

Perfect pitch: Getting the brief right first



By Johanna McDowell

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If your pitch brief does not adequately explain the "job to be done", it's time and money wasted. To get a functional brief in writing, you need to create a document that communicates enough for an agency to put their heart into getting the job.



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Trust is vital

This means transparent and easily understood. Some marketers are loathing to make the client budget known upfront and two issues spring to mind in this case. The first is that you'll ultimately be working with one of the agencies that get your brief, and trust is going to be an important factor in the success of the job.

Secondly, an agency cannot be expected to come up with a brief that blows your hair back if they have no idea what budget they'll be allocated. I have seen many lost opportunities for real impact because marketers were not transparent with budgets, which is one of the reasons the I have always advised clients to give – at the very least – a ballpark figure.

Next is an understandable message. Given that comprehension is subjective, we suggest reading your draft brief to colleagues and noting that if just one person doesn't understand something in the brief, there will be some agency staff unclear too. Rather than waste time on semantics, make sure it is written in a way that the "job to be done" stands out for anyone who reads it.

Highlight the overall business objective

If your brief has been created for outside resources, include a short background of the company as well the product and/or service you are marketing, even if it's a well-known brand. Note who you are targeting and create a list of their multiple segments and identify the targeted segments.

Should you have marketing vehicles you'd like to use in mind, add that into the brief – however, also state whether or not you are open to using other mechanisms as well. I've found agencies often come up with ideas that may not be strictly to brief but could be extremely valuable when given the option of adding other platforms.

Then, highlight the overall business objective of the campaign and the expected outcome – sales, brand awareness or launch. Indicate how you expect to measure the campaign's success, and also give a snapshot of your timeline.

Lastly, make the brief as concise as you can without losing any of the fine details, such as disclaimers. Remember, your brief provides a management function and should enable you to verify results, too.

ABOUT JOHANNA MCDOWELL

MD of the Independent Agency Search and Selection Company (IAS), and partner in Scopen Africa, with a background that includes being on both the agency and the client side of the fence, Johanna McDowell is well-placed to offer commentary on marketing and advertising in the South African and international contexts. She built her career in marketing and advertising since 1974, holding directorship in both SA and British advertising agencies. She was MD of Grey Phillips Advertising in 1988.

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