

A free step-by-step guide for small businesses

# Finding and working with a designer



We have created this free guide to explain the process of finding and working with a designer – focusing on your needs and ensuring you get the most out of the project.

Over the next six chapters, we will cover:

- How to find a designer  
which includes links to directories of UK designers
- How to choose a designer  
things to bear in mind if you want to make the right decision
- How to agree budgets and costs  
getting the most for your money without exceeding your budget
- Writing a brief and getting the project started  
helpful tips for defining and running a successful project
- Working with your designer  
useful advice for making sure the project stays on track
- Completing the design project  
making the most of everyone's hard work

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If you've never commissioned a designer or design consultancy before it might well be hard to know where to start looking and how to select the best one for the job. It's worth saying at the outset that, because all projects are different – and because the design process itself should be a flexible one – there is no absolutely carved-in-stone way to approach working with a designer.

However, there are definitely a number of things you should think about before undertaking such a project – and the purpose of this guide is to outline these considerations, leaving you well-prepared to make the process beneficial and, hopefully, enjoyable.

The guide draws on the experiences of people who have commissioned designers for the first time themselves, giving real-life context to the advice, so you can learn from people who've already done it.

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## Case study

### **How can design help your business?**

This free Design Council guide assumes that you have already decided to appoint designers to help with some aspect of your business. As a result, the information contained within it is designed to help you prepare for the process.

If, however, you have yet to make such a decision and would like to learn more about the various ways that design could help your business, or what specific design disciplines offer, we recommend you have a look at the [☞ Design Disciplines](#) section of this website, or the Design Council's [☞ Designing Demand](#) website.

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# How to find a designer

## In this chapter we will outline:

- Four different approaches to finding a designer
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## Finding a designer

There are several ways to find a designer. For instance, you might want to search a directory of UK designers and design consultancies.

As a government-funded organisation, the Design Council must remain impartial, and is therefore unable to recommend individual designers or design businesses.

However, we are able to recommend the following organisations, which offer a Yellow Pages-style resource of UK-based designers and consultancies, grouped by discipline – e.g. graphic design, product design, web design, branding and so on.

- The Design Business Association: [www.dba.org.uk](http://www.dba.org.uk)
- British Design Innovation: [www.britishdesign.co.uk](http://www.britishdesign.co.uk)
- Chartered Society of Designers: [www.csd.org.uk](http://www.csd.org.uk)

Please note that you will need to register with the Design Business Association to use their directory, but that registration is free.

## Asking around

In practice, most people prefer a more personal route than a directory when looking for a designer, so other approaches are very common.

In the first instance, scouting around is a good idea. Ask friends or colleagues if they know of any designers whose work has been successful and who were reliable and productive to work with. Whilst you're not necessarily looking to commission friends or friends of friends, getting people you already trust to recommend designers they've worked with is a good idea. Personal recommendation is commonplace and acts as a kind of pre-vetting, which you wouldn't get when selecting designers from an impartial list.

## Looking around

It's also a good idea to try and find a few examples of existing designs, products or services that you believe are effective in their market and then find out who worked on the design – good work can recommend itself.

So, whether you're interested in branding work, packaging design, annual reports, a retail space or an office redesign, if you come across something good in the same area, then it's probably worth talking to the designers who worked on it.

## Talking to a middleman

Another approach is to bring in an intermediary who knows the design industry well and can help set up introductions to a few designers who may be appropriate.

This person might also help you prepare information about your business and focus your objectives into the beginnings of what will become a design brief – a document which lays out in writing what you are commissioning your designers to do and what you need to achieve.

### **Crispin Clay**

Co-founder, Munchy Seeds

'My wife and I started the business eight years ago with no training in marketing, branding and so on, so we're learning as we go. We met with a consultant called Rob Waddell who helped us structure a brief. At first we said 'Rob, we've never done a brief before – a brief for what?' He explained the importance of telling the designer about our product and business. After we'd done that he then spoke to a few design consultancies and invited three for interview.'



Read the Munchy Seeds [case study](#)

Intermediaries may well specialise in a particular area, so if you can find someone who knows your market and knows which designers are skilled in that area, they could prove doubly useful. There's also a Design Week article discussing the merits of using an intermediary, which can be found [here](#).

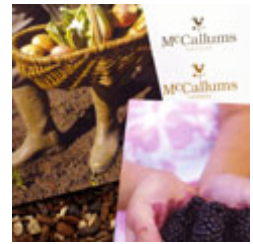
### **In more depth**

For more information about what a design brief is and how to go about writing one, [read chapter four](#) of our guide

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### How the McCallums found a designer

The McCallum family runs their own fruit farm and farm shop in Doncaster. They found a designer with the help of a design expert at [Designing Demand](#), a business programme run in their area by South Yorkshire Business Link.



A design expert appointed by the Designing Demand programme helped them write a brief for a couple of local design agencies then choose Sheffield-based Vivid Creative to work with on a brand identity project.

The McCallums are really pleased with the results and with the relationships they built up during the project. 'It has been a very good experience,' says farm manager David McCallum. 'It has really taken our business up a level and given us a much more professional image.'

[Read the full story](#) of how McCallums found and worked with a designer

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# How to choose a designer

In this chapter we will outline:

- Things you should consider before meeting with a designer
  - The importance of personality in a good working relationship
  - What you need to know about a design pitch
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## Choosing a designer

You may already know which designer you'd like to work on your project. If so, great - you can get on with pinning down the details of the design work. But if you're finding it trickier to choose one designer or consultancy from those you've found, here are a few tips on making the final decision.

As a starter it's definitely worth trying to see two or three different designers to get an idea of how well you'll work together. It is also invaluable to prepare as much information as you can for this first meeting because it is then that you'll get a sense of how the designers react to your objectives, your business and its requirements.

A good designer or design consultancy should try and extract information about all aspects of your business, so it's worth to having all the details to hand. Things you are likely to discuss in this initial meeting can include:

- Your products
- Your customers
- The size of your business
- Its financial performance
- Your competitors
- The reason behind your decision to commission a design project
- What you hope the outcomes of the project will be
- The business's or product's current position in the market
- Your aspirations
- Your ideas for growth
- A long-term vision

Thinking through these subjects in advance and preparing the necessary information will be really helpful and will make the meeting with the designers a lot more productive.

Crucially, you should have a clear business case for the work you're looking to undertake, as Jonathan Gold, founder of baby products brand Brother Max, explains:

### **Jonathan Gold**

Founder, Brother Max

'It's my job to give a huge amount of information about my customers, who I know best. The business has to provide enough information to allow the designers to understand and create relevant stand-out in the market, so I did a handover presentation to (design consultancy) Bloom rather than the other way around.'



Read the Brother Max [case study](#).

## **Personal chemistry**

At the first meeting you're likely to be getting a feel for how the designers relate to you and your business and how you relate to them. Make sure you see a selection of their previous work – known as a portfolio – to ensure that it's appropriate and of a high enough standard for you. You may also want somebody who has previous experience in a relevant market, so look out for that.

Also remember that a big factor in the selection can be based on gut feeling and personal dynamics. This is perfectly valid. The truth is that many contracts are sealed on this type of relationship. And it makes sense, because it's going to be much more fun to work with someone you like and feel you can trust than someone with whom you feel less comfortable, even if they have a higher profile or lower fees.

### **Jonathan Gold**

Founder, Brother Max

'Most decent consultancies will do a good job, so it's about people: can I work with them? The creative process is all about communication: firstly between a business and its design consultancy and, ultimately, between that business and its customers or users. And really good communication is likely to come from good personal chemistry.'



Read the Brother Max [case study](#).

It may sound obvious, but in any good design process you'll be talking a lot and it should be enjoyable and open, so ensure you get on well.

### **Robin Baker**

Ecobrand

'You have to find a rapport to let the ideas flow. Not everyone out there does that.'



Read the Ecobrand [case study](#).

## What is a design pitch?

A pitch is the way a designer or consultancy will attempt to win your project. There are two main ways they can do this: they can present you with a portfolio of previous work, explaining how their experience and skills would be relevant for your requirements. This is called a credentials pitch or presentation and it is the quickest way to get a feel for what a particular designer can bring to your business.

The second possibility is that the designer puts together some initial creative ideas for your specific project, based on the request for ideas (or brief) you have given. This is called a creative pitch or presentation. A creative pitch is more likely to be used in a second round of meetings to help you decide which designer has the best ideas and so whom to appoint to the job.

Remember: it is agreed good practice to pay the designers for any time they spend preparing creative work and you should not expect them to undertake such work for free.

So, if you'd like to see some initial creative responses to your project you'll need to factor in to your budget, say, a day's worth of time for each designer who will be making a creative pitch. The designers will be able to tell you what their day rates are, so you can work out whether this is feasible.

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### Personal chemistry at Mrs Massey's

When Nicola Massey, a nurse turned chutney-cook, started making so many jars of chutney her husband was kept up all night sticking on labels, a close friend realised there was great commercial potential to be tapped with the help of the right design agency.



Adrian Collins, Managing Director of Ziggurat Brands, already knew Nicola Massey well so he was able to start designing a brand identity for her products that reflected her personality.

Nicola Massey is impressed by the results this relationship brought. 'Sometimes you don't need a picture of yourself for something to be instantly recognisable,' she says. 'They had captured me completely: the pink, the humour, the use of the utensils in the design. It's unmistakably me.'

[Read the full story](#) about how personal chemistry with her design agency of choice helped Mrs Massey's brand design project work well.

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# How to agree budgets and costs

In this chapter we will outline:

- The value of a well-run design project
- Getting the most for your money
- What to expect from your designer
- Planning for extra costs

## Seeing design as an investment, not a cost

Spending money on a well-run design project is an investment in your company, not a commodity cost. If you're running a business which has never previously commissioned design it may be hard to see it that way. But it's likely to make for a smoother, more productive (and possibly cheaper) project if everyone involved views the expenditure as an investment, with positive effects for your business. For some people, this may require a shift in mindset and it may fall to someone in your business to champion the design project to other members of staff and management.

### Simon Meek

Director, Okayso

'The really big shift, mentally, is to see the project as having a definite business case and not just as a load of old arty stuff.'



## Be upfront about your budget

Initial discussions about budgets and costs ought to take place at the first meeting. If you have absolutely no idea what you need to spend then it may be a case of requesting three proposals or quotes, as you might with a plumber. Either way, it is beneficial for everyone to be up-front about your available budget.

The designers may not be able to give a completely accurate estimate of costs until they have a more structured brief in place, but once they know your requirements and how much money you have they can prepare a proposal for you to look at and consider.

- Agree with your designers how they inform you about any additional costs they may incur
- Design fees are usually quoted as an estimate, fixed price or on a 'price-not-to-exceed' basis

Although some of the bigger design consultancies may have a minimum project fee, many designers can - and often will - accommodate smaller budgets rather than dismiss a project entirely. But it will help if everyone has a clear understanding of how much money is available and a realistic idea of what could be achieved with it.

## Find out where your money is going

Equally, you should expect any proposals from your designers to include a detailed breakdown of all their charges, including standard day rates, possible additional fees and what is and isn't included, as Harriet Plyler, editor of Good Schools Guide International, explains:

### Harriet Plyler

Editor, Good School Guide International

'For our website, (design consultancy) CogApp gave us a total proposal and we took some elements out to stay within our budget, but overall design was not sacrificed at all. The consultancy stayed on budget really well and kept me abreast of what was going on. Then we would negotiate as we went through the project and they would do each bit.'



Read the Good Schools Guide International [case study](#).

## Planning for extra costs

It may also be worth reserving some of your total budget for additional requirements that could develop either during or at the end of the design project.

Things such as marketing, public relations and production costs will not typically be part of the design fee but may be a necessary corollary of the design work you're undertaking. For example, a full company rebrand will require the production of new stationery, business cards, marketing materials and so on. Alternatively, a new product development may require significant changes to a production or manufacturing process. Such costs would fall outside the creative design work itself (unless you've agreed otherwise and the consultancy can do it for you), so think about this early on if possible.

### **Kate Jones**

Co-founder, Gillies Jones Glass

'There was a tight budget of around £4000 and we set this out at the start. The designers then explained to us what all the extra costs might be, such as building the website, using public relations and so on. So I was able to work out how much I needed to invest initially and how much would be needed at later stages too. But we stayed on budget all the way through.'



Read the Gillies Jones [case study](#).

Your designers may well have the expertise to offer different ways of keeping your production costs down too, as design consultancy CogApp did for Good Schools Guide International:

### **Harriet Plyler**

Editor, Good School Guide International

'For our marketing materials I said "Can you do it for this amount of money?" and the designers said "No". So I shopped around and got some low prices, but in the end CogApp advised me on how to keep my costs down using their knowledge of printing. I did a lot of the legwork and checked out paper stock, brochures and websites and so on. This kept the costs down and allowed me to use CogApp for the marketing materials as well as the website.'



Read the Good Schools Guide International [case study](#).

The Design Business Association breaks down design costs into three areas:

- Design fees - quoted in advance; usually related to the amount of time a consultancy will spend on a project and probably charged at a daily rate
- Expenses - costs such as travel and accommodation incurred by the consultancy in connection with the job
- Implementation costs - payment for materials and services used to complete the project (this could include printing, and costs from suppliers such as photographers or shop fitters)

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## Budget upfront

Borderfields, a Northumberland-based farming collective, made sure its budget of £15,000 was clear upfront before it embarked on a design project.

It needed a design agency to work on a new name for its rapeseed oil as well as a bottle, label and brand identity that could be used on a website and in shops. Newcastle-based NE6 Design took up the task.



It took around eight months to complete the design stage but the results since its launch in September 2006 prove design is an investment in the business, not a cost. Oleifera, the new rapeseed oil brand, exceeded its forecast case sales of 20-25 per week by 145%, with actual sales of 55-60 cases per week. Each case contains 12 bottles. So rapid has the business expansion been that Borderfields outgrew its production facility and had to move to new premises in April 2007.

[Read the full story](#) about how Borderfields managed budgets to complete a design project

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# Writing a brief and getting a project started

In this chapter we will outline:

- What is meant by the term 'design brief'
- Things to consider when writing your brief
- Deciding who is going to work on your project

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## What is a design brief, anyway?

A brief is basically a set of instructions that set out what you want your designers to do, along with the objectives and parameters of the design project.

It should make clear what falls within – and outside – the scope of the work. This will help everybody refer back to where they started and make sure that the design work is developing according to your objectives.

It will also help you determine how successful the project has been when you reach the end.

### **Crispin Clay**

Co-founder Munchy Seeds

'The process that (design consultancy) Ziggurat put us through was fantastic to extract the info their designers needed. But to save time it is definitely good to have some sort of brief in place, whether you do that yourself or get someone to help you.'



Read the Munchy Seeds [case study](#)

Unfortunately, all too often briefs are agreed verbally – but a well-considered brief can act as a general grounding document if the project appears to be heading in the wrong direction, so it's well worth putting something in writing.

And remember, the brief isn't carved in stone; it can be adapted as you go along, as long as it's done in collaboration with everyone involved and the new version is also written down.

In short:

- Make sure you agree a brief at the start of the project
- Write it down and make a copy for you, your designers and anyone else involved
- Change the brief as the project progresses if necessary, but do so by agreement and make a new document

### **Kate Jones**

Co-founder, Gillies Jones Glass

'We had a brief written down after a number of conversations and emails with (design consultancy) Thompson, so it was a collaborative process to create it. We had to pin down the core of what it was we wanted and Thompson understood the problem and essence of what we needed within a few minutes of coming to meet us.



Read the Gillies Jones [case study](#)

## Writing a brief

Ideally, the brief will contain all the information about your business, its objectives and the rationale behind the design project that you talked about when first meeting your designer. The brief should also contain your investment expectations and timeframes. Here's a checklist of some of the things you might want to include in your brief:

- **Business background**  
customers; strengths and weaknesses; strategic objectives; competitors and existing marketing
- **Project objectives**  
what you want to achieve and how the design will be used
- **Constraints on the design**  
to fit with any existing designs or parts; specific technical or legal requirements; manufacturing processes needed; what is inside and outside the project's scope and any environmental issues
- **Creative direction**  
style; materials; tone; mood; communication and usability
- **Project management**  
budgets; schedule and deadlines; details of the team or person liaising with the designers and managing the project and how success will be measured at the end
- **Intellectual property (IP)**  
establishing who owns IP rights to the designs being produced – for more information, read our article on [Intellectual Property](#) by Iain Stansfield.

## Jonathan Gold

Founder, Brother Max

'Working as a designer gave me a unique insight. You sit at one side of the table thinking you know what the client wants. But as the owner of a business I now think there are things I missed as a design consultant.'



Read the Brother Max [case study](#)

The brief might also start to give direction on the more creative aspects of the design work, such as style, mood or tone for graphic work, or perhaps materials, finishes and ergonomic requirements for a product design.

Once these types of details are being discussed and written down you may start to refer to the document as a design specification. This is something that takes the objectives of the brief and works them into a specific design route to be explored and perhaps prototyped and tested. A number of different design specs may emerge from your original brief before you settle on a final idea.

## Who's going to work on your project?

You are going to be talking to your designers quite a lot during the design process so it will help enormously to determine who in your organisation will manage the project and who else needs to be kept up to date with what's going on. In larger organisations top-level executives should be involved regularly to avoid snarl-ups later on if management doesn't like what's come out of the design process.

It is extremely helpful if senior management can see the amount of work that goes into a well-run design project so they understand the value of their business' investment and where it is being spent.

Whoever is managing the design project (assuming it's not the managing director) should provide this regular link to top management. Alison Wright, managing director of Easy Living Home, explains how important this was in her work with plumbers' merchants Graham:

## Alison Wright

Managing Director, Easy Living Home

'If the guy at the top of the company missed a meeting then they wouldn't know the detail of the process and this would end up derailing it. So I said "no more meetings unless everyone is there".'



Read the Easy Living Home [case study](#).

If possible, it's also helpful to involve other people who will be directly affected by the new designs, maybe gathering feedback along the way. This includes employees, but

may also extend to external partners, such as distributors or manufacturers. As with any changes affecting a business, it's important to get a sense of involvement and 'buy-in' from the people involved, especially for branding projects.

### **Simon Preece**

Account director, Elmwood design consultancy

'In a small businesses which hasn't used design before, it's very important to have a champion with some authority or the process can easily run aground. And when you start to articulate a brand, you need a good representation of people from across the company to see it. Everyone needs to understand the brand's birth, development and creation.'



Read the Filthy Food Company [case study](#)

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### **Making briefs fit**

Hilary Boys, Strategic Planning Director, Lewis Moberly worked with Kingsdown water on a new bottle and brand identity.



She shared some of her tips for developing a design brief that fits and is fit for purpose.

- Clients brief are usually words, but words are 'fat' - they are very open to interpretation. If your brief says 'contemporary' give some examples of what this means to you.
- Designers are always hungry for visual stimulus - eg; what has your brand looked like in the past and why, where does your brand come from, what other support do you give the brand (eg; advertising or promotion), what do the competitors look like - feed them!
- If you have a budget for the design process and for the unit cost of the pack let the consultancy know at the beginning of the process.

[Read the full story](#) of how Kingsdown made sure its brief fitted

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### **Want to know more technical details about design briefs?**

[Read our article](#) from design brief expert Peter Phillips who explains

- What should be in a design brief
- Who should be involved in writing it
- Some of the lingo used in design briefs

You can also watch some videos of Phillips talking about design briefs. These include:

- [An explanation of how one SME made a design brief work](#)
- [Phillips answers some of the questions he's frequently asked about design briefs](#)
- [And he analyses one example of a design brief.](#)

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# Working with your designer

In this chapter we will outline:

- Getting involved
- Understanding the creative process
- What to expect from your designer
- Planning for extra costs

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## Working with your designer

Working with a designer may be an unfamiliar process. Unlike the suppliers of many other services to your business, designers will need to work with you creatively to achieve the best results. This means that one or more members of your business will need to invest time and thought in the process, liaising regularly with the designers.

On the other hand, if you're already familiar with this type of creative work the difficulty may come not from investing enough time, but in relinquishing some control and allowing the designer to take overall creative responsibility.

Either way, it is worth bearing in mind that this is a collaborative process aiming to achieve what you have set out in your original design brief.

## The creative process

One of the most important things to realise about the creative process is that it is iterative – this means that ideas will be developed, tested, refined, then passed around for feedback and discussion a number of times.

Ideas may also be dropped as part of this process. This type of cycle is an essential part of good design and it will involve a time commitment from whoever is managing the project.

Any given design may also move through a number of different stages, such as:

- Concepts – initial options and ideas
- Design development – refining a chosen concept
- Evaluation – testing and reviewing the design
- Implementation – production to launch

If you haven't worked through such a creative process before it may be tempting to think you should be able to tell the designer what you want so they can go away and produce it, delivering the finished article back to you a few weeks later. But the results from working like this will almost certainly be poorer - and the process less interesting - than if you engage with the development.

Design is not a completely black and white process, but nor is it a dark art to be left to entirely to the 'creatives'. Getting into the process is not only essential, it's also fun.

### **Crispin Clay**

Co-founder, Munchy Seeds

'I enjoyed the creative process. The designers were very good at interpreting what we were harping on about. The actual creative guys were in the workshops with us and we were bouncing ideas off each other which was great. It takes a long time, but you don't want big gaps in between trips, so it's always fresh in your mind. They were very good at holding our hands, as any good consultancy should, but if you don't like a route make sure you quiz them hard.'



Read the Munchy Seeds [case study](#).

Alternatively, if you work in a creative environment yourself and are used to this type of process, you may find it hard to give up your control over the design development. But if you want to get the most from your designer's skills and input you will also need to leave space for their judgements and creative ideas. Gillies Jones co-founder Kate Jones found herself in this situation:

### **Kate Jones**

Co-founder, Gillies Jones Glass

'It was quite a scary process and I found it hard to let go of control; it was well outside my comfort zone, but this is a really good thing and it was good process to go through. You need to give up some control to get some objectivity and see how others perceive you and your business. It's a very valuable thing to do. We went through lots of iterations of the identity, so we could pick out elements we liked and didn't like. The whole process took about a year.'



Read the Gillies Jones [case study](#).

When approaching the creative process, remember:

- It doesn't make sense to buy design as a commodity
- You need to develop creative ideas in collaboration with your designer
- Design is an iterative process: prepare to invest the time to work through different routes
- Try not to control every aspect of the creative process – trust your designers to use their own skills and judgement

## Talking the talk

As part of this creative process, a number of businesses find they come up against certain language barriers when trying to explain what they want, as well as in trying to understand what the designers mean.

As with most professions, designers may use a set of terms that you would never normally come across. Such technical terms and shorthand phrases have been adopted to help them work more effectively, but you shouldn't be expected to understand immediately.

### Harriet Plyer

Editor, Good Schools Guide International

'Never be intimidated by design professionals just because you don't know the jargon and the language. As a client you don't need to know everything about colour and design. Ask basic questions about colour – ask friends if they have a good eye. If something does not make sense, ask what's meant. And have a sense of humour during the process. Don't think the atomic bomb is going to go off if you screw up.'



Read the Good Schools Guide International [case study](#).

You should also be prepared to describe your reactions to design using language that may be different from how you'd speak about other areas of your business. It may need a more emotional response, or it may be helpful to make use of comparisons with other designs you've seen when explaining what does and doesn't work for you, as Okayso director Simon Meek explains:

### Simon Meek

Director, Okayso

'The more literate you are, the better the work you'll get out of it. Even if you're only pointing at a painting or something in a book. The more you know about design the more confident you can be in speaking to your designer and pushing them.'



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### The creative relationship

Building a strong relationship with the designers at the agency they had chosen to complete a product design project was crucial for knife-manufacture Harrison Fisher.



Sam Hecht from Industrial Facility worked closely with Harrison Fisher Managing Director Alastair Fisher. Having worked with large corporations, Hecht found it was a very different experience working with a small family-run firm. 'It was odd, but odd in a good way. This sort of company is able to propel itself forward and take certain risks that would be very difficult in a larger company with many different people trying to build a level of consensus.'

A very close relationship has developed between the company and Hecht. He has come to play a key role in the development of new products because of his fine understanding of the company's production capabilities and also because of his respect for Alastair Fisher's industry knowledge.

[Read the full story](#) to find out how relationships between designers and business can work.

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# Completing the design project

In this chapter we will outline:

- Getting ready to implement your new designs
- Assessing the results
- Measuring your successes
- Assessing the project itself

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## An end in sight

Once you've worked through the stages described in the previous chapters you'll be very close to having your final set of designs. Congratulations – hopefully the process produced just what you were after and was interesting and fun too.

Now that you have your new branding, office space design, website, packaging, product or whatever it may be, you'll need to think about producing and putting it into action.

## Implementing your new designs

After the creative work is completed the next stage is to begin implementing the designs, either through printing, manufacturing, interior construction, website coding or whatever, according to the nature of the project.

Your original brief should detail whether implementation is something that your designers will work on or whether their part in the project is now signed off and the implementation is handled separately.

It's worth bearing in mind that designers will often have skills and knowledge of implementation processes that may be valuable and could save you money; in some cases they may even be able to handle the implementation themselves. On the other hand, implementation companies such as printers may well be cheaper.

Either way, this should be discussed at the start of the project when the brief is being written, so that when you reach this stage it is clear what happens next regarding implementation.

## Assessing the project

There are many different ways that you can assess how effective your design project has been for the business, but the easiest way to clearly check whether you have met your own objectives is to refer back to your original brief.

Remember, the level of thought, planning and detail that goes into this brief will determine how easily you can see if you've achieved what you set out to.

And as simple as it may sound, the brief may also help to indicate when the project has come to an end and should be signed off. As with any incremental and iterative process, designing could go on indefinitely, with more and more tweaks and revisions, especially if you're not clear whether you've achieved your objectives.

For example, a new product may benefit from further revisions after it's launched, but are such revisions within the scope of your original brief or should they be undertaken as a separate design project, further down the line? Constant revisions could become expensive or result in grumpy designers (or both), so make sure you know when you've completed the work.

## Measuring design success

As success is relative to what you set out to achieve not all measures will be applicable to all projects. Also, different types of design will have different objectives - an office interior design may aim to make the workplace more efficient and inspiring, while a packaging design may aim to reposition a product on supermarket shelves. But with any project there will probably be a combination of hard and soft measures that you can use to assess the effectiveness of your designs.

- Hard measures could include profits, sales figures, contracts secured or number of units produced
- Soft measures could include customer and supplier feedback, shifts in the consumers' perception of your brand, changes in market positioning, competitors' reactions and general reactions to the designs

### **Crispin Clay**

Co-founder Munchy Seeds

'It's still early days, but I think where we are now is a huge improvement on where we were, in terms of brand perception. It's certainly helped with the supermarkets – we've got a listing in Tesco after trying for a long while before, and we've got a trial in Asda too.'



Read the Munchy Seeds [case study](#).

## Assessing the process

As well as measuring the success of the actual design work, your business may also benefit from a formal evaluation of the way the design process ran, although this may be more applicable to larger organisations. Such a process evaluation could include:

- How the project was managed
- Whether it met timetables and budgets
- Whether relevant management/staff were sufficiently involved
- The suitability of, and working relationship with, the chosen designers
- How processes could be improved for future projects

All in all, a design project should be enjoyable, illuminating and beneficial. It is an investment that can bring fresh, objective insight into your business and improve its performance in the marketplace.

If you strike up a good relationship with your designer or consultancy, it is something that should continue for any number of years to come, to the mutual benefit of both businesses.

### Crispin Clay

Co-founder Munchy Seeds

'It was an enjoyable and hugely enlightening experience. Don't go into it being nervous or scared about it because there's no reason to be.'

Read the Munchy Seeds [case study](#).



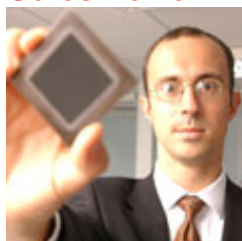
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## Inspirational results

The companies below all bought design and got great results.

But great results aren't just about making more money. For some, it is improved brand recognition that has provided the biggest return on investment. Others have been able to secure investment to help them develop their products or services after redesigning their offering.

### Ceres Power



Like all technology start-ups, Ceres Power needed funding to sustain research and product development. That meant convincing investors that its fuel cell technology was worth backing.

Design helped it do just that. 'We got our strategy straight in terms of target markets and improved our communications. It helped us communicate our ideas and our brand to get our technology

understood in the business community and attract investment,' says Ceres Power Commercial Director Bob Flint.

[Read the full story](#) of how design helped Ceres Power from two key investment partnerships.

### **Serious sh\*\***



Waste management business Envirotech found its customers were getting confused by competitors with a similar identities and it wanted to stand out from the crowd.

Managing Director, David Birkett attended a Designing Demand event about how design can help businesses and realised that branding was one way of increasing public recognition as well as improving other aspects of the business.

The new brand identity overcomes customer's inclination to snigger at the subject of waste management and is infinitely more recognisable. It's also difficult to confuse with other waste management firms.

[Read the full story](#) of how Serious\*\* stands out from the crowd thanks to design

### **Manchester Art Gallery**



After redesigning its exhibits in 2003, Manchester Art Gallery still found visitors were put off by its historic stone exterior and a disorientating route round the exhibits.

It employed a design agency to help it get more people through its doors. Sexier signs, maps that made sense, lighting that led and friendlier uniforms were designed to draw people in. And it worked.

The number of spontaneous visits rose by 180%, visitor numbers were up by 33.9% and complaints about signage and people getting lost dropped by 70%.

[Read the full story](#) about how Manchester Art Gallery redesigned wayfinding.

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A step-by-step guide for small businesses

# Finding and working with a designer: Case studies

## Brother Max



**Design services used:** Branding, packaging, identity and print marketing

**Designers:** Bloom

**Budget:** Undisclosed

### Who are they?

Brother Max launched in January 2008 with a range of simple, brightly-coloured products for parents of babies and young children, including bath toys, a 3-in-1 thermometer and high chairs.

### Why did they hire designers?

Brother Max founder Jonathan Gold wanted a design consultancy that could help develop a strategy for the brand, a visual identity and packaging designs.

### What did they need to achieve?

Launching to market, Brother Max needed to stand out strongly amongst competitor products, as well as attract the interest of potential investors. Visually, the brand was seeking to project the idea of 'simple clever ideas'.

### What did they do?

Bloom and Jonathan Gold collaboratively developed the brand's 'personality', overall visual style and colour palette, as well as packaging for the launch range of products. The identity also extends to the company's website and print advertising material.

### Top tip

#### Jonathan Gold

Founder, Brother Max

'Most decent design consultancies will do a good job, so then it's about the people. Ask "Can I work with them? Will they deliver?"'

#### Find out more

About Bloom at <http://bloom-design.com>

About Brother Max at [www.brothermax.com](http://www.brothermax.com)



# Easy Living Home



**Design services used:** Branding and interiors

**Designers:** Household and Easy Living Home

**Budget:** Undisclosed

## Who are they?

Graham is a plumbers' merchant and part of the Saint-Gobain Building Distribution Group, a leading European building materials distributor.

## Why did they hire designers?

Working with product designer Alison Wright of Easy Living Home, Graham wanted to launch a new service offering bathroom and shower products and designs that meet the needs of the widest range of users, covering all ages and levels of physical ability. Alison Wright brought in Household to create a brand and showroom design for the service.

## What did they need to achieve?

Living Works needed a visual identity and a showroom that would appeal to potential customers without alienating the core plumbing trade. It also had to convey aspects of inclusive design and occupational therapy without overtly targeting an older age group. Graham is planning to open 25 Living Works showrooms over the next four years.

## What did they do?

Household and Alison Wright first generated the name Living Works and its visual identity before using this to develop a retail showroom scheme dedicated to the brand. Every aspect of the scheme was designed to be inclusive: sales panels, print materials and graphics.

## Top tip

### Alison Wright

MD, Easy Living Home

'If the guy at the top of Graham missed a meeting then they wouldn't know the detail of the design process we'd been through and this would end up derailing it. So I said "no more meetings unless everyone is there".'



### Find out more

About Easy Living Home [→ www.easylivinghome.co.uk](http://www.easylivinghome.co.uk)

# Ecobrand



**Design services used:** Packaging and information design

**Designers:** Phelan Associates

**Budget:** Undisclosed

## Who are they?

Ecobrand creates and markets a range of health-related products that are sold in pharmacies and health shops throughout the UK.

## Why did they hire designers?

The company had sourced an ovulation testing product from Italy but needed to redesign the packaging and instruction leaflet to work effectively in the UK market.

## What did they need to achieve?

Calista had to appeal to UK consumers and health product retailers, as well as compete effectively with existing products such as Clearblue. It is also a product that requires a lot of explanation, so the design of the instruction leaflet was integral to the product.

## What did they do?

Phelan Associates and Ecobrand managing director Robin Baker worked through ideas for the naming, visual identity and packaging designs together. The consultancy 'took the product apart' and displayed it in a how-to-use flowchart on the pack.

## Top tip

### Robin Baker

Managing Director, Ecobrand

'A lot of people have a problem because they don't really know what they want from design. You have to know what you want very early on. You need to ask at the start - what is the project for? What are everybody's expectations?'



### Find out more

About Phelan Associates at [www.phelanassociates.com](http://www.phelanassociates.com)

About Ecobrand at [www.ecobrand.co.uk](http://www.ecobrand.co.uk)

# Filthy Food Company



**Design services used:** New product development, brand strategy, identity, packaging, website and marketing strategy

**Designers:** Elmwood

**Budget:** Undisclosed

## Who are they?

Filthy Food Company is a start-up brand launched in November 2007 to sell a range of 'indulgent' chilled desserts.

## Why did they hire designers?

Filthy managing director Simon Smith knew he wanted to launch a new food product, but wanted help to identify a gap in the market and develop a strong brand completely from scratch.

## What did they need to achieve?

The brand needed to receive a positive reaction from the supermarkets, as well as appeal to consumers. Because it was new to market it had to stand out strongly against competitors. Lacking sufficient money for a major advertising campaign, the product also had to be designed to grow through word of mouth and public relations.

## What did they do?

Elmwood and Simon Smith worked through the new product development process together, from initial research to branding, packaging, the website and public relations material. The whole concept was built around ideas of naughty, indulgent behaviour.

## Top tip

### Simon Smith

Managing Director, Filthy Foods

'I wanted to work through the brand creation together with Elmwood and I used them holistically throughout the whole project because they were so engaged in it. This was a very effective way of doing it and it's flown from day one.'

### Find out more

About the Filthy Food Company at [www.filthyfoodcompany.co.uk](http://www.filthyfoodcompany.co.uk)

About Elmwood at [www.elmwood.co.uk](http://www.elmwood.co.uk)

# Gillies Jones



**Design services used:** Brand identity

**Designers:** Thompson

**Budget:** ~£4000

## Who are they?

Gillies Jones Glass is a North Yorkshire-based duo – Stephen Gillies and Kate Jones - who create glass works as art pieces and under commission.

## Why did they hire designers?

The pair had been running the business for over a decade, handling all their design work themselves. According to Kate Jones, they felt they needed a fresh identity and wanted someone from outside the business to give a better perspective on what they might do.

## What did they need to achieve?

Changes in the branding needed to reflect the growing scale and range of the business. Specifically, Gillies Jones needed a stronger online presence with the ability to sell directly through the website.

## What did they do?

Thompson helped to define ‘the core of what we wanted’, developing a brand identity and set of brand guidelines to a tight budget.

## Top tip

### Kate Jones

Co-founder, Gillies Jones

‘We and Thompson didn’t always agree, so it was a matter of compromise from both sides in some respects, but you have to trust your designers; that’s why you’ve appointed them.’



### Find out more

About Gillies Jones at [www.gilliesjonesglass.co.uk](http://www.gilliesjonesglass.co.uk)

# Good Schools Guide International



**Design services used:** Website strategy, design and production

**Designers:** CogApp

**Budget:** Undisclosed

## Who are they?

Good Schools Guide International is a web-based resource of information on schools and schooling for expatriates, written by a network of parents and editors.

## Why did they hire designers?

The company wanted to build on the 22-year publication of sister title Good Schools Guide by developing an online service covering international English-speaking schools. According to GSGI editor Harriet Plyler, a design consultancy was needed to develop the structure and functionality of the site, as well as the look and tone of the brand.

## What did they need to achieve?

The website needed interfaces for the parent end-users, the businesses that employ them, GSGI administration and a network of GSGI editors. Visually, it also needed to present a GSGI brand identity in keeping with the target audience of expatriate families.

## What did they do?

An initial consultancy phase was undertaken looking at the project from different perspectives - business objectives, audience, content development, technical considerations and operational requirements. CogApp then developed specifications for the structure and look of website, which had to be 'fresh, clean, elegant and not cluttered,' according to Harriet Plyler.

## Top tip

### Harriet Plyer

Editor, Good Schools Guide International

'You are the client. If something isn't making sense, stop the designers dead in their tracks and make them explain.'



### Find out more

About CogApp at [www.cogapp.com](http://www.cogapp.com)

About Good Schools Guide International at [www.gsgi.co.uk](http://www.gsgi.co.uk)

# Munchy Seeds



**Design services used:** Branding, packaging and identity

**Designers:** Ziggurat Brands

**Budget:** £25,000 initially, rising to ~£100,000 with production and public relations costs

## Who are they?

Munchy Seeds is a Suffolk-based roasted seeds snack brand established eight years ago by husband and wife team Crispin and Lucinda Clay.

## Why did they hire designers?

'We'd lost a major roasting contract customer and our sales were failing, so we had to do something. In the end we did a complete rebrand across the board,' says Crispin Clay.

## What did they need to achieve?

Following the loss of the major roasting contract, Munchy Seeds decided to build awareness of its own brand products amongst both consumers and the supermarkets in order to secure more, higher profile listings in the big stores.

## What did they do?

Ziggurat and Munchy Seeds conducted workshops to learn about the product category and its consumers. From this they created a new look for the Munchy Seeds brand and its packaging. The design is based around a set of hungry animal characters modelled by hand and painted by a body painter. This branding was then applied to all of Munchy Seeds' marketing material, corporate stationery and website.

## Top tip

### Crispin Clay

Co-founder, Munchy Seeds

'Packaging of products has a life cycle and we'd run for seven years, so we'd probably left it a bit late; we should probably have done it two years ago. Refresh your packaging every four to five years. You can see why big brands and successful brands do keep changing.'



### Find out more

About Ziggurat Brands at [www.zigguratbrands.com](http://www.zigguratbrands.com)

About Munchy Seeds at [www.munchyseeds.co.uk](http://www.munchyseeds.co.uk)