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HOW TO BRIEF YOUR AGENCY

The killer web brief

The key to getting the website your business needs is providing your agency with the best possible brief. As an agency, we see a lot of web briefs - some of them good, some of them not so good - but very few people get this 100% right. In this pack you'll find a guide on how to create a killer web brief, and a template you can use to fill out and share with your chosen agency.

#1 Forget everything you *think* you want.

Agencies like us are often approached by clients who are starting with a very detailed idea of what they want their new website to do and how they want it to look. Sometimes they'll even have a site map prepared, or will have sketched out part of the design. If this is you, we encourage you to set all of that aside.

Why? Because no matter how talented you are, and no matter how well you know your business, you probably aren't a professional web designer and you probably aren't an expert in brand communication. Your agency is (or should be) all of these things.

It may seem counter-intuitive, but the more undefined and nebulous are your ideas about your finished website, the better your agency will be able to serve your needs.

This is because a client's idea of what they *want* can often get in the way of what they actually *need*.

A good agency will have a creative process that's designed to deliver the right website for you, based on a fundamental understanding of your business.

#2 Make sure you actually need a new website.

If you're experiencing a dip in your business, or need to meet some new goals, a new website might seem like the obvious solution. However, it's not always the best way to achieve what you want, and can be an expensive investment.

Before you approach an agency, ask yourself **why** a new website will solve your problems. There may be a better way to solve your problems that suits your business and your budget.

Problems that can be solved by a new website:

- You have rebranded, and your website no longer represents your company or your customers.
- You have expanded or changed, and your website needs more functionality or content.
- Your existing platform is no longer working for you, and you need to switch to something else.

Problems that may be better solved in other ways:

- You want to broaden your audience
- You want to make more sales
- You want better brand awareness
- You want fewer negative product reviews
- You want fewer returned products
- And so on...

If your problems look more like the second list, you might want to consider a different course of action. Maybe you need to improve your social media presence, maybe you need some optimised blog content, maybe you need a better product, maybe you need a better after-sales process. In reality, these solutions will serve you better than a new website, and be a much more effective way to spend your marketing budget.

If you're not sure what the answer is, the best thing you can do is go to your agency and just tell them your problems. Instead of saying, 'I need a new website and I want it to look like this,' say to your agency, 'I have these problems, and this is what I want to achieve - what do you recommend?'

A full service agency will be able to help you out with questions like these by tailoring their service to your needs.

#3 Help your agency understand your business, budgets and goals.

A good agency will care about all this stuff, because without this, it's impossible to design a really great website.

We like to get to know our clients really well, so that we can slot into their business like an extension of their marketing department.

By understanding these fundamental details and big-picture concepts, your agency will be able to produce a website that's tailored to you and your long-term goals.

#4 Help your agency understand your audience.

Incredibly, many businesses forget about their audience entirely when they're thinking about getting a new website. But ultimately, your website isn't about you at all, it's about your customers.

Give your agency detailed information about all the key users who will interact with your new site, including their background, their values, their needs, and their expectations.

Put together detailed use cases for your key users and order them by priority so that your agency knows which content on your website is the most important.

#5 Establish your success criteria.

Once the design and development process is underway, it's important to keep measuring the success of the project.

One issue that can cause a web project to become delayed or derailed is subjective feedback. The agency will present their design based on the brief, and the client will say something like, 'I don't *like* this.'

The important thing to remember is that this website doesn't exist for you to like it, it exists to serve your customers, represent your business, and help you meet your goals.

That's why it's so vital to establish a good foundation before the design process begins, so that you, your agency and your stakeholders can measure the success of your new website based on important, objective criteria.

#6 Don't copy your competition.

It's tempting to want to copy other websites out there, or to go to your agency with a list of websites you want yours to be like. But again, this approach is backwards. Even if your agency copies your competitor's website down to the smallest detail and slaps your branding on it, that website may well not do any of the things you really need it to do, and you've wasted your time and money.

Also, do you really want to look like everyone else in your industry? If you want to make a big impact, it's always better to stand out. Look at what your competitors are doing, and then do something **different**.

If you come across a website (within or outside your industry) that has some functionality on it that you enjoy, by all means bring that to your agency as a suggestion. They can include it, if it serves your needs well, meets your user's requirements, and can be done within budget. But equally, it might not be suitable at all, or might be too expensive to implement. Your agency will be able to advise you on this.

#7 Get your whole team involved right from the start.

Another potential major roadblock for a new website project is important players entering the game at a late stage. If there are key decision makers in your business who are heavily invested in your new website, get them involved in talks with your agency very early on.

Otherwise, you and your marketing team can go on a huge, involved journey with your agency - you may even get the website to a beta stage - only to find out that someone had very different ideas about what this website should be trying to achieve.

Hiccups like this can be hugely costly, and can risk destroying your vision.

If all your key decision makers are involved in the early stages of this process - by which we mean **now** - you can take them on the same journey, and you will all (hopefully) end up in the same place with a website that works for everyone.

THANKS FOR READING

