

The Professional Brief

Introduction

As a student, you are used to being given a series of briefs that are delivered by the staff who usually expand on the written information with a verbal description of their requirements. In industry and especially in Freelance practice you will find that eliciting the brief from your client is an art form in itself! In consequence it is important to not only be aware of this but to prepare some form of action plan to enable you to get the maximum information from your client in as little time as possible.

It is important that you are satisfying the person who is ultimately paying the bills hence this first stage, the briefing, must be handled well.

The Briefing

When you undertake commissioned work you are usually fulfilling two functions not one. You have to address the needs of the client's customers as well as his own requirements. He or she might be a specialist as in the case of an Art Director or Artist's Agent and thus will be able to discuss details of a technical nature using appropriate phrases or terms. All too often this is not the case so it is important that you are able to lead the client, explaining technicalities as they arise and trying to communicate, not simply impress (this often has quite the opposite effect).

Let's look at some preparatory work for this all-important meeting;

What you should take -

- i) Samples of work
- ii) Notepad and possibly audio recorder
- iii) Checklist of questions

Sample check-list of questions

What are the aims of the design?

To whom is it aimed?

Print / web or both?

Any colour restrictions?

Any size restrictions?

Are there a proposed number of pages?

Illustrations or photography need commissioning?

What reference material is available?

How much copy is needed?

Is it available / supplied?

When are these resources to be made available?

When are the deadlines... interim deadlines?

Is there a set budget?

Or are estimates / quotations required?

When are these needed?

How will payment be made? Lump sum, weekly, production stages.. other?

Are there any copyright issues?

Printing or ISP arrangements required?

Can they give a signed response to you, letter of agreement - possibly written up by you?

Please bear in mind the list of contacts that you've previously been given, for example, the designer could well influence the decision as to which illustrator should be employed. If you can put yourself in his or her shoes and imagine the various considerations that they have to make then you are in a far better position to make your case. These checklists can be a very important tool so your task is to create your own. Maybe present this professionally as a reminder of events? It can then be signed by both parties at conclusion of meeting or used as a basis for a letter / contract?

Your Task

Create your own version of this checklist, in your house style, for your diary. Consider using copies of it at a meeting etc.

Ex Students comment

I find myself teaching my clients half the time... explaining how my job works
(Darryl Edgecombe - Graphic Realm)

My checklist that I did at college was pretty thin... can I catch up with you to do a better version... think I need it!
(Leanne Ellis - Children's book illustrator)

We got together (a group of graphics and illustrators) like we did in year 2... it was amazing what we all thought of for that checklist
(Tom Buttle - Big Fish - Little Fish, Business Plan Group)