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## 12 Basic Ingredients for Creating a DESIGN BRIEF

On certain websites, we get a list of basic steps in writing the design brief. It depends on your project requirement and your type of work. However, if you believe that “Design is a problem-solving tool” and you would like to contribute strategically to influence business outcomes, then you need a detailed in-depth design brief.

Design Brief is not definition of a problem but beginning of an exploration.

*“We need to design a pen for Left-Handers”* -If this is going to be the brief, then the client is not going to utilize the designer’s expertise. The client’s marketing department could be wrong in coming out with ideas like this.

*“I need a cooking oil container, which appears similar to a Temple Tower”*— another brief. Thanks for the invitation.

A Business should hire a designer to find a solution for the problem and not to execute his solution.

### CLIENT -WHO?

The first step in any business engagement is to call your customer a “PARTNER” than “Client”. If you call them a client, it means you are providing them with a service and implies they are in charge.

The design is not a Service. It is a problem-solving consultancy and an equal partner.

Think of calling them as “Partners” with whom we can share responsibilities, equally accountable for the projects. When you work as partners, mutual respect increases and great designs happen.

### WRITING A DESIGN BRIEF

Who will write the brief? A Designer? Remember — Partner — Shared Responsibility — Two heads are always better than one. Design Brief should be prepared by a team of 2 people, one from the design team and the other from the client’s side....oops...sorry... from your Partner’s side.

#### 1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

This section contains the scope of the work, objectives, background,

business needs, expected outcomes, ownership of the project, stakeholders' details.

**Objectives**— It's the working title of a project at the beginning stage of the project. After the research phase, the project title may undergo a change. Example for objectives -A general brief, a designer got from his partner— *Can you design a container for 5litre cooking oil?*. The objective for this brief -To design packaging for 5l cooking oil.

**Background**— Add a bit of detail regarding the project and the company.

**Business Outcomes of the project**— Ask questions to understand the outcomes of the business. Example -In the case of designing packaging for oil, ask Why do you need a new shape for the container? Why is this the best time to change the shape? Why there is an urgency? and some more relevant questions.

Business outcomes can be

- To stand out from the marketing clutter
- To launch during the festival and grab the attention of customers
- To hold a position in a consumer's mind
- To increase market share (How to increase the share)

If the business outcome is specified to increase the market share— How are you going to do? Just styling alone will not work. You may need to come out with new value propositions based on the research insights and discussions with your marketing team. Those value propositions need to be reflected in the design.

Design can contribute to meeting those business objectives if it is made very clear.

## **2. CATEGORY**

Category refers to the specific industry in which the product or service is involved.

**SouthWest Airline's** customers were people who had been traveling by buses, cars and never or rarely travelled in flights. If we had chosen Airline passengers as the category for Southwest, our designs would not have connected the required target segment.

**Starbucks**— Can you define the categories? It's not a just coffee house anymore— Place for people to hang-out — Home away from Home — An office away from an office. It's fighting with products/services from multiple categories.

**McDonald's**— Which category McDonald's in? Fast Food? It is involved in the “Entertaining” category. Its original concept was to have a place for families to have fun. Happy meals — Play parks — Games — Puzzles, Small Toys — Clown — Slogan. If somebody designed a product/service based on the “fast food” category, McDonald's would not have survived until this time or our associative memories would be different.

### **3. TRENDS**

If you would like to be a leader, you need to IGNORE the trends.

Great Brands Ignore the Trends

Again, it depends on your field. Do you think Apple collects all product images in the Consumer Electronics field and then generates Ideas? I understand — Apple can afford to create a new trend. But Apple too has started as a small company. Anyway, it is up to the Design Brief team to decide on Trends to be followed. The best way is to anticipate trends.

### **4. TARGET AUDIENCE**

“Men, 18 to 25”, “Household women of 30 to 40 years”, “Executives”, “Everyone” — Let's close the browser and go for a walk!

Target Audiences or customers are the heart of any business. Generally, there are usually multiple audiences for a product/service. It's important to note the cultural, regional, gender, emotional, behavioral, attitudinal differences of each segment. Each segment may have different needs in various situations or circumstances.

One of the examples from “The Innovator's Solution”.

*A Quick-service restaurant wanted to improve its milkshake sales and profit. The chain segmented its customers by characteristics of existing milkshake customers. Since sales were not picking up, they did user ethnographic research. The most surprising insight was half of all the milkshakes were bought in the early morning. Most of the time, the*

*milkshake was the only item these customers purchased, and it was rarely consumed in the restaurant.*

*Early morning customers had a long and boring ride to work. They needed something to keep the commute interesting and avoid being hungry after a couple of hours.*

*In the evening, when the same customers come with their children, they buy a milkshake for different reasons. It is like a moment to connect with their children by satisfying their needs.*

As a user, I may buy a product in Chennai for a different reason, and the same product in Delhi for another reason.

User's needs, desires may change based on the circumstances. So, the target audience section should have certain scenarios specifying the user's needs and desires.

## **5. BUSINESS ALLIANCES**

If your client is a cooking oil manufacturer, he may have an alliance with a scientist-consultant, who would be responsible for the chemical formula of oil, mixture ratio, quality levels. The client may be filling oil in containers at an outsourced facility. As a designer, we have to understand the network of Client vendors and the partners that make the client's business model work. We could make a good design solution when we understand how partnerships with their external vendors can be influenced.

## **6. KEY ACTIVITIES**

The most important activity a company/client does inside his office/premises which contribute to the product/service's usability to consumers. It's the core competitive advantage. For Amazon, a customized logistics system is a competitive advantage that ensures quality deliveries on time to the customers. For Walmart, the location of the store, the computerized supply-chain management system, vendor relationship programs are the core activities that ensure 'everyday lower price' for its customers. The activities may be related to production, marketing, servicing etc... Once we understand those key activities, we can check whether our new proposed solutions affect those activities, modify any of the activities, or eliminate some of the activities.

## **7. RESOURCES**

Resources could be assets, manpower or any other resource which helps a company to create and offer a value proposition. Though some of the activities are outsourced, many were done in-house. Resources involved in implementing those critical activities need to be identified.

For example— Imagine an Oil Can filling station where a conveyor fills 5 containers in one sitting. You have designed a container wider than existing containers, and filling machine could fill only 4 containers instead of 5 containers at a time. Cumulative production loss would be high in this case. Good knowledge of existing resources, corresponding activities will go a long way in cutting down design cycles and provide an optimized design.

Can your new design eliminate some of the resources, or require any new resources? *Can it be possible to modify any of your existing machines to accommodate the new labeling requirements?*

You may need to divide this further into departments or any other suitable divisions.

## **8. CHANNELS**

Understand how a company reaches the customer, how they communicate to them, how they deliver the product/service to the customer? It includes Distribution channels as well as Communication channels. If you are proposing Call-Centre support, can it be integrated with an existing system or you need to hire extra resources? If the container designed is wider than the earlier design, it would affect the Bulk Packaging dimensions. Can the existing channel handle it or what would be cost, time implications in the case of utilizing an external source? Are the channels capable of providing the desired customer experience? Can the channels communicate what you as a designer expect to communicate?

## **9. COST STRUCTURE**

A product's cost covers every employee's, every asset's, every process's cost. Understand the entire product's cost structure. In the case of oil packaging -If a designer decides to add additional value proposition -the manufacturer has to pay extra to the chemical consultant for feasibility

and formula preparation, pay for experimentation and testing, pay for preparation of formula mixture, testing and certification, taking the mixture liquid to filling company, training the employees on how to mix in production, modifying production parameters, and the list goes on. It's essential to understand the detailed cost structure to provide solutions that would help in building a sustainable business.

## **10. REVENUES**

How a company generates cash from each customer? Is it a recurring cost? Is there any loyalty from the customer? The understanding of the revenue stream will help a designer to explore several concept possibilities. If a product cost increases due to design, the designer proposes a way to increase the revenue to offset the incurred cost, using the client's communication & distribution channels, the client will be happy to accept the design solution.

## **11. BRANDING**

Do they have details of the perception of their brand in the customer's eyes? If it's there, then we need to reflect the same in our solutions. Understand their Brand Culture, Brand Emotions, Brand Personality, and Brand Values. Understand whether the product or service is a Stand-Alone product or Brand-Extension.

## **12. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Is the brand conscious of the environment? Is the company trying to sell long-lasting products? Is the company helps in recycling of products, when no longer needed? Do they have any social programs running? Are they part of any social or cultural movement?

Driving social change is one of the significant marks of great brands. Instead of engaging in attention-grabbing donation activities, brands design and run their businesses to make a sustainable impact on society. Starbucks ensures ethical farming practices, farmers' well-being, and post-consumption wastage. any new proposal at Starbucks has to accommodate whatever the environmental practices are in place. It is creating "Shared Value" along with their customers, employees, alliances. It is a more integrated approach. *Understand and design based on the level of Social Responsibility the company is interested.*

Note: The brief will have further details of timelines, budget, phases of work.

## CONCLUSION

A well-written design brief is a road map, guiding to the path of success, help you to define steps, outcomes and act as a good project tracking tool. It saves time and shortens the design cycle. It provides a shared understanding among all stakeholders. An extensive design brief enhances creativity. A detailed design brief will help a designer to study the business in detail, proactively contribute and create an impact on the business. The design is nothing but working with people, for the people, and by the people.

AVAILABLE ON AMAZON -

[21 KEYS to SUCCESS in BUSINESS -A Guide for Every ASPIRING ENTREPRENEUR by Shah Mohammed M.](#)

*References: Design Brief by Peter L. Phillips*

By [Shah Mohammed](#) on [March 15, 2017](#).

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