

Design Business Association
35–39 Old Street London EC1V 9HX

Tel +44 (0) 20 7251 9229 enquiries@dba.org.uk
Fax +44 (0) 20 7251 9221 www.dba.org.uk

DBA Guide to buying design



03 Agency selection guide

dba

In association with

The Voice
of British
Advertisers



What are you actually looking for?

Having decided on the source of the designers, how do you actually know who is right or who is more suitable than others? The initial step will be to review their case-studies, many of which can be found within the DBA Directory. You can also use the designer's own website to have a look at the projects they have worked on; another option would be to gather tailored credentials, explaining who they have worked for and what they can offer you. Things to look for or think about are:

-
Have they worked on similar sized projects to yours?
.....
- Do they have similar types of client to you?
.....
- Have they, or do they, work with any of your competitors?
.....
- Do they have a range of outputs or are they all somehow similar?
.....
- What sort of experience do they have (just because they may be a new company does not mean that the owners and senior designers do not have vast experience)
.....
- Do you like what they do?
.....
- What information is available? Can you get a feel for who they are?
.....
- Can you get more information if you need to?
.....
- Do they measure what they do? How effective is their work? Do they tell you?
.....
- Have they won any awards? (especially design or effectiveness awards)
.....

At this point you are ideally looking to identify three to four designers who you feel confident would be able to help you and that you would like to take to the next stage. There are no 'rules' about how many designers you can see. However, bear in mind the more you see, the longer the process and the more work may be involved in communications with them. You can refer to the ISBA/IPA Good Pitch Site: www.thegoodpitch.com*

Next steps

Ideally the next step is to meet the designers you have shortlisted. You can do this informally or formally and this will depend on how fast you need to make a decision.

Asking them to meet with you informally to present their portfolio and talk through the project is often referred to as having a 'Chemistry' meeting. In meeting the designers you are learning more about them, how they approach you as a client, how they communicate and how they go about understanding who you are and what your business does. Visiting each of them, if you have the time, will be of huge benefit, however you will need to make time for this.

The pitch process is designed to formalise this and to allow a decision to be made as to who may be more suitable to undertake the project. You may decide to go for the more formal approach and organise a 'Credentials' pitch at this point (see section 4) but this will depend on your needs and preference at the time.

Alternatively, you could just ask them to write a proposal and send it in. Either way, there is more help and guidelines available in sections 2, 4, 5 and 9.

Chemistry

At the end of the day, you will need to work together as a team and this invariably comes down to 'chemistry'. Getting the best from your designers will be easy if you all get along and can work well together, there is little point selecting the highest scoring designers from the pitch process if you don't think you will get along! The pitch process is only a guide to help you find a designer who has the right credentials; can demonstrate that they can handle the project; and that best understands what it is you are trying to achieve, to the point where you start to work together.

*The Good Pitch is a joint industry initiative which brought together client and agency representative organisations to tackle the issue of pitching and best practice pitch processes. The Good Pitch microsite: www.thegoodpitch.com hosts outputs from the Good Pitch Taskforce including: 6 Pitch Principles for use by agencies and clients; results of research carried out regarding pitch practices; and an overview of the Pitch Alternatives identified.

If you don't find a designer straight away, go back to your lists and try another selection. Don't feel you have to select from your first pass. Too many projects have veered off plan because of the speed in the decision process that has resulted in having to pick someone unsuitable due to time constraints. If speed is an issue, then seek the help of a third party who has experience to guide or advise you. If you do not know of anyone ask the DBA or ISBA to suggest one of its advisers to help.

Asking for a proposal document

Depending on how confident you are with your selection of designer, you may just approach them to develop a formal proposal response to your brief. You can in fact ask all the designers you have seen to respond if you have not selected one but this will mean more work. There are proposal scoring templates and feedback pro formas in section 7 and 8 to help you manage this process. The proposal document can be used as a way of engaging in a conversation, a negotiation or as a way of selecting the final designer. This subject is covered in more detail in Section 9.

Final decision

Once you have arrived at your final choice for the designer you wish to work with and regardless of the process used to get to the decision, make sure you have allowed enough time to give feedback to the unsuccessful designers. There are pro formas in section 7 that will help you to organise the information used to feedback. The feedback is important to the designers as they will have spent time and effort working up their proposals as well as any time spent meeting with you. They will want to know why they were not awarded the job so that they can use this information to improve their performance next time.

Feedback is also important as you may decide to ask some of the designers to pitch again for another project in the future. They can learn from their experience with you and decide if you are a client that they would like to work with, and therefore decide whether to go through the process again in the hope that they are successful the second time around. This is as much about your brand as it is theirs!

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.