

Using design to add value to your business

# Design Buyers' Guide



# The results speak for themselves



£26+

## Social return on investment

If you're a public sector organisation, you can make dramatic savings while adding value to services.



£4.12

## Net operating profit

With design at the heart of your vision and strategy, you can combine stronger turnover with greater efficiency.



£20+

## Net turnover

Combining a design approach with new customer insight means increased sales.



£5.27

## Net exports

A fresh perspective and innovative approach can open new markets.

## Foreword

Being a successful business in the UK today increasingly means adding value rather than cutting prices, and that's where design comes in.

Used effectively, design can help you anticipate what customers need, develop the right offering, get it to market fast and improve your bottom line. There's evidence to prove it. A recent survey showed that for every £100 design-led businesses spend on design, their turnover goes up by £225.

But getting full return on your design investment can mean having to find new ways of thinking and working – and often the hardest thing about doing that is making the first move. I hope this guide will help you to get the best out of working with a designer so that your business grows and thrives.

**John Mathers**  
Chief Executive  
Design Council

Would you like to learn how to become one of the success stories like those featured in this guide? If so, visit the Design Council website to learn more about joining the Design Leadership Programme.

[www.designcouncil.org.uk/leadership](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/leadership)



## Contents

01 Prepare yourself	03
02 Decide what skills you need	07
03 Set your budget	11
04 Choose your designer	15
05 Brief your designer	19
06 Manage your project	23
07 Measure your success	27
08 What next?	31

Design could be one of the best investments you ever make. But how do you get that investment right? How do you choose the right designer at the right price? How will the designer get to grips with the complexities of your business? How can you communicate what you want when you're not quite sure yourself? How will you manage a designer and how will you assess whether what you get is 'good' design or not?

These are questions businesses ask all the time about using design. This guide aims to help you answer them.

It features advice and practical tips on looking for design opportunities within your business, getting the right design help, drawing up design briefs, managing design projects and measuring the results.

# 01

## Prepare yourself

Remember, design isn't just a finishing touch. It's a process you can use to pinpoint and then overcome the challenges your business faces. Designers can help you shape your strategy and they can help you implement it through specific projects.

### Defining a project

Whether you decide to make long-term changes or just put together a brochure, it's important to arrive at your project by being clear about your company's needs.

### Think about your **vision and strategy**.

What do you want your business to achieve? How will technological change and emerging trends affect your future? How do you stand out from the competition?

### Research into your markets,

competition and emerging trends will bring key issues into focus. Some design agencies can help here, adding valuable layers of insight to the data accumulated by market research.

Take a close look at **your customers** – not just the people who use your products or services but buyers, distributors and retailers. What do they really want and need? Do you spend time listening to them to find out?

**Your process for developing products and services** may contain lots of design opportunities. How often do you launch new offerings and why? Are you reacting to competition or pre-empting it? How do you generate ideas and develop them?

**Your brand** is more than a logo. It's the sum total of all the things people associate with your product, service or organisation. It can get customers excited or turn them off before they come anywhere near what you're selling. Can you describe your brand? Can your staff, suppliers and customers describe it? Does your literature, website and premises reflect it? Do you have guidelines for using it consistently?

Finally, design can help you shape a **culture and environment** for your business in which staff feel valued, challenged and inspired to share new ideas. Your customers will notice the difference too.

## Case Study

### Kemtron

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“

More people in our marketplace now know who we are, and turnover in the two years since the re-branding is up 26%. I firmly believe our design investment was a significant factor.”

David Wall, Managing Director,  
Kemtron



**Sector**  
Manufacturing, engineering

**Design Associate**  
Neil Gridley

**Design Agency**  
Phelan Barker

**Investment**  
£20k

**Delivered**  
Company re-brand

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Ahead of opening a new sales office in France, Essex-based Kemtron needed a new product brochure and website.

But working with Design Associate Neil Gridley through the Design Leadership Programme and applying design thinking across the business, it went on to invest in a project to re-brand the entire company.

By bringing the quality of the company's branding in line with the world class quality of its products, Kemtron was able to better convey its strengths and turnover has risen by 26% over the two years since.



**World class product now  
has a world class brand**

# Prepare yourself

## Checklist

### The big picture

Where do you see your business in 2-5 years' time?  
What is your business good at?  
And what do you need to improve?  
What are the biggest threats to your business?  
What are the biggest opportunities?  
What is your competition doing?

### Project specifics

Why are you doing this project?  
Why now?  
How will the project help you to achieve your wider business objectives?  
What is the budget for the project?  
When do you need it completed?  
Who will be involved and how?

### Success

What will success look like for your company?  
How will your customer benefit?

# 02

## Decide what skills you need

The range of specialist design skills is wider than most people think, so look for designers who concentrate on specific areas of expertise rather than claiming to offer general services. Just as you wouldn't get a roofer in to fix your plumbing, you shouldn't hire a graphic designer to develop a product.

The designers that businesses turn to most, come under the heading of communications designers. Graphic designers deal with work such as brochures, stationery, direct mail, newsletters, annual reports and instruction manuals. Brand specialists work to communicate the essence of a company through elements like logo, typeface and colour palette. They use graphics to show the brand in action and create guidelines to ensure future materials are consistent. More than half of design clients say they've used these design disciplines in the last 12 months.

Next most popular, and used by nearly a third of clients, are web or multimedia designers.

They design online communications and other digital media.

**Product designers** focus on anything manufactured in three dimensions, from components to complete products. Often they focus on particular sectors, such as consumer products or medical devices, and some have engineering expertise in-house.

**Packaging specialists** focus on the container used to transport and display a product, including the labelling and protective covers. Some also handle point-of-sale displays.

**Innovation consultancies** work at a strategic level to develop new product and service ideas.

**Exhibition designers** help you show off your product or service or promote your brand in a temporary space, from a booth at a networking event to a stand at an international trade show.

**Interior designers** transform workspaces, offices and reception areas, though shop interiors are best left to retail specialists.

**Service design** is a fast-growing field centred on the customer experience and the resources needed to deliver a service.

## Case Study

### Fudge Kitchen

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“

We knew how to sell products and understood the market. With the help of the Design Council we now have the identity we need to back up our products.”

Sian Holt, Managing Director, Fudge Kitchen



**Sector**  
Retail, Food, Confectionery

**Design Agency**  
Ape Creative

**Design Associate**  
Gavin Pryke

**Delivered**  
Re-branding

Prosperity Brownies wanted to grow its business beyond its West Sussex base. To achieve this, it needed to re-design packaging to extend the shelf life of its products.

Working with Design Associate Gavin Pryke through the Design Leadership Programme, the company introduced new packaging that kept its brownies fresher for longer and which also conveyed its premium positioning and its ethical philosophy.

For only a modest design investment, a solid platform was created for future growth. Distribution in major retail chains was secured, along with the company's first export order.



**Re-branding secured contracts with exclusive outlets**

# Decide what skills you need

## Checklist

### Brand and communication projects

Corporate identity guidelines for creating or re-designing a brand, leaflets, signage, posters.

### Service projects

Developing a new service or improving the experience of an existing service.

### Product projects

New product development or product improvement, prototyping, testing, getting a new idea to market.

### Website projects

Launching a new website, improving the functionality or performance of an existing website.

### Interior projects

Trade exhibitions, sales environments, workplace environments.

### Skills required

Strategic branding, research, graphic design, illustration and photography, naming and copywriting, print production management.

### Skills required

Service design, usability testing, prototyping, information design, innovation consultancy.

### Skills required

Product and industrial design, 3-D design, model making and prototyping, ergonomics, packaging design.

### Skills required

Website design, multimedia design, graphic design, copywriting, usability testing.

### Skills required

Interior design, space planning, lighting design, signage.

# 03

## Set your budget

Just as there are different types of designers, design businesses differ too. They range from sole traders to large consultancies offering a range of skills under one roof.

How and what a designer charges will depend – as with any profession – on where they are based, their reputation and their experience. It will also depend on the kind of project – you might pay a fixed fee or an hourly rate for a straightforward brochure. But the fee structure will be more complicated for a major web overhaul involving junior and senior designers and a creative director or a sub-contracted external specialist, all charged out at different day rates.

In some projects designers are paid on a royalty basis, so that rather than a fee they receive a share of the revenue generated by their work. Payments can also comprise a combination of fees and royalties. Advice on structuring payments is available from organisations such as the Design Business Association.

Don't forget to budget for a pitch fee. If your project aims are very clear, you may want designers to present creative ideas for tackling the problem you want the project to solve. It's usual to pay a fee for the considerable time agencies spend generating concepts, as well as models or graphics.

A man with short dark hair, wearing a dark blue suit, a light blue shirt, and a yellow patterned tie, is sitting on a black leather sofa. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is an office with wood-paneled walls, framed pictures, and a clock. A red arrow-shaped graphic points to the right, containing white text.

**Creating new revenue  
streams from scratch**

A man with short dark hair, wearing a dark blue suit, a light blue shirt, and a yellow patterned tie, is sitting on a black leather sofa. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is an office with wood-paneled walls, framed pictures, and a clock. A red arrow-shaped graphic points to the right, containing white text.

**Successful diversification  
to help off-set recession**



# Set your budget

## Checklist

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Usually designers charge either a fixed fee for the whole project, or an hourly rate. Day rates for designers range from £200 to £1,500 per day depending on their specialism and how many years they have been practising. Designers are usually classified like this:

- Junior designer (1-2 years' experience)
- Middle-weight designer (3-6 years' experience)
- Senior designer (minimum 7 years' experience)
- Creative director.

### Quotes

The quote from your designer should detail a fee for the design work, expenses incurred during the project and the cost of producing what is designed. Make sure you are clear whether the following costs are included in your quote:

- Specialist equipment or skills
- Prototyping and testing
- Photography or illustrations
- Pitch fee
- Copywriting
- Intellectual property assignment
- Print and production
- Design changes
- Packaging
- Market research

# 04

## Choose your designer

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Choosing the right designer could take your business to a new level. But choosing the wrong one could lead to a costly and frustrating experience. So how do you get the choice right?

Personal recommendations together with referrals from business support agencies or trade associations are a good starting point. Also, look for designers with experience in your sector.

Next, invite no more than three designers to pitch. With a credentials pitch, the designer presents their portfolio, emphasising the work that makes them most suitable for your project. In a creative pitch, you're asking designers to present creative ideas to tackle the problem you want the project to solve, and you should expect to pay a fee for this. Either way, give the candidates an outline brief spelling out your project's objectives and your wider business goals.

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We've included a checklist and possible questions to use during the pitch. They will help you judge whether the designer can deliver. Weighing up the responses, try not to be tempted by a designer who reinforces your own thoughts or one who's already designed what you have in mind. Instead, study the thinking and methods behind their work.

Evidence of a track record in problem solving, exceeding clients' expectations and achieving bottom line success are better yardsticks than your personal preferences.

Finally, personalities matter. Could you work with them? You could be trusting the designer with the strategic direction of your business, so there has to be chemistry and mutual respect. The right solution to a problem often comes from a good rapport, but an awkward relationship can lead to time-consuming, expensive misunderstandings.

## Case Study

### White Logistics

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“

What's been most valuable about our experience of the Design Leadership Programme has been how our culture has changed: we now think far more strategically as a direct result.”

Judith Stracey, Managing Director,  
White Logistics

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**WHITE**  
LOGISTICS & STORAGE  
PROBLEM? SOLVED

**Sector**  
Logistics

**Design Associate**  
Ellis Pitt

**Design Agency**  
The Allotment

**Investment**  
Just under £40k

**Delivered**  
Company re-branding,  
services re-design,  
cultural change

Worcestershire family-owned haulage business, White Logistics & Storage Ltd, has a staff of 85, a fleet of 50 vehicles and a turnover of just over £6m.

White Logistics wanted to grow its business. But how best to achieve this in a competitive marketplace?

Working with Design Associate Ellis Pitt through the Design Leadership Programme, the company refocused its efforts and repositioned itself through branding and service design projects to better reflect its strengths and incorporate customer insight into new product development.

The move helped generate more than £500k of new business within just nine months. Meanwhile, a corresponding cultural change has made the company more strategic in its focus.



**Service re-design  
boosted customer loyalty**

# Choose your designer

## Checklist

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### Has the designer shown you that they:

- Have the right skills to take on the project?
- Can fulfil your requirements within your budget?
- Have the right experience?
- Understand your business?
- Understand your customer?
- Have a good track record?

### Ask the designer

- Why do you want to work on this project?
- How do you work with clients?
- Who would I be working with?
- How experienced are you?
- How has your work improved your clients' business performance?
- What process would you use on this project?
- Have you told me all the costs?
- Do you see any additional opportunities or potential risks?
- When does ownership of the design pass from the designer to us and what will happen to unused concepts or designs?

### Ask yourself

- Would I enjoy working with them?
- Is their work of a high enough standard?
- Have they asked the right questions?
- Would my project be important to them?
- Can they deliver on time, to budget and to the right standard?

# 05

## Brief your designer

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Designers are only as good as the brief you give them, so it's vital to get it right. At all stages of the design process the brief is the point of reference both of you can go back to for clarity.

The more thought you give the brief, the more likely you are to have a smooth running project with the right result. But, while you need to spell out what you want to achieve, don't be tempted to say what you think the design should be. The right solution will emerge from team work between you and the designer.

Start with the obvious. What do you do and who do you do it for? The designer needs to know and the simple process of getting fundamentals about markets and priorities down on paper could expose and resolve internal differences of opinion you never knew existed. Then move on to the project's objectives, timescales, deliverables and budget. If you can, state how the work will be divided into stages and assessed, and be specific about roles and responsibilities on your side.

While a brief should be relatively concise, don't assume knowledge. It's better to provide too much detail in the form of appended documents or signposts to more information than to leave possible question marks.

And don't be afraid to use emotive language in a brief if you think it will generate a shared passion about the project. Better to ask for 'an exhibition that stops people in their tracks' than 'an installation which communicates effectively and engagingly'.

A good designer will question the brief, so be prepared to have it challenged. In fact, in the most successful projects, designers often work with clients to develop and refine the brief.

## Case Study

### University of Nottingham – Heartlight

“

Introducing a strategic design approach is having a significant impact across a growing number of projects as we move them towards market.”

Dr George Rice, Technology Transfer Officer,  
The University of Nottingham



**Sector**  
Universities

**Design Associate**  
Neil Gridley

**Design Agency**  
Small Fry

**Investment**  
£25k+

**Delivered**  
Accelerated commercialisation process, strategic design approach, product differentiation

The University of Nottingham's in-house technology transfer office wanted to find a new way to tackle the challenges associated with successfully taking a new idea, technology or product from concept to market.

Working with Design Associate Neil Gridley, through the Design Leadership Programme, the university brainstormed the commercial potential of new technologies including Heartlight — a platform technology offering a new way to measure a person's heartbeat — to identify end user applications.

Having identified which products could be developed first, those with the highest potential value were identified then worked up into a proposition. By better articulating a clear product proposition, the university successfully secured additional development funding.



# Brief your designer Checklist

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## Company background

- What do you do?
- How long have you been doing it?
- How successful are you?
- What is the competition like?

## Project aims

- What do you want to achieve?
- Examples include:
- Sales growth, bigger market share, cost reduction,
  - higher profit margin, better brand awareness.

## Target audience

- Who is your customer?
- What does your customer think about your offering?
- What do you know about your market?
- What new trends might influence what your customer buys?

## Project specifics

- Who will be responsible for the project?
- Are there any technical or legislative standards or safety requirements?
- What delivery channels will you use?
- Who else will support the project and how?
- What is the time frame for delivering the project?
- What is the budget?
- What should it cover?

# 06

## Managing the design project

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Managing a design project is about more than briefing the designer and then leaving them to get on with it. You need to take a full and active part in the project if it's going to achieve the result you want.

That means taking key steps to make sure everything stays on time and on budget.

A good first step is to create a project plan elaborating in more detail on the timescales set out in the brief or any proposal document provided by the designer. Making this a joint exercise will ensure you have a common starting point and expectations, as well as setting the right collaborative tone for the project.

It's important that a single point of contact is available on your side at all times. The designer will need regular information and perhaps meetings to discuss issues as they arise, so don't give the job to someone who's going to be tied up or away for long periods during the project. If review meetings are missed, sign-off of the various stages of design work will be held up and deadlines will slip.

Build in review meetings for the designer to formally present concepts, models or mock-ups. Think carefully about who has final responsibility for signing

work off and who needs to see concepts beforehand. Ideally, these people should be involved as early as possible, preferably in drafting or approving the brief. That way, you're most likely to steer clear of unwelcome surprises and delays.

The same goes for anyone, internally or externally, who is likely to be involved in implementing the project, particularly if this means totally new disciplines, such as engineering or manufacturing, being adapted for the first time.

Try to review design work objectively rather than subjectively. For example, try to consider if the design work will help you achieve the aims you set out in the original design brief rather than being subjective and just saying, "I like it" or, "I don't like it". If you don't have clear enough aims in your brief then perhaps you need to add them e.g. is the design trying to help you reach new customers? Reach new markets? Innovate or position your company, your product differently? You may want to test your design with customers at some point too, and allow time in your schedule for changes based on their responses. It can really help refine the design to work best for your audience.

## Case Study

### Challs

“

From our initial investment of £40k in 2001, we spent £100k on design in 2011 and plan to spend a further £300k in 2012 – a huge percentage of our turnover – but that’s because we see design as a powerful growth engine.”

Graham Burchell, Managing Director,  
Challs International

## Challs

### Sector

Manufacturing

### Design Associate

Evan Kitsell

### Design Agency

Elmwood

### Investment

An initial £40k (2001)  
rising to £300k in 2012

### Delivered

Product re-brand

Challs International’s Buster range was struggling to stand out against larger rival brands. Working with Design Associate Evan Kitsell through the Design Leadership Programme, the company re-focused, streamlined and re-designed its Buster range.

With an initial design investment of £40k, an immediate 35% rise in Buster’s sales was achieved. This was followed by annual growth rates of 50% and 25% as major retailers began stocking Buster for the first time.

Challs, which has since up-scaled its annual design investment to £300k (2012) to ensure continuous enhancement of existing ranges and develop new innovative, design-led products, now hopes to double its business within three years.



**Packaging re-design more than doubled shelf life**

# Manage your project Checklist

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Agree milestones with your project team and plan in review points to monitor progress.

## **Project milestones**

- Prepare the brief
- Review design ideas
- Select final design
- Test
- Detail and refine designs
- Start production
- Launch
- Deliver
- Evaluate

# 07

## Measure your success

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The clearer the objectives in your brief, the easier it will be to measure the value of your design investment. If you get the increased take-up you wanted from your website, or if you reduce time to market through your new production process, then you know your investment has delivered.

Some projects are more difficult to gauge. How will you know when your corporate rebranding has succeeded? Or how can you be sure workplace culture has improved because of your office redesign? But even here it should be possible to agree some quantifiable measure so you can plot the project's effect on your business.

Some measures will be no different to ones you would use for any project. Did you meet the ultimate project deadline and the various deadlines you set in the project plan? If not, why not? Did you reach key milestones when you expected to reach them? Did you go over budget and, if you did, why did it happen? Did the project change? Did sign-off take longer than planned? Were there hidden charges you weren't expecting? Analysing the reasons for any mishaps will provide valuable learning for your next design project.

If this was your first design project, make sure you monitor its effects on internal relations or working practices. Taking on board new ways of thinking and working may have many unforeseen results beyond the measures of success set out in the brief. Decision making may become more effective, relationships among the team may alter and procedures for working with suppliers may improve.

## Case Study

### HMRC and Companies House

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“

For an initial investment of around £50k the project is expected to deliver between £500k and £5m of cost savings to UK businesses.”

Bill Pollard, Deputy Programme Director,  
Business.gov Programme, HMRC



**Sector**  
Civil Service

**Design Agency**  
Sean Miller

**Design Associate**  
thinkpublic

**Investment**  
£50k

**Delivered**  
Cost-saving online  
incorporation service

HMRC, Companies House and BusinessLink.gov wanted to create a more streamlined, customer-focused process for incorporating a new business that would benefit both customers and Government. But they were worried transformational change would be restricted by established approaches and conventional thinking.

With support from the Design Leadership Programme, HMRC worked with Design Associate Sean Miller to develop a new, design-led approach to service development based on customer research and prototyping ideas to embed innovation within the organisation.

Having clarified the issues, HMRC undertook a £50k project with design agency thinkpublic to define and develop an online incorporation service. The project also generated valuable fresh ideas HMRC can now draw on to enrich the service in the future.

A man with short brown hair, wearing a grey and red long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, is sitting at a wooden desk. He is smiling and looking at a laptop screen. His hands are on the keyboard. The background is a bright, out-of-focus window with white curtains.

**£5m potential savings  
for UK businesses**

# Measure your success

## Checklist & links

### Checklist

#### Project delivery measures

- Timing
- Cost
- Quality

#### Market measures

- Customer satisfaction
- Market share
- Brand awareness
- Differentiation

#### Company measures

- Increased sales/profit
- Reduced cost
- New markets
- New knowledge or skills
- Improved processes
- Improved staff morale and productivity

#### What have we learned?

- Did we solve the issue we wanted to?
- Can we see the value of our design spend?
- Have we learnt from the project?

### Links

#### Design Business Association (DBA)

A UK membership organisation for designers and other businesses. It runs an annual award scheme recognising projects with bottom line impact. Services include advice on choosing designers, managing projects, legal matters and other issues. The website includes case studies and a directory of designers.

[www.dba.org.uk](http://www.dba.org.uk)

#### British Design Innovation (BDI)

A membership organisation for designers and educators. Its website includes a directory of designers searchable by agency sector, location and size.

[www.britishdesign.co.uk](http://www.britishdesign.co.uk)

#### Chartered Society of Designers (CSD)

The world's largest chartered body of professional designers. Services include client matching.

[www.csd.org.uk](http://www.csd.org.uk)

# 08

## About us

### Design Council

The Design Council champions great design. For us that means design which improves lives and makes things better. As an enterprising charity, our work places design at the heart of creating value by stimulating innovation in business and public services, improving our built environment and tackling complex social issues such as ageing and obesity. We inspire new design thinking, encourage public debate and inform government policy to improve everyday life and help meet tomorrow's challenges today.

[www.designcouncil.org.uk](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk)

### Design Leadership Programme

The Design Leadership Programme is a national support programme to help organisations get the most out of design. We offer businesses, the public sector and universities a bespoke package of support and coaching to use design to innovate and grow. Our programme has led more than 2000 organisations in the private and public sectors to growth.

- It has turned around businesses in manufacturing, services, retail, and research and development
- It has transformed the way many local authorities deliver services in health, housing, communities and environment
- It has supported science and technology innovations to accelerate their ideas to market.

[www.designcouncil.org.uk/leadership](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/leadership)



If you have found this quick guide helpful and would like to learn more about what design can do for you and how our programme might help you realise your ambitions, why not get in touch.  
[leadership@designcouncil.org.uk](mailto:leadership@designcouncil.org.uk)

As an enterprising charity, the Design Council uses design to stimulate innovation in business and public services, improve our built environment and tackle complex social issues.

The Design Leadership Programme is endorsed by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Our business programme – ‘Designing Demand’ – is part of the Government’s Solutions for Business portfolio, supporting the growth of SMEs.

