value from your agency.

Which came first, the chicken or the goose?

Who cares? But your agency should care about whether or not the brief includes a discussion about the chosen medium for the campaign. It's not uncommon for the medium to determine (or at least play a major role in the selection of) the visual identity. Perhaps an image of, say, a fish will look pretty strange on the cover of an A4 document – but it could look pretty eye-catching being sent as an image file to a mobile phone, or flapping its tail in the centre of an HTML email.

Picture this – then write it down

Do you rely on your own in-house expertise when it comes to writing good copy – or are you wanting to challenge your agency to come up with the supremo del' el facto (so long as it's conveyed in such a way that causes not the reader to attest to the notion that said writers are not kindred with the spirit of the brand)? It may well cost just the same – so why not challenge your agency to design a campaign, not merely the visuals? Alternatively, you could ask your agency to get involved in writing the collateral with you. This will force discussions about appropriate language and tone, and with more heads working on getting the message clear it's likely to result in a well-polished campaign. At the very least, you could simply ask the agency to have a good read of your copy, and provide any feedback – and if it's a free service, why not?

Show me the money!

How rude! You've only just met, and already your agency is asking 'how much you got?'. It may not be British, but to be upfront about the cash situation is not necessarily a bad thing. Knowing the budget and objectives can help your agency to provide valuable input into the decision making process. You may also want to ask the agency to supply a rate card before getting them in to pitch (of course, the agency could provide one beforehand anyway – but it's best to wait to be asked since to provide one without request could be considered a little 'off').

What do you get for a tenner in Wagamamas?

You may be tempted to begin your brief with 'we want to target groups 1,2,3,4, and 5,...' and expect the agency to return with a singular and appropriate visual identity that covers all bases. Unfortunately, there aren't many agencies who feel comfortable retorting with 'but we can't do that... can you help us prioritise?', and instead they really do try to please. The end result is often a blend of compromise, explanations, and pills. We know we can't go into a nice restaurant with a tenner and expect three-courses plus drinkies, but when it comes to nailing down the message for the audience, it's tempting to think we can fill a blunderbuss with self-guiding silver bullets, and all for a very special price.



But it's not all bad. Try this:

1. Identify all segments within your ideal target audience.
2. Give your 'target audience pool' a total weighting of ten.
3. Weight each segment according to your particular criteria (this will usually be how valuable they are to the show's bottom line, but there will probably be more complicated weighting factors such as a particular sector's connections and influence).
4. Let your agency know the hierarchy of importance.

Print quotes

Your agency will normally have their own preferred print suppliers, and as such they may well be able to offer preferential rates. Can't hurt to ask – and it certainly won't cost anything to get a price. Why not get an outsider's perspective on print quotes and quality?

At the pitch

Include key decision makers. Questions to the agency can be asked directly – it's often the case that the first pitch requires discussion and further development in the studio, and this can only take place after discussion and feedback. Also, try to provide post-pitch feedback verbally. If it's impractical to meet face-to-face, it's best to phone rather than email feedback. At this early stage, dialogue is key – both for avoiding misunderstanding, and ensuring further development.

Measurement

No news is...

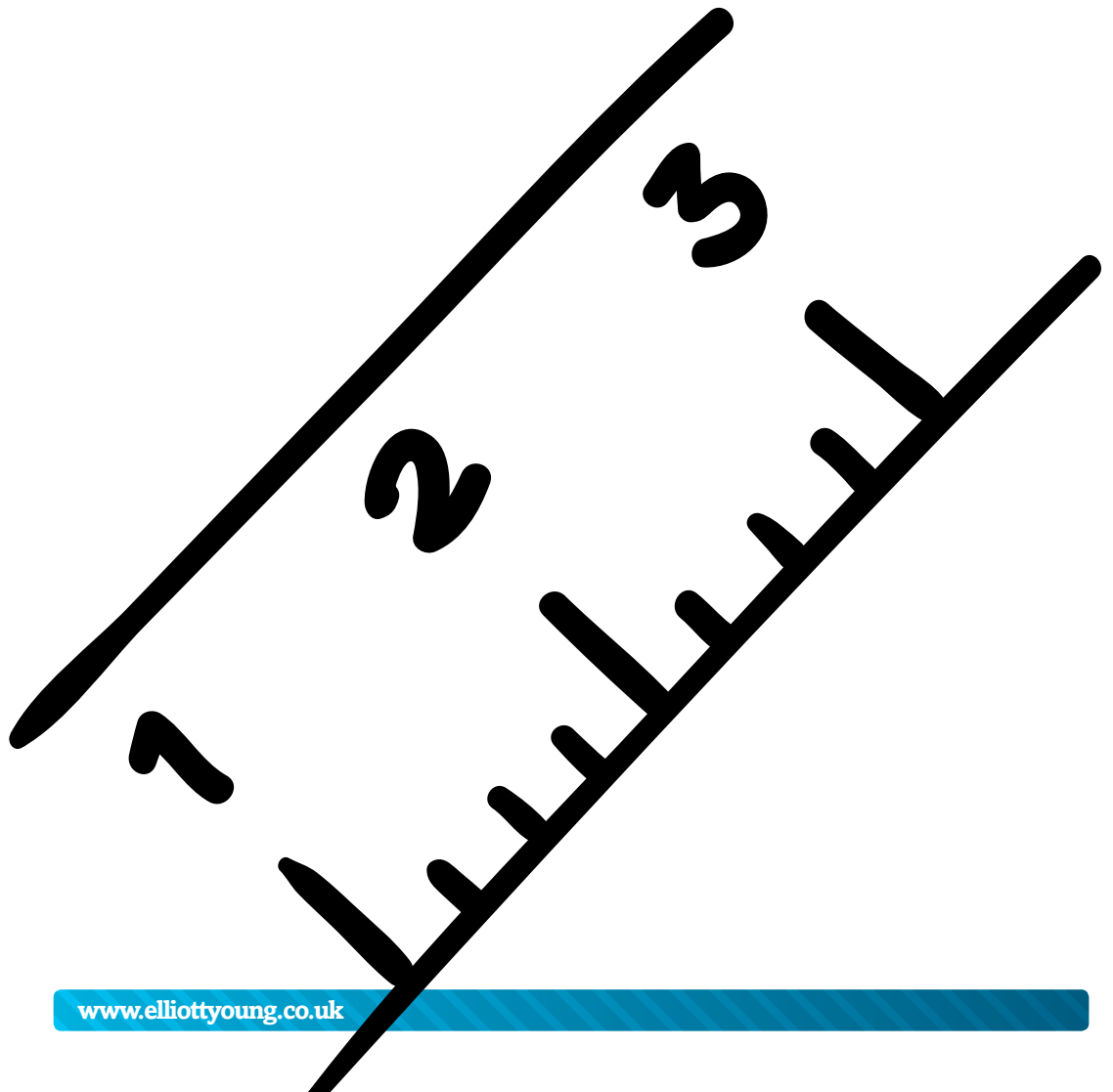
No news. Keep the agency informed about things that are and aren't working throughout the campaign (where possible). An after-show postmortem is always a good idea, even if it's brief. Continual communication with your agency is essential in avoiding the repeat of pitfalls, and the assurance of a good working relationship. Why not pick up the phone right now and give some feedback, or even invite the agency down for a group hug? (...sniff).

Should problems arise

Or perhaps that should be 'when problems arise'... talk with your agency. They may be entirely unaware that a problem even exists. The cost of nurturing a new relationship is always high – so before deciding to switch agencies, make sure that it's going to be worth it. It could be the case that the price of a cup of coffee nips the problem in the bud – and if not, at least you'll know for sure.

Celebrate the good things

It's just as important to bring out the flowers as it is to bring out the baseball bats. Apart from being extremely motivational (and let's face it, the agency is run by humans who, if they like you, will work hard for you), it's very helpful for the agency to know about the things that work. Such successes can be developed and formed into the foundations for future progress.



Key questions

Agency briefing questions

Most of these questions will require the use of a 'weighting of 10' methodology. That is, when answering a question by listing more than one variable, each variable should receive a specific weighting, with the overall group weighting totaling 10. This will help the agency to understand all of the relevant issues for each question, while also being able to prioritise the issues. For example:

What are the key product features?

- _ Best of its kind in the UK (5)
- _ Best quality in the industry (3)
- _ Contains more new 'special features' than at any time in its history (2)

What are the features?

What are the key benefits?

What are the key objectives of the campaign?

What are the core industries that are served by the product?

Where does the product fit within each industry (marketing, R&D, education, strategy, senior management...)?

From feedback received so far, how would you describe the various responses regarding the overall satisfaction of the product?

From feedback received so far, how would you describe the various responses regarding the branding of the product?

Are there any key issues that have been raised by your customers that will be addresses as part of the campaign? Please be as specific as possible.

What are the main competitors, and what do they offer/specialise in?

What are the industry mediums that your product competes within?

Describe the various characteristics of the product:
eg. older/established young/fun/cool professional/
regimented/organised flexible/friendly?

What would the product be if it were a:
car? restaurant? newspaper? movie or actor? book?
drink?

Describe the various characteristics of your key audiences?
eg. older/established young/fun/cool professional/
regimented/organised flexible/friendly?

**What would your audiences be if they were a
car? restaurant? newspaper? movie or actor?
book? drink?**

What are the core messages of the product?

**How does you audience prefer to be contacted
regarding new product information?**

_website
_phone
_f2f
_email
_post
_sms

In your opinion, should your product's branding look/feel the same regardless of the message? Why would this be/not be important to this particular product?

Describe some previous branding options that have been presented for your product. What were the good ones, what were the bad ones? Why were they good or bad for this particular product?

Are there any good marketing or branding ideas that you've seen elsewhere, the principles of which could be used/adapted for this product? What makes it/them appropriate for this particular product?

What's the total population of your audience?

Can you break your audience down into segments? How many segments? How many people in each segment?

What's the total budget to reach your audience?

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test your existing campaign,
explore the benefits, or just
meet elliottyoung.**

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