



What constitutes a great creative brief? Survey results and report

November 2022

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Do you need us?

Do you need us to tell you that the key to an effective campaign, one that will actually have an impact on your audience, is the work that goes into laying the foundations for that campaign?

We define 'having an impact' as changing, in a measurable way, the beliefs and consequently the behaviours of an audience. We do this in line with pre-determined business objectives and key performance indicators in mind.

Do you find it surprising how many people—people who are responsible for spending budget with agencies - still see this a mysterious black art with hit and miss results, 'those woolly marketing and advertising people and their risky ideas'?

What's an insight?

Even amongst those who understand the importance of basing a campaign on insight, we have learnt that some people struggle to understand what an insight actually is, despite the word being in common usage as part of our day-to-day language. Do you agree that the definition of the word has been tortured to death by burdening it with all sorts of proprietary, pseudo-academic branding tools and processes?

For us, an insight (the foundation block for any campaign) is exactly what is says on the tin. It is an idea about how we can add value on someone else's behalf that they have most probably not imagined for themselves (although this is not always the case). It is insightful when you buy someone flowers because you realise they need a little extra brightness in their lives or you give someone space when they look like they need some time to themselves.



Introduction

It's not just about insights – we follow a strict process

In addition to developing insights, we also use disciplines to ensure we personify (build personas) or segment our audience. We use research so we can get specific about facts and figures, the findings on which we base our insights. And yes, we believe in the discipline of developing a proper positioning that contains an insight, the primary feature, the advantage of that feature and the benefit of that advantage to the audience. And we have lots of other tools that enable us to get creative and develop our ideas as well. We're sure you do too.

All of these disciplines contribute to the brief, don't they? A good brief contains ideal key performance indicators and some sort of insight. A good brief evolves as we work through the 'Discovery' and 'Define' phases of a campaign. From a robust insight we can develop a strategy and once the strategy has been agreed we can identify the most appropriate tactics.

Who's right and who's wrong?

So, do you need us to tell you that the key to an effective campaign that will actually have an impact on your audience, is the work that goes into laying the foundations for that campaign – in other words, the brief...

...well, based on a recent call with a now ex-client, who demanded during our very first discussion to see *'the tactics, the ideas, you know the colouring in'*, the answer has to be yes.

We thought he'd be in a minority.



There's good news and there's bad news ...very bad news

We had a good response to our survey. The vast majority of respondents were in EMEA or global roles and directly responsible for marketing strategy with a 50/50 split in terms of pharmaceutical manufacturers as opposed to medical device, biotechnologies or more general healthcare.

“ **Show me the tactics,
the ideas, you know...
the 'colouring in'** ”

Despite this, the majority of respondents consider eye-catching creative and greater differentiation to be the most important factor when considering the effectiveness of a campaign, over developing creative based upon genuine insights. Arguably therefore, a value proposition could add no value at all in the target audience's eyes, but the client would be happy because the campaign was eye-catching and different.

In this situation, if we were measuring the changes in behaviour and belief of the target audience, a campaign that is highly creative but not based on a clear insight would under-perform against a campaign based on a clear insight (being based on an insight does not preclude the campaign from being creative).

Perhaps, this is because top of mind for a vast majority of respondents (more than 90%), was the need to meet the annual objectives or goals set by their leadership. Does this mean the ultimate leadership of these organisations are less interested in the impact of their campaigns than they are in the optics?

A failure of imagination

In which case, we have a huge failure in terms of imagination, and the authors of Blue Ocean Strategy, Chan Kim & Renée Mauborgne, have totally failed to educate corporate leadership.

This outlook is further compounded by the top two priorities being quick turn around and cost savings, followed by agency experience in the therapy area and then campaign performance.



WRITING THE BRIEF

Survey participants

The vast majority of respondents were in EMEA or global roles and directly responsible for marketing strategy with a 50/50 split in terms of pharmaceutical manufacturers as opposed to medical device, biotechnologies or more general healthcare.



01 Writing the brief

Q1

When writing a creative brief, on a scale of 1 to 5, how hard do you find the process?

When we average it out, everyone sat on the fence claiming they neither found brief writing hard or easy.

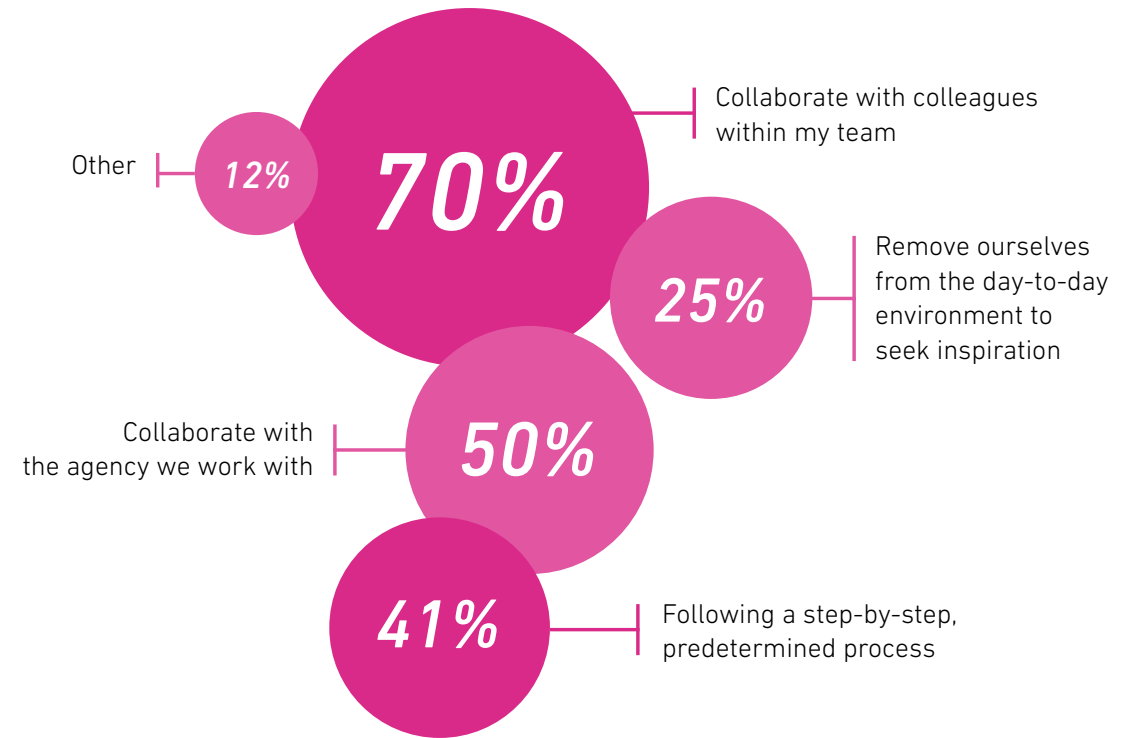
Q2

When writing a creative brief, which of the following best describes your process?

Over 70% of the respondents described their preferred approach, working with colleagues, as collaborative. Second choice, selected by 50%, was to collaborate with their agency.

“ You need to be generous with your agency on sharing enough to give them a chance to fully respond. This shouldn't be a blind exercise. By all means don't share anything privileged, but they need to understand key insights about the project and the company approach if they are to have a shot. Not providing sufficient information is a waste of everyone's time and makes a mockery of the process. ”

Survey participant



Results concluded from: Question 2
When writing a creative brief, which of the following best describes your process?

01 Writing the brief

Q3 What will you typically cover within your brief?

The vast majority of respondents said they'd include the value proposition, positioning, market analysis, research findings, insights derived from findings, insights or findings derived from data, business goals, market strategy, brand strategy and communication, identity or brand guidelines.

Only 50% said they provide stakeholders or stakeholders' roles within the process. Interestingly this is one of the biggest problems for agencies. An agency will work hard to please the person they see as the key decision maker, only to be frustrated when they discover someone previously unknown has greater influence.

This challenge is further confounded by the 0% who said they'd include any personal objectives. The goal for any agency is to give a brand personality, to ensure it is relatable. With this in mind, taking personal objectives out of the brief is perhaps counter-intuitive.

“

Clear timeline and budget guardrails – just not fair otherwise to know what they are actually bidding for and when, otherwise they may not be able to deliver it ultimately – time wasting

Survey participant

”

*Results concluded from: Question 3
What will you typically cover within your brief?*

01 Writing the brief

Q4

What mode of written and visual communication will your next brief be most likely to involve?

Again, our respondents laid claim to the importance of beautiful visual elements over and above emotive storytelling, data analysis and statistical information.



“

I'd recommend to sit between 'tried and tested' (boring/done before) and 'push the boundaries' (sounds a little aggressive in pharma and at risk of code queries) - better to keep evolving and opening up new ground (in a values-driven, ethical and compliant manner)

Survey participant

”

*Results concluded from: Question 4
What mode of written and visual communication will your next brief be most likely to involve?*



***BRAND STRATEGY AND
BUSINESS DRIVERS***

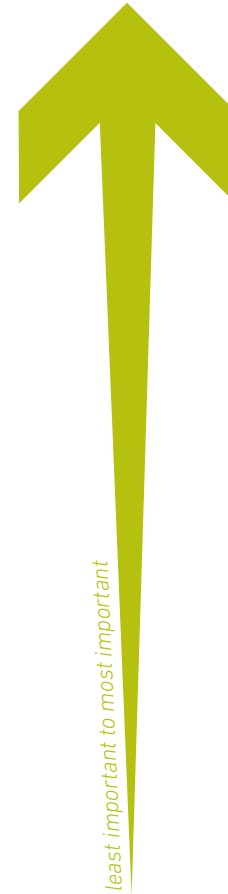
02 Brand strategy and business drivers

05

How important are the following channels in relation to your current brand strategy?

Scientific media, email and social media remain the channels that the majority of respondents would choose first, closely followed by journals, the brand's website or a third-party website.

With the exception of email, this shows a strong belief in pull media over push media—media that pulls people in and earns attention rather than media that reaches out to find an audience.



EMAILS
SCIENTIFIC MEETINGS
WEBSITES
JOURNALS
SOCIAL MEDIA
MOBILE APPS
ONLINE BANNERS
PODCASTS
WORKSHOPS
ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT AND SALES REPRESENTATIVES

Results concluded from: Question 5

How important are the following channels in relation to your current brand strategy?

02 Brand strategy and business drivers

Q6

When considering the effectiveness of a campaign, which factors do you consider most important?

Disturbingly (although only marginally), the majority of respondents consider eye catching creative and greater differentiation to be the most important factor when considering the effectiveness of a campaign, over developing creative based upon genuine insights. Arguably therefore, a value proposition could add no value at all in the target audience's eyes, but the client would be happy because the campaign was eye catching and different.

Q7

What will the main business drivers be behind your next brief? What key performance indicators matter to you?

The biggest business driver behind campaigns proposed in 2023 is to save budget. Interestingly however, this is contradicted later in our survey.



Hopefully you start with the differentiated product, if not, it's your role to make it appear differentiated, therefore it's table stakes



Survey participant

Results concluded from: Question 6

What mode of written and visual communication will your next brief be most likely to involve?

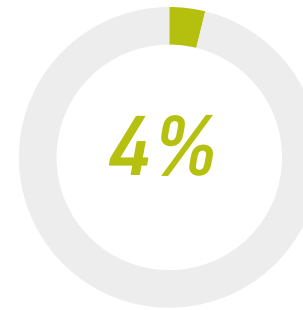
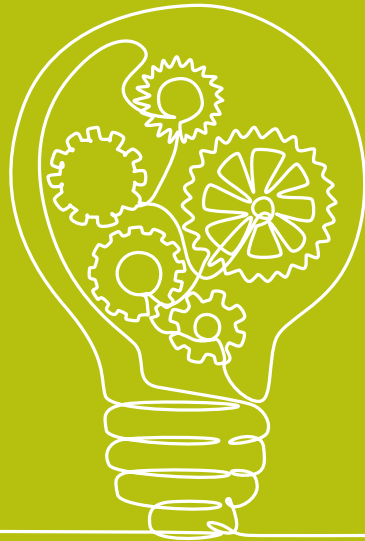
02 Brand strategy and business drivers

08

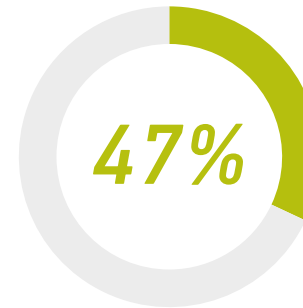
Will your next campaign be led by the audience or led by insights?

This question elicited a fascinating response; almost a 50/50 split with half of the respondents being led by the audience and the other half being led by insights.

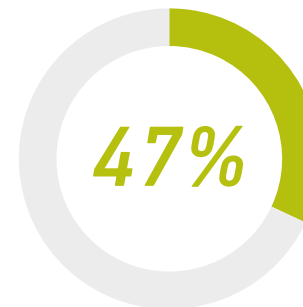
The bottom line here is that if we are depending on the audience to lead then all the offerings will be generic, to meet the customers' common denominators. Therefore, the only ground left on which to compete is price. Letting the customer lead creates a commodity market.



Our next campaign will be led by the competitive set of our offering



Our next campaign will be led by our customers' needs



Our next campaign will be led by insights we've developed

Results concluded from: Question 8
Will your next campaign be led by the audience or led by insights?

02 Brand strategy and business drivers

Q9

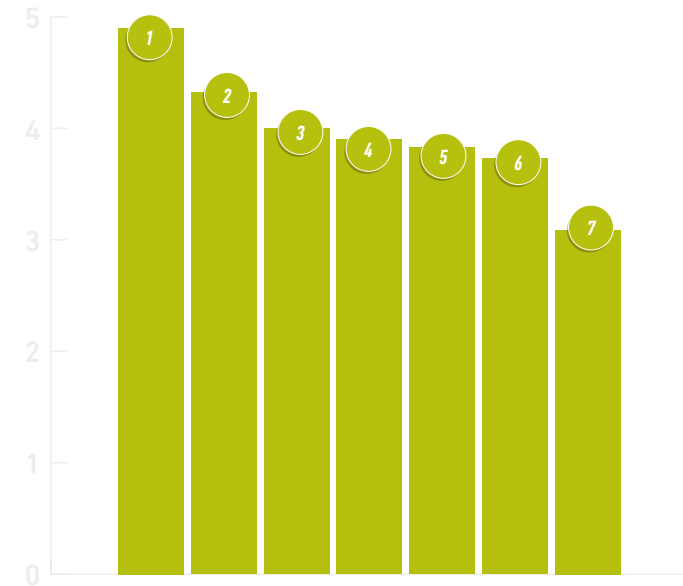
What level of customer research will your next brief be most likely to involve?

There was a real tussle here, 40/60 between the next brief depending on no research at all and micro-scale desk research carried out by the agency.

Q10

What will you be prioritising in your briefs?

The top two priorities were quick turn around and cost, followed by the agency having experience within the therapy area.



- 1 Micro-scale desk research carried out by your agency
- 2 Macro-scale market research/social listening carried out by a research agency
- 3 Sharing of learnings from internal sales/marketing teams
- 4 Focus groups/workshops with internal sales/marketing teams members
- 5 None
- 6 Focus groups/workshops with customer/users
- 7 Data driven insights or findings

Results concluded from: Question 9

What level of customer research will your next brief be most likely to involve?



PERSONAL GOALS

03 Personal goals

Q11

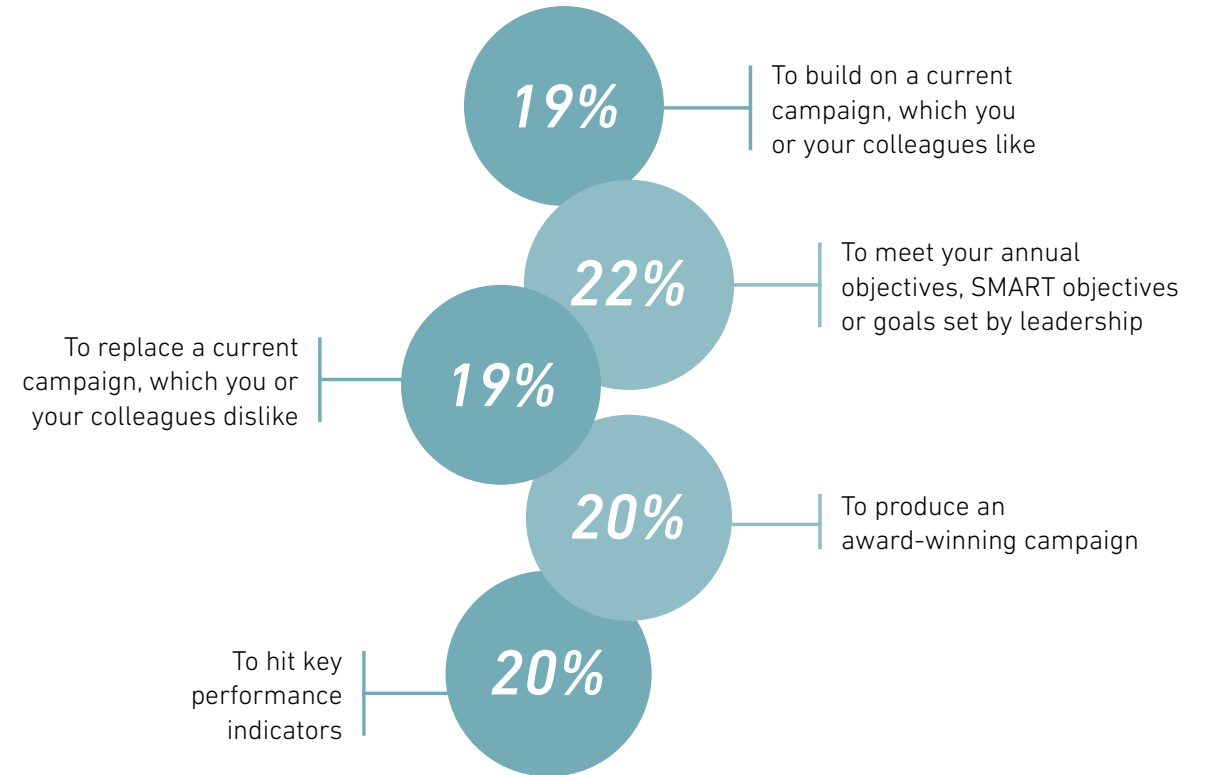
A minority thought in terms of a 'blue water' strategy.

“
To drive the market with our vision
”

Q12

With your own personal goals in mind, what will be the main drivers behind your next brief?

Top of mind for a vast majority of respondents (more than 90%) was the need to meet their annual objectives or goals set by their leadership.



Results concluded from: Question 12

With your own personal goals in mind, what will be the main drivers behind your next brief?

03 Personal goals



“

It is our goal to create a standout campaign that reflects the company identity/values/differentiation and can be the bedrock for future campaigns and positionings

”

Survey participant

03

Results concluded from: Question 12

With your own personal goals in mind, what will be the main drivers behind your next brief?

03 Personal goals

Q13

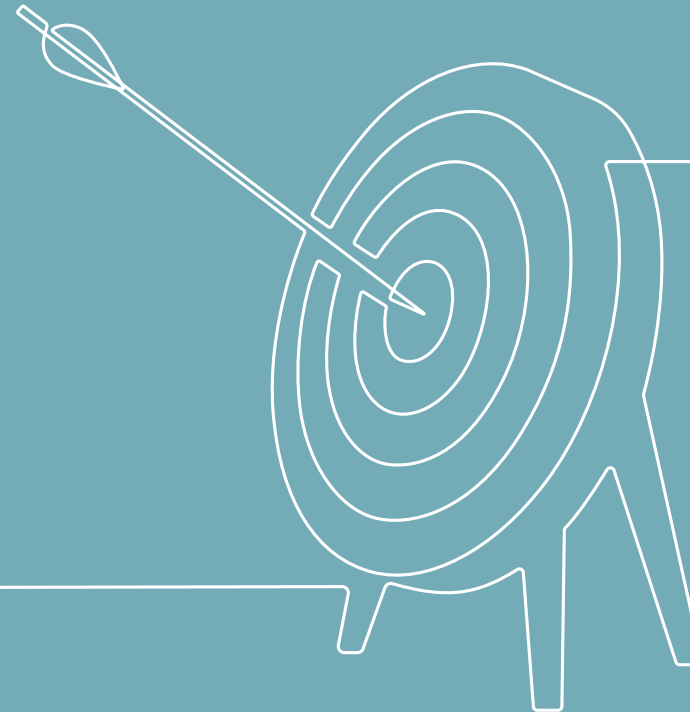
How do you anticipate your budget allocation will differ in 2023?

In answer to this question, we saw a majority of respondents who do not believe budgets will change in 2023 (despite everything that is happening in the world), and an even split in the remainder who do think budgets will be reduced or increased.

Q14

To you, what makes a good brief so important?

Despite all the contradictory indicators that appear throughout this survey, the majority of respondents feel a brief is important to provide clear focus and direction for the agency or the best way to develop high-quality campaigns and outputs.



03 Personal goals

Q15 In summary, what do you think constitutes a great brief?

It should be difficult to write a great brief because it involves distillation of the strategy and provides clarity of thinking for the agency.

Strategically planned, clearly communicated KPIs.

Shares all key insights.

Sharing the information, data and experience we have with the agency and then allowing them to do the same back. This way we pool all our experience to fine tune the brief. We also need to trust each other.

*Deep thinking in advance, and consideration to what is being asked.
Enabling the right agency to be selected to deliver the right campaign.*

Fair steers on timelines/budget banding.

03 Personal goals

Doesn't overstep on confidential info sharing.

Is the North Star for what you want and don't.

Doesn't fully replace the agency's ability to research and complement insights from their own sources – critical.

Enough time to deliver to enable a full, considered response.

Not sent to too many agencies, so all have a fair shot.

03 Personal goals

Insight, clear goal/strategy, knowing what you want!

Sent to the right agencies for good reason, following prior research.

And last but not least... not too long (the hint in the word 'brief'!

Clear direction from the client which leads to understanding from the agency of not only the brief but the reason behind the brief. An agency that can get on board with the brand challenges and be a strategic partner, rather than simply executing on a brief is important. This takes time and commitment from both the client to educate and the agency to receive, communicate internally and seek to understand. It is imperative that the agency are always thinking of continuous ways to offer strategic value to the brand beyond just creative execution and getting on board with the 'why'.

Clear, concise but filled with all appropriate information.



CONCLUSION

Conclusion

So, in conclusion there's good news and there's some fairly bad news

Let's tackle the bad news first. Our respondents consider the need for an effective campaign (one that actually changes the beliefs and behaviours of their audience), to be less important than eye-catching visuals. To add insult to injury, they prioritise fast delivery and low budgets over quality work.

There is good news in that creative excellence *is* valued (if only superficially). And an experienced creative team understands that the only way to come up with an effective, meaningful idea (rather than a superficial one), which looks good too, is to base it on an insight.





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