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# DBA Guide to buying design



## 01 Getting started

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The Voice  
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# Agencies come in all shapes, sizes and types, so how do you pick the best for your project?

Design is practiced 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, studio or agency providing design services.

We believe that design is best introduced at the earliest possible stage of a project as a designer can add value at the strategic level as well as the tactical implementation level. Depending on where you are in the project, you will require different skills from the selected designer and so it may be worth taking time to think about your current situation, and the status of the project before you embark upon a search for any kind of 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. Be mindful of any possible implications and effects a new design initiative could have on other parts of the business at this stage, and ensure the right people are involved in kick-off conversations. At this early stage, you are not yet trying to decide what the ultimate design output might be in terms of brochure, website or service, but thinking broadly about the sort of help you need.

## Developing the brief

The next step in beginning to clarify your requirements is drafting a brief (covered in detail in section 2). All designers will want to start from a similar point. They will need some information on the background to your business and to the nature of the project as well as what you will need from them. The brief represents a starting point for internal communication and discussion as well as a tool for you to use when searching for and selecting designers, thus ensuring everyone is on same page.

## 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 resolve most design issues. However, as in all sectors, some designers specialise in certain types of design or sectors 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. For instance, if you think that you need to resolve issues with your packaging then look for designers who specialise in packaging, rather than a generalist.

The easy way to do this is to look at their portfolio online. If the work examples are mainly packaging projects then it is probably safe to assume that they specialise in packaging design (as opposed to seeing a selection of graphic design projects with just a few 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.

# Terminology

**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** deals mainly with two-dimensional design (2D) or what is sometimes referred to as design for print. This will typically include stationery, brochures, catalogues and internal communication materials as well as technical information and forms. Designers in graphic design may specialise in Information Design or Internal Communications.

**Brand or Identity Design** are designers who specialise in this area tend to deal with the way a company communicates who it is and what it does and, more importantly, try to define a differentiated proposition for the business. They will typically 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 maybe 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 – often referred to as ‘brand guidelines’.

**Product or Industrial Design** are designers who 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** 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-to-media applications. This sector will also help develop everything from powerful presentations to CD ROMs and digital media for customer use.

**Packaging Design** works in three dimensions but use the print process to express the final design. Packaging or structural 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** 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 on site.

**Retail Design** covers shop interiors and fittings as well as the way products are sold within the retail environment. 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** 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. Typically, interiors designers will get involved with the entire fit-out process.

**Service Design** 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** helps 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. Innovation consultants will also work internally to help identify and build appropriate internal skills and capabilities. Creativity and innovation is part of what all design agencies can offer but only as part of the core specialism. These agencies are typically used when no specialism has been identified 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. Naturally the DBA Directory is the first place to look. The Directory will allow you to search by different criteria; each criterion added will narrow down the possibilities available to you from the membership. Outside of the DBA membership, 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. Using the internet is another route but possibly the most haphazard and time consuming. Many trade associations offer specialist guidance on pitching and agency search and selection for their members. The DBA and partner association ISBA are able to help with this.

### **More information**

If in doubt about any part of the process or you have questions that are specific to what you are trying to achieve, ask the DBA, who will almost certainly know someone who will be able to answer your questions or help in the process.