



The Bureau of European
Design Associations

Starting up a design project

This document is based on the **DBA's Getting Started section** featured in the **DBA Directory** and is featured by BEDA as an inspiration.

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Creative agencies come in all shapes, sizes and types, so how do you pick the best for your project?

Design is practised in a number of ways. A designer may be self-employed, part of a group of designers working together in a loose collaborative way or they may be part of a design agency where there are a number of different specialists under the same roof. This guide uses the term 'designer' to refer to any person regardless of employment status.

We believe that design is best utilised at the earliest possible stage of the project and that a designer can help with the project at the strategic level as well as the tactical implementation level. Depending on where you are in the project will require different skills from the selected designer and it may be worth taking time to think about where you are in the project before you embark on looking for your design resource.

Identifying the Challenge

A good place to start when thinking about what sort of designer you need is to look at the size and the nature of the challenge facing you and the business – whether at this stage the output is an open question; a concept, a product idea or a series of products, or for communication design a brochure, a website or a new service.

Developing the Brief

The next step in beginning to help clarify your requirements is drafting a brief. If more than one designer is approached, it is obvious that all designers should start from a similar point for you to compare the feedback you get from them. They will need some information on the background to your business and to the nature of the project as well as what you need from them. The brief represents a starting point for communication and discussion as well as a tool for you to use when searching for and selecting designers.

Types of Designers

The term 'designer' is generally used to cover a range of services and activities and for the most part a well trained and experienced designer will be able to add value to most design issues and processes. However, as in all sectors, most designers specialise in certain areas and many agencies may offer more than one specialism.

When making an initial approach to selecting and commissioning a designer, the recommended route is to look for designers that specialise in the type of challenge you have identified and need to resolve. So, if you think that you need to resolve issues with your packaging, then you might want to look for designers who specialise in packaging initially rather than graphic designers who are able to design packs.

The easy way to do this is to look at their portfolio on line. If the work examples are mainly packaging projects then it is safe to assume that they specialise rather than seeing a selection of graphic design projects with some packaging examples. You may need different types of designers at different points of the project but it will help your selection process if you focus on core specialist skills initially.

Designers use a range of terms to describe who they are or what they do. A simple and perhaps basic starting point for what each is about is as follows.

- **Graphic Design**

Graphic design deals mainly with two-dimensional design or what is sometimes referred to as design for print or screen viewing. This could include stationery, brochures, catalogues and internal communication materials as well as technical information and forms, posters and banners, design for digital reproduction, signage etc. Designers in graphic design may specialise in areas like Wayfinding, Information Design or Internal Communications or in visual communications for specific fields of application.

- **Brand or Identity Design**

Designers who specialise in this area tend to deal with the way an organization communicates who it is and what it does and, more importantly, try to define a differentiated proposition in the marketplace. They will often develop an identity system that will include a logo, typeface, colour palette and any photography or imagery required. As part of the project they will also produce stationery options, a brochure cover or may be a webpage that demonstrates how the identity should be applied. Ideally they will produce a guide to all the identity elements for use when commissioning design in the future.

- **Product or Industrial Design**

Product designers will deal with anything that is three dimensional and typically manufactured. This may include components of larger designs, complete products, consumer goods and even 3D structural packaging. These designers can also specialise in sub categories, for example medical devices, consumer goods or sports equipment. They may have engineering support in house and will be able to deliver a set of CAD drawings ready for tooling and production.

- **Web or Digital Design**

Website design deals with the way a business is expressed on line as well as handling any extranet or intranet applications required. Increasingly digital designers will also be able to develop phone applications and other access media applications. This sector will also help develop everything from powerful presentations to CD ROMs and digital media for customer use.

- **Packaging Design**

Packaging designers work in three dimensions but use the print process to express the final design. Packaging design includes labelling and protective covers as well as the actual box, carton or pack the product arrives in. Some packaging designers also deal with point-of-sale materials such as the retail unit that may display the packaged goods in store.

- **Exhibition Design**

Exhibition design covers that range of design outputs required to promote a product or service in a designated space. This could either be a stand at a trade show or a small booth at a local networking event. In some cases it may also include the development and construction of the final design.

- **Retail Design**

Retail design covers shop interiors and fittings as well as the way products are sold within the retail space. Some agencies will also have project managers who will be able to manage the fit-out of the shop or retail space as per the design solutions developed.

- **Interior Design**

Interior design in some agencies may well include retail but usually covers everything from office space and workspace to large public spaces and design for domestic spaces. Some interior designers will get involved with the entire fit out process, while others work on a more conceptual level or on specialized areas, from designated work or client relations stations to environments for specific types of care or treatment.

- **Service Design**

This is a relatively new specialism for agencies; traditionally it was included as part of a brand agency offer when establishing the way a brand operated. It deals with the development and delivery of a service offer both on line and off line. It will cover all aspects of the service from the customer experience to the internal resources required to support the service on a day to day basis.

- **Innovation Consultancy**

Innovation consultants help organisations to identify and develop new product or service propositions. Typically they will work with the business at a more strategic level using creative tools and processes to help the business uncover and identify then exploit unrecognised opportunities within specific markets. Innovations consultants will also work internally to help identify and build appropriate internal skills and capabilities. Creativity and innovation is part of what all the agencies can offer but only as part of the core specialism. These agencies are typically used when no specialism has been identified or required but will work with the client to develop a brief for the most suitable agency to help implement the opportunity identified.

The Process

Finding a designer is easier than you think, once you have thought about the challenge you face, have tried drafting a design brief and identified the type of designer you think you need to help. In many countries, you will find online directories which allow you to search by different criteria, each criterion added will narrow down the possibilities available to you from the membership.

Besides such directories – where available – there are a host of different ways to identify potential designers. Asking colleagues or other business contacts for a referral is one, using the wide range of available magazines and journals that cover each sector of design is another. Moreover, professional designers' associations and design centres will be able and more than willing to guide you in your search for a partner. Using the internet is also a possible route but possibly the longest and most time consuming.