



Fire dog design guidelines

New to the game?

Your brand's visual identity and how it is perceived by consumers can be the make or break for most companies. It is increasingly recognised that design is in fact vital to the success of today's businesses.

At Firedog, we believe in offering valuable support to what can be a complex task. Drawing on our combined experiences, we have put together a quick guide on a few of the basic principles when faced with commissioning design. We hope you find it useful!

From luxury to necessity

Design has redefined itself over the years from a luxury item to very much a business necessity. More and more purchase decisions in our time are influenced greatly by the products design assets. Manufacturers and businesses are realising that to play a serious game, you have to look the part.

Brands such as Bang & Olufson have known this for quite some time. The real cost advantage is that good design adds value and businesses have been able to charge a premium based on superlative design. Do you honestly believe that a Ferrari costs £60 000 to manufacture?

Where does it all begin?

All design and marketing requirements are based on need. This need will determine the best course of action to take. Do you need to sell more product or do you need to "get out there"? These two examples, whilst both based on a similar need, will ultimately require a very different strategy.

Additionally consider the short-term versus the long-term needs and the apparent benefits offered. Whilst your short term needs might be answered through a reactive campaign; most businesses benefit from a long-term pro-active strategy.

You know what you want

Once you've decided on what your needs are, consider taking a look at the big picture. More often than not a graphic solution can be used across more than one treatment to develop a more cohesive identity. At this point, accurately define exactly what you require from the design consultancy in terms of the scope of the project. From here we can develop the brief...

Writing an accurate brief

A written brief allows your design team to accurately develop solutions based on defined criteria. It acts as a guide and offers the parameters within the design can be developed.

Ideally, it would be really useful if a written brief could be developed and offered to the design consultancy once appointed. Alternatively, a verbal briefing is often sufficient, provided the agency distils the information and provides confirmation in writing. At any point a good written brief will certainly assist in making sure that your design consultancy delivers what you require.

The following is a list of the basic ingredients required for a solid brief:

- Objectives What are you hoping to achieve with the project? Don't forget to include the 'key message'.
- History and background Provide the agency with an insight to your company, your products and your people.
- Project nature Does the project require a photoshoot or any illustrations or is there an image library already available?
- Corporate guidelines Are there any existing corporate guidelines that the design concept has to fulfil?
- Budget Although not always clear, an estimated budget will allow the agency to deliver a solution that is appropriate.
- Timing and deliverables Usually includes: quantity, delivery locations, deadline and any other logistical requirements.



Have an eye for media

The one aspect that has revolutionised the design industry over the past few decades, is the choice of media available to the client. You will need to define what and who your market is and decide on the best approach. All media types crossover in some areas, however, we can guarantee that you will not sell any zimmer frames through a multimedia compact disc campaign!

On your marks...

Design consultancies will only start work once a Cost Estimate (CE) has been signed off. It will take a few days to develop an accurate CE based on the brief. If print or production is involved, we'll obtain a few print quotes to secure the best deal available. Just like any business, terms and conditions apply. These can be found on the CE.

Get set...

Before we start we'll always present the cost estimate and discuss how it's made up and what options we have chosen. It is your money after all! Typical agency fees consist of: conceptual development, design development & detailing, artwork, project management, print management, art direction and prop sourcing. Typical examples of outcosts include: photography, print, illustration, retouching, scanning, production related expenses etc.

Go...

Once the parameters of the brief and the costs and formats have been agreed, we proceed to a creative brainstorm. This is the fun bit. Once we have developed conceptual routes, we'll present them for approval. Once a route has been approved, it's then developed through two proofing stages to final artwork. Final sign off is required before we proceed to production.

Although we're small, we still able to offer typical project management practices such as work schedules, contact reports etc. We require our designers to have solid project management skills and for larger or more complex projects a dedicated Project Manager is assigned to the project if there's budget for it. We believe that this approach offers the flexibility and cost efficiencies of smaller 'hot shops' whilst additionally offering the support often required by clients.

Snap, snap

Photography can often be the most expensive part of any design requirement. Stock photography is invariably the cheapest route, but can be limiting at times. On the other end of the scale - setting up a shoot is the most expensive. It is always best if you are concerned with costs to supply your own images. If you commission photography often, it is a good idea to create an image library that you can pass on to relative agencies so that they need not shoot additional photography, thus saving costs.

Illustrations and visualisations

There are many types of illustrations that will support a design concept, from simple line drawings to complex 3D visualisations. Be wary of choosing a very particular style in illustration as their shelf life can be limiting and they will date quickly. As some illustrations are quite complex and take a while, their lead times can be lengthy, so build this into your timeline. 3D visualisations for product and packaging design are quite the new thing and these we have found really hit home when it comes to getting the creative concept across.

A written style

Copywriting plays an integral part in the creative process. Once again, there are different styles and it is always best to find the correct tone of voice that compliments the design strategy. Copywriting, like design, follows the same two-step proofing process.

Colour in printing

The use of colour greatly affects the price at the production stage. Single colour print is cheaper than full colour CMYK printing, however, full colour printing always looks the smartest. Other options are duotone and tritone printing, which is printing with two and three inks respectively - somewhat cheaper than CMYK. Pantone colours can be used to add a special colour in print and can be really effective for large flat areas. These are available in flat colour and also metallics.

Strength in numbers



This decision will ultimately follow your business needs. Bear in mind, that often after the initial setup for printing, the cost difference drops considerably. For example, hypothetically : 100 to 200 print units = £100; whereas 200 to 1000 units = £120. The choice of paper will have some effect here too, for very large print runs it is advisable to use economical stock.

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Paper stock

Like colour usage and photography, this is a representation of the aesthetics of your design needs. For quick flyers that are not intended to last forever it is beneficial to use economical stock. If you wish to create a premium tactile feel for a brochure, paper choice becomes important.

The icing on the cake

There are other subtle production techniques that can enhance your design, mostly relative to printing. Firedog will advise on features such as embossing, laminating and varnishing.

Done and dusted

Finishing refers to how the printed material is held together and bound or stitched. The most cost effective method for small paginated print items is folding. There are different styles in folding namely: Concertina, Roll-folding and gate-folding to name a few.

There are many other types of binding methods, all with their different advantages. The ultimate is case-binding, which is how a hardcover book is put together.

The end of the line

Carefully consider how you would like to roll out your print. Printers normally charge a premium for delivering to more than one address - you might want to take care of the distribution within your company. Also, have a think about packaging for when your printed item is to be posted; there are many types of envelopes and box-card contraptions that will not only protect your design but also add a fine aesthetic touch.

We hope this guide has made the design story a little clearer, give us a call if you would like any further details.

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