

5 THINGS YOU SHOULD CONSIDER WHEN EMPLOYING A DESIGN AGENCY.



“CONTENT PRECEDES DESIGN.
DESIGN IN THE ABSENSE OF
CONTENT IS NOT DESIGN,
IT’S DECORATION.”



— Jeffrey Zeldman

best selling author, designer and speaker

1 | ARE THEY ANY GOOD AT MARKETING?

Why should a designer or design agency be competent at marketing, you ask? Well, what are you usually designing towards if not sales? There are other benefits, of course, but making more sales and expanding your business has to be uppermost.

That's why every design piece you commission should:

- a) be considered as marketing collateral.
- b) have a clear marketing message.
- c) have a place within a marketing strategy, to generate those sales.

Most clients we work with tell us of bad experiences with design agencies. Yet when we question them further, the problem was often of their own making. Either they briefed the designer incorrectly or they chose the type of designer or firm that is only really interested in how the work looks.

It's not enough. Any design agency you work with must be able to help you define the correct sales messaging and communication structure for your project. In particular they should assist you with the following:

- Identifying your target market (or markets) and the decision makers within the process.
- Supporting you in asking the right questions, checking the market research and looking at your competitors' communications to ensure that what you produce will have the right impact.
- Helping you define where best to place the message and what your potential client's needs or issues are and how you can solve them.

These steps are vital to focusing your message, reducing costs and making you stand out. They could also help you produce something completely different to what you had initially intended. Only when all this is done should the designer(s) apply their thinking towards the actual design.



2 | ARE THEY ANY GOOD AT ARGUING?

People and companies always buy 'the difference'. For instance, there are thousands of design companies in London so how can one of them stand out? They can all design, they can all produce a decent website or brochure, but what makes one of them stand out from the rest?

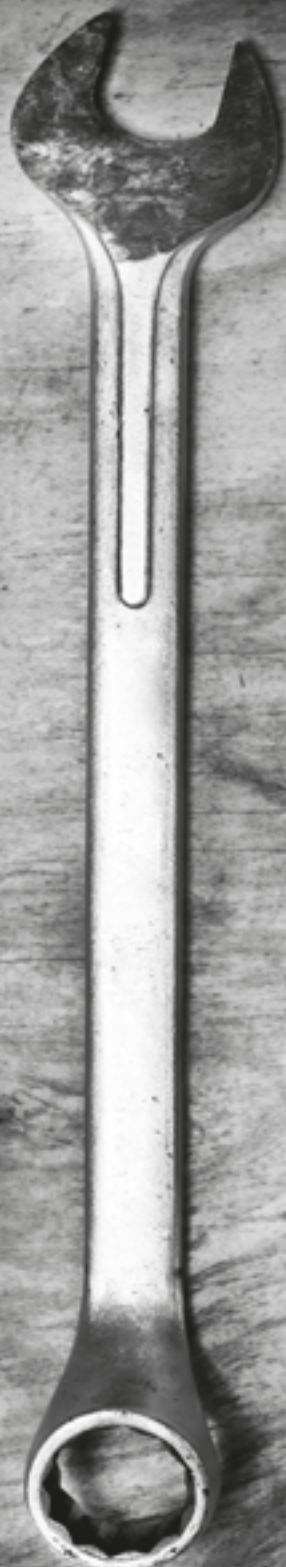
The same can be said about your business. Other companies may offer a similar product or service. No doubt they also offer great customer service and their clients work with them because they're great people! But what makes you different from them?

This is where a design agency must step in and help you define that difference, help you create a message that is unique to your target market and encourages potential clients to choose you.

This is even more critical within the B2B marketplace where the decision making process is fraught with fear. If your design company can't help you to stand out then the buying decision will come down to price, and there will always be someone cheaper than you.

So the chosen design agency must help you develop solid arguments around the benefits of working with your business. You won't please all of the people all of the time and your message will appeal to some more than others. But if you don't stand out from the crowd, you're still in it.





3 | CAN THEY FIX CYCLES?

It can take a while before a prospect finally decides to do business with you, yet during the interim they may interact with you many times. This is part of a sales cycle and it provides an opportunity to learn who to speak to within the organisation and how. After all, once you've sparked someone's interest you need to find ways to retain it and each piece of design or marketing has its place within this communication process.

There is no point sending out a beautiful new brochure that drives customers to a website that looks nothing like the design that attracted them in the first place. By denying the prospect what they expect to see you'll lose their trust as well as potentially losing the sale.

So your designers must focus on getting each of your brand's touch points working seamlessly together. This way your prospects and customers will enjoy a consistent experience of your brand which will gain their trust and potentially their business.

It may cost more than you planned but it could also increase sales dramatically thereby providing a healthier return on investment.

4 | ARE THEY CONFIDENT ENOUGH TO SAY NO?

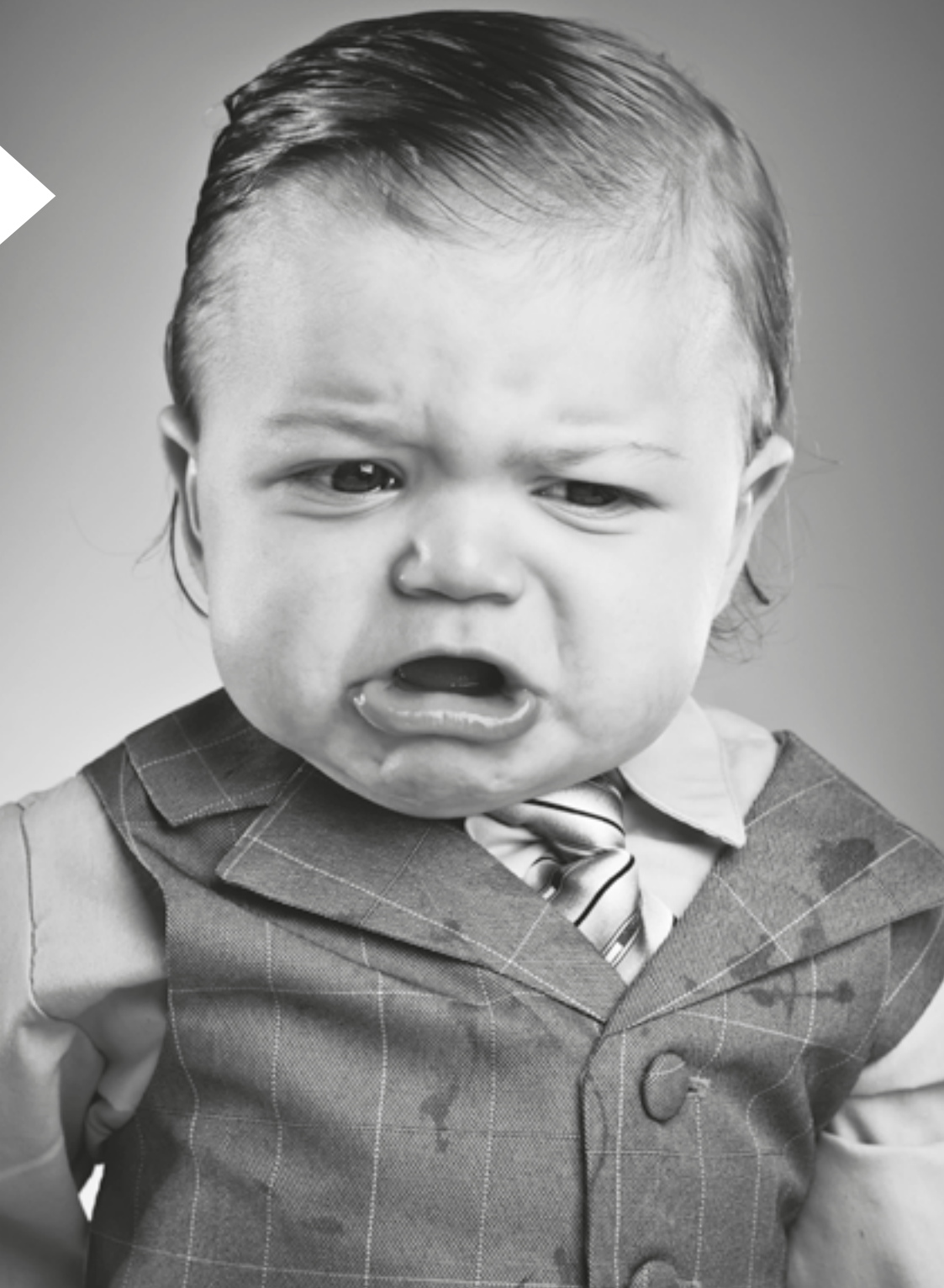
Obviously, any decent supplier should want to keep their clients happy, but taken too far this approach can be detrimental to the actual work (and the results generated).

Remember that your design agency needs to consider what your target market wants or expects to see and not necessarily what **you** want to see. Just because you really like the colour orange or a certain image or font doesn't necessarily make it suitable for your brand, nor will it guarantee a positive response from your prospects.

Your agency should also have the confidence to say where you've gone wrong in the past in order to avoid repeated errors. The truth isn't always nice to hear but it's better than wasting time and money on ideas that aren't strong enough just because your design agency is full of yes men.

Keep in mind that when it comes to design **they** are supposed to be the experts. They design all the time and that gives them an evolved perspective. What you consider original and striking, they may have seen a hundred times before. So when they speak there should be enough trust and respect for you to listen.

They should be confident enough to tell you when you've got it wrong. Always... or at least now and again.





5 | CAN THEY SEE INTO THE FUTURE?

Where is your company going? What's your vision for it and how do you want it perceived? What market do you want to succeed in? How big do you want to get? This type of thinking should underpin any work you produce. By orienting yourself in the future you encourage everyone to buy into where you're going rather than where you are now.

This will ensure the longevity of your design - which you should be growing into rather than outgrowing. However, for this to happen you need to make your design agency fluent in your future too. They should understand your ambitions and dreams and be constantly considering how to realign your message, content and communication to retain existing customers while attracting new ones.

By retaining a positive image of your company's future, your design agency should be able to produce design work that empowers, stimulates and incentivises all stakeholders.

A lot of this should originate from the arguments you create to stand out in your marketplace (see point 2: Are they any good at arguing?) but it should also include your aspirations as a business.

You might even create something new and different in your marketplace. Be daring and let the others follow. It's better to lead the race than to always be playing catch up.

SUMMARY

Every piece of design you commission should have a brand and marketing function. Whether it's a website, brochure, logo or business card, its message should originate from solid business thinking with a view to generating sales and developing the business.

So the first job of any design agency should be to find out what your company wants and what the objectives of the piece are. They should bring their expertise to the table and offer insights on how to produce something that is effective rather than merely decorative.

The relationship between a client and a design company needs to be based on respect and knowledge, with both sides challenging each other to do better.

A great design company brings imagination and expertise to the table along with clear business reasoning, understanding and clear objectives. A client should bring sector specific knowledge, a willingness to listen and, of course, sufficient budget.

With all this in place there's no reason why a piece of design shouldn't deliver a return many times its cost.

Without any of it - no relationship, no trust, insufficient budget and no conception of the future... well, as the saying goes, if you fail to plan, then plan to fail.

Happy hunting.





latitudesolutions
building business. creating brands

Latitude Solutions are a marketing and design agency, created in 1999 from the realisation that too often clients were being misled and poorly sold to by most design and marketing companies.

Since then they have worked with a broad range of SMEs, Tier one companies and multinationals, creating numerous successful European and World-wide marketing campaigns and re-brand initiatives across most sectors.

All of their work is based on achieving the highest Return On Investment for their customers rather than winning awards for themselves.

Based in London, Latitude supplies design and marketing knowledge and services that can generate huge word of mouth business.

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