

## In brief

‘Art’, and ‘Design’ are two different things. Art is largely concerned with aesthetics, beauty, and self-expression of the artist. Design, on the other hand, is a problem-solving discipline that also incorporates many elements of ‘art’. Art could be said to be subjective. Whereas design could be said to be objective.

Given that design is a problem-solving discipline, then great design must begin with a comprehensive understanding of the business problem that needs to be solved through visual means. This is the purpose of a design brief.

A design brief is a written document that thoroughly explains the problem to be solved by designers working in various design disciplines. The design brief is focused on results of design, outcomes of design, and the business objectives of the design project. It should not deal with the aesthetics of design. That is the responsibility of the designer.

In nearly all cases, the outcomes of the design project will produce measurable data, such as an increased percentage share of market, an increase in sales of the product or service, increase in customer satisfaction, or increase in overall profitability. These measurements generally reflect the business needs of the enterprise.

A truly useful design brief should be developed by two people – one representing the group with the business need for design – and one person representing the design company that will execute the design work. Both individuals are equally accountable for the results of the design project.

An effective design brief answers a great many questions, such as:

- + Why are we doing this project?
- + Why are we doing it now?
- + What specific business outcomes, or results, do we expect from this design project?
- + Who are we designing for (this means a very precise and complete description of the target audience for the design project)?
- + Who are the key stakeholders (eg sales, marketing, law, distribution, procurement, manufacturing, etc) in this project?
- + What is the current and anticipated business environment for the results of this design project?
- + What, precisely, are each of the phases of this design project?
- + How much time must be devoted to each phase?
- + What will each phase cost?
- + What is the competitive environment like?
- + Who will approve the final design solution?
- + What criteria will be used for this approval?
- + How will the design solution be implemented?
- + How will the results be measured?

A design brief has many uses to all of the key stakeholders in the design project. The designer must have every bit of information possible in order to develop an effective solution.

For all stakeholders, including the designer, the design brief becomes a written agreement describing business objectives and the design strategy to meet those objectives. It is a road-map through the process, a project-tracking document, an outline for a presentation for approval of the design project, an implementation plan, a plan for measuring results of the design project, and an archival document that will be useful for similar projects in future.

The design brief should not dictate how a designer will actually execute the design. Rather, the design brief describes the problem and the desired business outcomes of the design work. It is up to the designer to create the most effective and creative design solution to solve the problem, using the most effective techniques employed by the particular design discipline.

Source: Design Council [www.designcouncil.org.uk](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk)  
Written by Peter L. Phillips

Peter Phillips has 30 years' experience of corporate design management and consultancy. He is the author of *Creating the Perfect Design Brief* and teaches the subject at the Design Management Institute.