

# BUSINESS SENSE

## Next Level Tools for Entrepreneurs & Small Business Owners



## MARKETING SERIES

### Creative Briefs

#### What is a Creative Brief?

A creative brief is a short 1 to 2 page document outlining the strategy for a creative project (i.e., logo, product packaging, print ad, social media campaign, etc.). A creative brief is a map that guides a design or advertising agency, or a company's internal creative team on how to best attain the goals of the initiative or campaign. At a design or advertising agency, the creative brief is usually created by the account manager in close consultation with the client, who can be the business owner or a delegate of the owner most often responsible for the marketing and sales activities of the business.

To that effect, it's an interpretation of the client's ideas and vision for the brand and the product.

In many instances, this brief is created by and for the agency, and is open-ended in nature. That said, this same tool may be used in-house by the business owner, led by a skilled marketing staff member to facilitate the process of defining the Creative Brief to attain the campaign goals. You can, and should, include anything and everything that will help the agency,

designer or internal creative team understand your brand and product better.

#### **Most creative briefs include the following:**

- A short **brand statement**. A brand positioning statement explains to customers the values, benefits and ideals of your specific brand. It is a complete strategy that implements different unique elements, such as a logo or slogan, to show why your business is better than the competition. For example: Amazon: *"For people with limited time in their day who want to reduce the stress of heading to the store or the mall to shop, Amazon has nearly everything you need all in one place. Plus, it delivers products to customers quickly, using a dedicated fleet of drivers."* Key takeaway: Amazon's aim is to be different through efficiency and customer convenience
- A brief overview of the initiative's background and objectives – or **project background**.
- Key challenges or insights that this initiative aims to resolve – or **project objective**.
- **Target audience** for the initiative with demographic/psychographic information.
- A list of chief **competitors**.
- Primary message describing the brand's values and market positioning – or **consumer message (your driving idea or single-minded thought) with key consumer benefit/s** and supportive statements that validate the benefit/s.
- **Communication channels** on which the initiative will be distributed. For example – website/s, social media channels, blogs, etc.
- **Advertising tone or brand voice** – in keeping with the brand positioning; for example, friendly, innovative, hip.
- **Advertising medium** – as applicable from print to digital, social networks to point of sale.
- **Mandatory elements** – as applicable to include trademarks, patented technologies, brand colors, etc.

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Essentially, the creative brief describes the “what” of the project (i.e., its’ objectives) and “how” to achieve them (i.e., the creative approach). A creative brief ensures that all creative messages are clear, consistent and “on brand” and gives the creative team that you’re working with a broad vision for your brand, business, and the project at hand. It should offer inspiration and serve as a jumping off point for brainstorming ideas as well. A creative brief reduces the potential of conflict by ensuring that you and the creative team/agency with whom you’re working are on the same page. It also serves to align your resources – time and money – and expectations with the creative media strategy or design solutions. Finally, creative

briefs are flexible in their content and design. The format simply needs to work for both you as the client and the creative team with whom you’ve partnered for the project.

### The Five Elements of an Effective Creative Brief

To write an effective creative brief, you need to focus on these five elements:

#### 1. Your Product

A creative campaign starts and ends with the product that you are selling. If you don’t understand the product and are unable to convey its’ attributes or benefits succinctly, you can’t expect your creative team to do a good job.

As the product’s owner, be prepared to educate your creative team by answering the following fundamental questions:

- What product are you advertising?
- What category does it belong to?
- Where is the product currently being sold?
- Where is it being advertised? Where will it be advertised in the future?
- What is the product’s current status in the market?
- What are the product’s existing brand values?
- How many variants are currently available?

Your goal is to map the product’s current brand perception. This will



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be a combination of factors, such as price, quality, perceived quality, etc. Be ready to provide sales reports, market surveys, and consumer data to help your creative team understand the product and your brand well.

### 2. Your Business

Your business and your product can often have a complex relationship. In some cases, the business brand might be completely independent of the product, particularly in larger businesses with multiple brands and products. In most other cases, the product and the business affect each other in a symbiotic relationship.

In developing your creative brief and working with your creative team, your goal should be to provide:

- An analysis of the business' brand perception.
- An understanding of the business' relationship to the product brand.
- A map of the factors affecting the business' brand perception.

### 3. The Market

The 'market' is a combination of the "Three C's":

**(1) Competitors** - their strengths, weaknesses, market position, and media strategy.

- Who are the product's and the brand's chief competitors?
- What is their market share compared to the product?
- What is the competition's marketing strategy? Where do they advertise?
- What kind of messaging and tone does the competition use?
- What kind of customers buy the competitor's products?

**(2) Context for the campaign** - political, social, and technological movements.

- How does the market currently see the product or its' category?
- Is there a cultural moment you can tap into to promote the product?
- What cultural values, ideas, or events can you align the product with?

- How is the economy doing? Is it a time for optimism? Or are people concerned with saving?

In a time of "personalization/customization" and "activist brands", businesses are increasingly aligning their products with social and cultural movements. Think of how you can tap into these biases or trends to create a better brand message.

**(3) Category** - how people see the product category.

- How do people perceive this product category? What factors affect this perception?
- Is there a change in people's perception of the category? Is this change positive or negative? What is leading this change?
- Are there any category conventions you can use in the campaign?

The Three C's have a marked influence on the campaign and must be considered in the creative brief.



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### 4. Your Customers

Your customers are the most important ingredient of the creative brief and of your business. In developing your creative brief be prepared to convey your deep understanding of your target audience, its wants, desires, and tastes. To do this, start by describing the following:

- Demographic data (age, sex, income, marital status)
- Other data (interests, aspirations, lifestyles, habits)
- What they think about the product and the brand right now (“boring”, “fun”, “not for me”, etc.) from your formal or informal research, social listening, comment cards, etc.
- What you want them to think about your brand (“change perception”, “shift frame of reference”, etc.)
- Frustrations, aspirations, life

needs, and shared beliefs you can tap into in order to interest them in your product and convert them to your brand

The purpose of all this data is to understand how to ignite the sparks that will motivate your target audience to buy your product. This action should align with the campaign’s objectives.

### 5. The Campaign

Every campaign has a specific goal, message, and audience. It’s not uncommon for brands to run several campaigns at the same time with different messages in larger businesses, or if products have a seasonal lifespan. As the project and/or business owner, your job is to convey the goals for this project/campaign so that the creative team can define the campaign’s strategy and approach.

#### In summary ...

Together you should be able to answer the following questions

within the context of the creative brief:

- What is this campaign trying to do? Increase awareness? Increase traffic? Get more shares? Be as specific as possible.
- What customer action would make the campaign “successful”? Fill out a form? Click a link? Call the business?
- What specific challenge is the campaign trying to address? State this in a single sentence. Example: “We want to advertise new features to get more trials.”
- What is your media strategy? Where will the campaign run?
- What is the chief message for the entire campaign?

Your collective goal in completing the creative brief is to find the “driving idea” for the project/campaign and how best to leverage it to achieve the intended results.

Business Sense is a no-fluff source of information that gets right to the heart of what small business owners need: essential tools and informational resources to help their businesses grow. Written by our team of business coaches, this series shares their decades of experience in areas such as financials, operations, sales and marketing, human resources, leadership, and governance. Business Sense is designed to provide entrepreneurs and small business owners in various sectors, including agriculture, forestry, waste management, renewable energy, and environmental technology, with recommendations and practical advice to help their businesses not only survive but thrive.

Our business management coaching and Business Sense Resource Guide are designed to accelerate the growth of the enterprises we work with and expand the leadership capacity of the entrepreneurs who own and manage these businesses.

## Let Us Help You and Your Business

The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund provides tailored business management coaching, entrepreneurial support, and training to position Vermont-based entrepreneurs and small business owners in our designated market sectors for growth and long-term success. We partner with state government, private sector businesses and nonprofit organizations to build a thriving economic, social and ecological future for Vermont. Learn more at [VSJF.org](https://www.vsjf.org)



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