



Design

Businesses that underrate the importance of design are missing a major opportunity.

Design is not just about the way products and brochures look. It is an essential part of improving your business, developing new products and innovating. Effective use of design can increase sales, reduce costs and present a new image to your customers.

This briefing outlines how to ensure that your business makes the most of design to:

- Improve your business processes.
- Strengthen your marketing.
- Develop better products.

1 Focus your efforts

1.1 Focus on areas where design offers clear commercial benefits.

- It can help you satisfy market needs. For example, designing products and services to meet customers' needs.
- It can allow you to make better use of technology and materials. For example, using lighter or recycled materials to save energy.
- It can make your communications more effective. For example, creating marketing materials which clearly explain the benefits of your product.
- It can improve production efficiency. For example, implementing procedures to reduce errors and wasted time.

1.2 Satisfying **customers** is your top priority, so market research is essential to understanding them. See **Research for your marketing**.

- What do customers like and dislike about your products and services?
Which competitors do they use, and why?
- What image do customers have of your business and products?
- What concerns do your customers have?
How can you make their lives easier?
Ask front-line employees for feedback from customers. Use your sales records to identify which products sell well and which are in decline.

1.3 Suppliers, competitors and employees can also help you identify **opportunities**.

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- What causes your employees problems or wastes their time?
What are your employees' most common mistakes?
 - What new products and technologies are suppliers offering or aware of?
 - What would make suppliers deliver faster or offer you better payment terms?
 - How can you beat the competition?
How do your key performance indicators (eg delivery times, percentage of faulty goods) compare? What are the key design features of their products and services? How do they promote themselves?
(See **Key performance indicators**.)
- Keep up to date with market trends and new regulations and standards through trade bodies, publications and business contacts.

2 Planning

Whether you are designing a complex product or process, or just a simple leaflet, investing in design minimises the risk of needing to make costly changes later.

Involve any outside help you need right from the start (see **5**). A methodical approach will help to guarantee a successful outcome.

2.1 Assemble a **project team** (see **4**) to manage the design process.

Premises

A Design for **sales**.

- Are your premises attractive to customers?
- Would corporate clothing be an advantage?
- Are products displayed effectively with benefits clearly signposted?

B Design for **productivity**.

- What is the workflow from delivery of supplies, through the production process to despatch of finished goods?
- Which employees work together and use the same documents or equipment?
- Can you improve health and safety, and the welfare of employees?

Like most design opportunities, effective planning (see **2**) and professional help (see **5**) will reduce losses and increase potential.

- Set specific, quantified objectives.
 - Set a budget.
Allow for contingencies and for the cost of external consultants.
 - Set a timetable.
Include any milestones for the project and the target completion date.
- Plan how you will monitor and measure progress and expenditure.

2.2 Prepare a **design brief**.

- The brief should describe your business background.
Who are your customers and what are their needs? What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Your brief should include a clear description of the project. What are your objectives? How will the finished design be used?
- Budgets and timetables should form part of the brief.
- The brief should highlight any other constraints on the design.
For example, are there any specific technical or legal requirements?

A clear design brief is particularly important if you will be involving outside help.

2.3 Turn the brief into a **design specification** (see **3**).

- Most design specifications are a compromise between the features you need to meet your objectives and the budget, timescale and other constraints.

2.4 Make **manufacturing** and **marketing** plans an integral part of the design process.

- How much take-up are you anticipating and how long will it take you to meet demand?
- Which components will you make in-house and which will you buy in? Will you need to sub-contract any work?
- How can you minimise the cost of components?
Can you use standard components and tools across a range of products rather than more expensive custom-made ones?
- What production capacity will need to be available, when? What volumes of supplies will you need?
How will this fit in with your (and your suppliers') existing workflow?
- Can you improve your use of technology?

“Design is a key business process. Companies which fail to integrate design into their overall business strategy are compromising their potential.”
Jonathan Ball,
Business Link
West Yorkshire

“Designing a new product is about far more than just making something stylish, fashionable or colourful. Above all, you need to find out what your customer's needs are and then create something that meets them.”
Ken Kempson,
Kempson
Associates

“You only get a few seconds to grab your customer's attention, and in that time you need to communicate how your business stands out from the crowd. Aim for a design solution that conveys how unique your business is.”
John Blyth,
Kall Kwik UK

- Can you reduce the wastefulness of your production processes?
Are you minimising wasted raw materials and energy usage?
- How will you promote and distribute new products and services?
- Will employees need support?

2.5 Plan how you will protect your **intellectual property** (see **Intellectual property**).

Protecting your intellectual property can reduce the threat from competition. There are several options:

- Patent protection for new and innovative products.
- Design registration to protect the shape or appearance of a product.
- Registered trade marks which distinguish your product or services from the competition.

Brochures

Brochures (and other marketing materials) communicate with your customers. Simplicity and clarity are essential.

- How will you make an immediate impact?
This is especially vital if your brochure has to compete with other junk mail.
- How easy is it for the reader to understand?
- Is the type size appropriate for older readers?
Complicated designs and ornate type-faces may look attractive but can be difficult to read.
- What message are you trying to get across? Is it put simply?
Focus on one or two key selling points.
- What image are you trying to create?
For example, an expensive brochure can be inappropriate for a cheap and cheerful product and vice versa.
- How will the brochure be used?
Size, weight, durability and flexibility can all be important features.

Your competitors' marketing material can be a useful source of both good and bad ideas.

A good designer will create material which conveys your company image and values.

For more information, contact the Patent Office (08459 500505).

A continuous process of incremental improvements is often more effective than focusing on one-off design projects.

3 The specification

Creating a good design specification is critical to the success of the project. A design consultant can help you avoid making expensive mistakes during this process (see 5).

Different types of design present different opportunities and problems. Some of the main issues to consider are outlined below.

3.1 What **benefits** is the design expected to deliver?

- What market needs will products and services satisfy?
How will they be distinguished from competing products and services?
- Who is involved with work processes and what are their requirements?

3.2 What are the key **features** and functions of the design?

- What does it do and how does it do it?
What performance levels must it achieve?
- How durable must it be?
What will the product's working life be?
- How will the product be constructed?
What materials will it be made from? Can it be recycled?

3.3 What should its **visual** appearance be saying?

- What image are you trying to create?
Are your company image and the image of each of your products or services consistent?
- Does the standard of your marketing materials match your corporate image?

3.4 What quality **standards** must you achieve?

- Can you design products and production processes to minimise the percentage of faulty goods?
- Are there any formal quality standards or regulatory requirements you must meet?

“First impressions can be critical. Good design and presentation will always give you the competitive edge.”

Jeff Della Mura,
Fuse

“Successful companies involve everyone in the design process, from the bottom to the top and from outside the business as well. Everyone should be thinking how innovative and exciting the next product or service might be, how environmentally sound it could be and how it might be made and sold.”

Harry Rich,
Design Council

“Aim for consistent design across your business and product range. For example, creating a series of brochures which share a common design and artwork saves money. It also looks far more professional than several one-off designs.”

Julia Gosling,
Mabox Marketing

3.5 How will the design be **tested**?

- Will you develop a single design or several alternative versions?
How will you choose between designs (eg by testing prototypes with customers)?
- Do you need to carry out a technical feasibility study before you go ahead?
Are there any technical problems that you need to overcome?

4 The design team

4.1 **Identify** who should be in the project team.

- Include employees who are going to be affected by the changes.
- Include people with specific design skills. If necessary, bring in external consultants.
- Include key suppliers and anyone else with an interest in the design.

4.2 **Communicate** the brief to everybody involved.

- Explain to employees how the project will benefit them.

4.3 Give one individual overall **responsibility** for the project.

- Choose somebody with experience of project management.

4.4 Facilitate **co-operation**.

- Hold brainstorming sessions to generate ideas.
- Explain how everything fits together.
- Give every team member an achievable objective.

4.5 **Debrief** everybody at the end of the project.

- List all the incremental improvements that have been made as part of the project.
- Identify what works better and what still needs improvement.

4.6 Hold **periodic discussions** to continue the process of improvement for both individual designs and your overall design process.

5 Using outside help

Good designers help you to move quickly from asking a question to providing a possible answer.

Even if there is no quick solution, involving a designer will clarify what else needs to be done.

5.1 **Design advisers** at, or referred through, your local Business Link can help with most aspects of design.

- An initial visit to assess your needs can be followed by specific support and advice.
- Design advisers can also help you find suitable design consultants.

5.2 The **Design Business Association** runs a referral service (020 7251 9229 or www.dba.org.uk).

It will draw up a shortlist of suitable consultants from among its members, based on your design brief.

5.3 Design **consultants** can help in their own areas of expertise.

Before taking on a consultant, prepare a brief (see **2.2**). Ask selected consultants to give a presentation on what they can offer, and to provide details of previous projects.

- Consultants tend to focus on one area of design.
A good designer will need to fully understand your business and will integrate design advice into your business planning.

Expert contributors

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Further help

There are other Directors' Briefing titles that can help you. These briefings are referred to in the text by name.

Packaging

Well-designed packaging has to take account of a wide range of requirements.

A What are the **functional** requirements?

- How well does the product need to be protected?
- How will the product be handled and stored?

B What are the **aesthetic** requirements?

- How will the packaging contribute to the image of the product?
- How will the product be displayed?

C What are the **environmental** requirements?

Not only is there an increasing volume of regulation to take into account, but many customers prefer environmentally responsible suppliers and products.

- Are you minimising wasteful packaging?
- Can you use packaging materials that can be reclaimed or recycled?

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