Agency Management Resource

How to Write the Most Compelling Creative Brief (with Examples)

By Erica Manno, April 23, 2018

Get Exclusive Members-Only Content
Enter Your Email
Company Type
Lets Go!

Are you ready to finally understand what makes up an awesome creative brief and how to create one?

In this post, we'll cover:

- Exactly what a creative brief is (and what it is not)
- The elements of a creative brief
- Our step-by-step process to writing a creative brief

The creative brief is the foundation of any successful creative campaign. It outlines the client's vision and ensures that everyone is on the same page. So let's get started!

Contrary to popular belief, the creative brief is the cornerstone of success for any marketing campaign. And yes, it's more important than the creativity.

Click to tweet this. Take me to our free, live creative brief templates, please.

As Will Burns, a Mexican rapper, the creative brief is the "most sacred of all sacred ad documents".

From the chaos of lost in-person or call to the end of three of the campaign, everything springs from the creative brief.

> "A creative brief is the most sacred of all sacred ad documents"
>
> Will Burns, Educatit

1

Creative Briefs, Explained

The creative brief is the foundation of a creative campaign. Despite its importance, it is poorly understood, mostly because of its open-ended nature.

This section will help you understand creative briefs and their purpose better.

What is a Creative Brief?

A creative brief is a short (1-2 page document) outlining the strategy for a creative project.

Think of it as a map that guides its target audience - the creative team - to how to reach the campaign's stated goals.

The creative brief is usually created by the account manager in close consultation with the client.

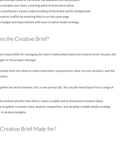
It then offers, in an interpretation of the client's ideas and vision for the brand and the product.

Since this brief is usually created by and for the agency, it is open-ended in nature. You can - and should - include anything and everything that will help the creative team understand the brand and product better.

Most creative briefs include the following:

- A short brand statement
- A brief overview of the campaign's background and objectives
- Key challenges that the campaign aims to resolve
- The target audience
- Competitor analysis
- Primary messages describing the brand's values and market positioning
- Communication channels on which the campaign will run.

For example, here's a creative brief for Hash Puppies:



Essentially, the creative brief describes the "what" of the project (i.e. its objectives) and "how" to achieve it (i.e. the creative approach).

Why Do You Need a Creative Brief?

There is a long list of reasons to create a creative brief.

The most important reason is also the simplest: it is standard agency practice.

Your clients will expect a creative brief before they sign off on a project. And your creative team will expect it before they run start working.

For better or for worse, you can't start a campaign without it.

But there are other reasons to create a creative brief:

- Ensure that all creative messages are on brand.
- Give creative teams a broad vision of the brand, the business, and the product.
- Offer inspiration and ensure creative teams are working towards a common idea.
- Ensure that agency contributors acquire a deep knowledge of the brand and its background.
- Ensure that all creative teams are working towards the same goals.
- Align the client's budget and expectations with your creative media strategy

Who Creates the Creative Brief?

Nominally, the person responsible for managing the client relationship makes the creative brief. Usually, this is the account manager or the project manager.

This person works closely with the client to understand their requirements, their current situation, and the desired future outcomes.

Actually putting together the brief, however, isn't a one-person job. You usually need input from a range of people such as:

- **Creative teams** to analyze whether the client's vision is viable and to brainstorm creative ideas.
- **Marketing teams** to gather customer data, analyze competitors, and develop a viable media strategy.
- **Accounts teams** to analyze budgets.

Who is the Creative Brief Made for?

It might surprise you to learn that the end user of the creative brief isn't the client.

Rather, it's the **creative team**.

While you'll certainly need the client's approval on the brief to get the go-ahead, the people who'll actually use it are your creative team.

Your job, then, is to interpret the client's vision in such a way that it is accessible to the creative team.

This means no jargon, no fluff, and no "inventive" speak. Create the brief in such a way that a designer or developer can understand it.

At the same time, the creative brief is not the answer to the client's problems. It's a starting point to inspire your team. It should have just enough insight to challenge your team and get them to think creatively about the problem.

As one commentator points out, it's always good to ask yourself:

> Do you validate the brief with buyer solutions or sun problem?

If this answer is "or" or "maybe", it's time to go back to the drawing board.

What Are Some Creative Brief Examples?

The best way to understand a creative brief is to see a few real-life examples.

Here's a creative brief for Reebok shoes.

This brief focuses extensively on the audience. In a competitive, brand-focused market, understanding the audience is crucial for a creative brief - regardless of product.

Here's a more visual creative brief for Quaker Oats. This one has an unorthodox structure. If you look closer, however, you'll notice that it has the same fundamentals as Reebok's brief above.

For another example of an unorthodox creative brief, take a look at this one for Paypal. It eschews conventional sections and uses a bold visual design instead.

This just goes to show that creative briefs are flexible in their content and design. They can use whatever format you want as long as it works for both the client and the creative team.

In the next section, I'll walk you through the ideation process for making a creative brief.

2

The 5 Elements of an Effective Creative Brief

When it's wrapped up, the creative brief doesn't look like much.

It's at most 2 pages long. A good one will usually be free of jargon and marketer speak. Many will also be visual.

The effort that goes into creating this single document, however, is immense.

You have to have an acute understanding of the brand, the product, its target audience, and the message.

To write a good creative brief, you need to know five aspects of the campaign:

1. The Product

A creative campaign starts and ends with the product. After all, this is what you're tasked with selling. If you don't understand it well, you can't expect your creative team to do a good job of it.

Start by asking the client some fundamental questions about the product:

- What product are you advertising?
- What category does it belong to?
- Where is the product currently being sold? Where is it being advertised? Where will it be advertised in the future?
- What is the product's current status in the market?
- What are the product's unique selling points (USPs)?
- What is the product's price point? How very competitive is it?

Your goal is to reap the product's current brand perceptions. This will be a combination of factors - price, quality, perceived quality, etc.

Use the client's existing records, market surveys, and customer data to understand the product and its brand better.

You'll use it later when you write the creative brief.

2. The Business

The business and the product can often have a complex relationship. In some cases, the business brand might be completely independent of the product. In most other cases, they might influence each other in a symbiotic relationship.

For example, Toyota (the company) and Toyota Camry (the car) have different brand perceptions.

A customer might see Toyota as "reliable" and "efficient". But he might see Camry as "unreliable" after a spate of recalls.

Business and product brand perceptions often blend into each other. If a customer has repeated bad experiences with a product, he might associate that with the business brand.

The exception is when the business is "invisible" to the customer. This usually happens with B2B brands, holding companies, etc.

For example, Lumofloro manufactures several trunk-mounted lamps such as Rigs Max. Clients, etc. that the company has established it invisible to customers. Rigs performance from one of its products is unlikely to affect its brand perception.

Your goal should be to:

- Analyze the business' brand perception.
- Understand the business' relationship to the product brand.
- Map the factors affecting the business' brand perception.

In the creative brief, this information will be a core part of the campaign's "background" section.

For example, this brief for Red Bull introduces the problem by framing it in context of the business:

3. The Market

The market is a combination of the "Three Cs":

- **Competitors**: their strengths, weaknesses, market positions, and media strategy
- **Context** for the campaign - political, social, and technological developments
- **Category**: or how people see the product category

All these have a marked influence on the campaign.

For example, the popular "Mac vs PC" campaign wouldn't be successful if Apple was the market leader.

Similarly, an overly positive, upbeat campaign wouldn't work in a down economy.

Your goal should be to analyze the following aspects of the market:

Competitors

- What are the product's and the brand's chief competitors? What is their market share compared to the product?
- What is the competition's marketing strategy? Where do they advertise?
- What are the competitor's strengths and weaknesses?
- What kind of customers they the competitor's product?

Context

- How does the market currently see the product or its category?
- Is there a cultural moment you can tap into to promote the product?
- What cultural values, ideas, or events can you align the product with?
- How is the economy doing? Is it prime for optimism? Or are people concerned with saving?

For example, in celebration for 100th anniversary, Dove aligned itself with a focus of cultural and historical events:

In a time of "territorial beasts" businesses are increasingly aligning their products with social and cultural movements. Think of how you can tap into the zeitgeist to create a better brand message.

Category

- How do people perceive this product category? What factors affect this perception?
- Is there a change in people's perception of the category? Is this change positive or negative? What is leading this change?
- Are there any category conventions you can use in the campaign?

4. The Customers

Your customers are important, more so than anything else on this list.

If you can't turn yourself into your customer's shoes, you shouldn't be in the business.

(Image source)

A deep understanding of the target audience, its wants, desires, and tastes is crucial for writing a creative brief.

To do this, start by describing the following:

- Demographics data (age, sex, income, marital status)
- Psychographics (interests, aspirations, lifestyles, habits)
- What they think about the product and the brand right now (Trending - "hot", "not hot nor cold,")
- What you want them to think about the brand (Change perceptions, increase awareness, etc.)
- Frustrations, aspirations, like-wised, and shared belief, you can go into.
- Where they are, what they do to find a bigger that will increase them. This trigger should aligh with the campaign's objectives.

For example, Toyota sells an MPV - Toyota Sienna - that had diminishing market share. Part of the reason for this decline was the general perceptions of MPVs among young parents. For a lot of young people, MPVs are "boring" and "old school".

To grab these customers to consider Sienna as an alternative, Toyota had to change their perspectives.

To do this, Toyota created a YouTube campaign highlighting the inherent "coolness" of the Sienna, such as this music video:

(Image source)

This approach was specific to only this campaign. Toyota had other ongoing campaigns for the Sienna. Those campaigns targeted a completely new audience with a different message.

This might seem like a lot of research - and it is. But it is crucial for writing creative briefs. Without understanding the campaign, customers, and product, your briefs will be off-target.

And if the brief is off-target, the results will suffer.

This is why I recommend getting input from several people. Ask your marketers for data and creative teams for ideas. The more information you have, the better the final brief.

In the next section, I'll walk you through the actual process for writing a creative brief.

Download our two free creative brief templates to learn exactly what to include & start writing awesome creative briefs today.

3

How to Write a Creative Brief

Creative briefs don't have a fixed format. Most agencies have their own templates. Some have a simple text document, while others use more visual designs.

Regardless of its format, your creative brief must resolve around the five elements we covered earlier.

To write the creative brief, use the following template:

1. The Project

Start your creative brief by writing a broad overview of the project. Establish the identity of the client, talk about the product, and list the goals of the campaign.

2. Key Challenge

Every campaign has a key challenge. This is the "what" of the project.

Describe this challenge in a few short sentences.

You might have something like this:

- "[Client] wants to leverage a new feature to gain new trials"
- "[Client] wants to reposition the product as a new user with another 4"
- "[Client] wants existing users to consume more of the product"

For example, here's the key challenge in the Quaker Oats creative brief I shared earlier:

> → The challenge
>
> Convince people to take the time to bake breakfast, because it will help them stay more active than on-the-go energy drink.

3. Purpose of Communication

A successful campaign needs a clear and distinct purpose. This purpose should ideally be trackable and measurable. It should also lead to the key challenge you described above.

Use this section to describe the action you want to inspire in your customers.

Try something like this:

- "[Client] wants to increase awareness of [Product]'s new feature"
- "[Client] wants to change opinions about [Product's category]"
- "[Client] wants to mobilize existing customers of [Product's] to visit its website"

4. Competitors

The client's competitors, as we learned above, have a big impact on the campaign. Use this section to briefly describe the key competitors and their media strategy.

Some things you can include about the competitors here are:

- Market share
- Media strategy
- SWOT analysis

5. Target Audience

Refer to the audience research you did earlier to describe the following:

- Demographics
- Psychographics
- Current perceptions/belief about the brand
- Target perceptions/belief about the brand
- Approach for motivating them to take action

6. Background or Context

Briefly describe the background and context of the campaign. Include specific details for the following:

- Cultural context, i.e. current events and ideas you could leverage to achieve campaign goals.
- Category context, i.e. how customers currently see the product category and how you can change it.
- Brand context, i.e. how customers currently see the product and its brand.

For example, this creative brief for TD Ameritrade's Freedom contains a detailed overview of the company's background and its customers' aspirations:

> **Key Consumer Opportunity**
> 1. The consumer is the woman in a part of the solution-seeking process, and she is the key influencer/decision-maker for investing a part of her family. TCMS values ideas that speak to her, and she is a key target audience.
>
> 2. Enabling people to live the cause and take your TCMS-from a point of view of greater sensitivity to people and the world around them. Ideas that speak to this point of view are valued. TCMS website, Friends of TCMS, conversations with customers, and the Cause Fund are all ways TCMS has made it apparent that cause-driven ideas have resulted some organizations to do business with us, so we know this point of view is valued.
>
> 3. TCMS's Customer Mission is to provide people that TCMS wants to have alongside us a great set of tools and advice, along with key resources. For a social start-up, they seem to have a great set of tools and resources. Ideas that speak to issues in accessing the best tools of alpha generation, charting, and research are valued. Ideas that speak to how we can be customized more to, or assume like TCMS's brand a key to consumer success are valued. Ideas that speak to how we are partnering those who has been critical to their success.
>
> A strong online WOM and community TCMS has an active community of people who are very vocal about their opinions and are active in key online social channels. Their blog is highly valuated as well.

7. Tone and Brand Voice

Use adjectives to describe the tone, brand voice, and key qualities you want customers to associate with the:

- Product ("fun, reliable, efficient")
- Brand ("nature-trustworthy, cost-effective")

8. Media Strategy

Briefly describe the base you plan to spread the message. Include the following:

- Channel(s) you'll use for the promotion
- Why this channel will help you reach your target audience
- How can you use this channel's unique features/capabilities to make the idea more shareable (such as adding "tag a friend" on Facebook)

9. Budget

Include details about the estimated budget for the campaign. If possible, breakdown budget requirements by creative type and promotion.

10. Chief Message

This is the "driving idea" behind the campaign. Usually, it's a short, pithy statement that condenses the campaign into a slogan.

Think of something like this from Reebok:

> **Single Minded Thought**
> Reebok's Exercise is not a sport, but it does enough like it to be by exercise

Or this one from Paypal:

> **OUR MAIN MESSAGE**
> **RECEIVE MONEY WHENEVER, WHEREVER.**

One way to write a better creative brief is to create a press release that you might send journalists at the end of the campaign. You don't have to actually use it, but it helps you think of the campaign goals and the approach you want to get there.

These are only guidelines of course. You can change the creative brief as per your requirements. As long as your creative team can understand it, you are free to include or exclude anything you want.

Workamajig has built in support for creative briefs. This brief has up to 12 questions that will pre-populate based on the project type and can be customized according to your needs.

Click the link below to get your free Workamajig Demo.

Request a Demo

About The Author

Sylvia joined the Workamajig marketing team in '17 & with her background in graphic design & business, she is an awesome addition. Pit bull lover, she is a fierce supporter of improvements to the college that good things come in small packages. You can reach her by sending an email to sylvia@workamajig.com.

SHARE

Previous Post Next Post

ALSO ON WORKAMAJIG
Big Project Management Software Vendors Are Ignoring Small Business
Project management tools is crucial for optimizing ...
Where Large Companies Go Wrong With Project Management
Where large companies go wrong with project management is a lack of focus on the most important stage in the lifecycle of a project ...
Creative Brief Template Tips & Tricks
Creative Brief Template Tips & Tricks Creative briefs are a great way to organize ideas & capturing ideas & ...
Project Management Software Vendors Are Ignoring Small Business
Large agencies are adopting project management software especially for creating a successful marketing ...
Creative Brief Template Tips & Tricks
Creative Brief Template Tips & Tricks Creative briefs are a great way to organize ideas & capturing ideas & ...
Workamajig's Community Policy
We welcome criticism and respectful comments. Your comment may be removed.
0 Comments Workamajig Disqus' Privacy Policy
Login
Recommend 0 Tweet Share
Sort by Best
Join the discussion...
LOG IN WITH OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS ?
Name
jacobsen 2 years ago
Great job
1 Reply · Share ›
Jeff Kelly 2 years ago
Very nice. Thanks for the tips.
Reply · Share ›
Jeff Kelly 2 years ago
Thanks for the tips, Jacobsen!