

The Essential Guide: How to Write a Website Design Brief

Tips for Tourism, Hospitality & Wine

What is a Website Design Brief?

A **website design brief** is a document that a business owner or marketer puts together to clearly define their brand's website design and development needs.

A brief guides the entire website design and development process. So it should be as comprehensive and detailed as possible to communicate outcomes, expectations and ideas to the designer as well as serve as a common point of reference for all parties involved.

The purpose of a Website Brief is threefold:

1. Allows you as the business owner or marketer to deep dive into your **website vision** and **confidently manage** the website build process.
2. Enables website designers to quote more accurately. Therefore, you are able to source **quotes** that are **comparable**.
3. Gives **clear direction** to the website designer thus avoiding miscommunication and possible costly scope creep.

What's not to like about that?

All you need to do is nail the design brief upfront.

Below are 10 core areas to cover when writing a website brief. Each section will guide you and make the writing process more manageable.

Disclaimer: This is not a definitive guide, but it's a good starting point and will serve as food for thought.

1. Introduction

Start by covering what you're after – content management system (CMS), proposed launch date and budget.

Also, cover the bid timeline (what date they need to have the quote back to you by). Be realistic!

A proper quotation and proposal from a website designer can take a number of days to research and prepare, so don't ask for it back in 2 days.

This information will quickly serve to give the web designer the opportunity to know if they wish to even offer a quotation.

No point wasting your valuable time and a web designers if you want a WordPress website for under \$5,000 and they only work with \$10,000 plus customised in-house CMS builds.

And don't forget to include your contact details, so they can give you a quick call to clarify points.

Include:

- Preference, if any of Content Management System
- Budget and timeline
- Bid timeline
- Your contact details

2. Background

Before you jump into describing what you want your website to do. First give the website designer insight into your business.

Write a few paragraphs about your business on when founded, what services you provide or products you sell, size, are you selling globally or a local business – are you thinking of exporting (ensure you cover the countries).

No need to write War and Peace though! A few paragraphs will suffice.

Also include what best describes your business – are you young, fresh, artisan, established, traditional etc.

Offering insight in your business enables a website designer to gain a feel for how they should design your website.

Include:

- When founded
- What products / services you provide
- Where do you sell these products / services
- Size of your business – there is a lot of difference in a global business and a family run business
- A few words to describe your business

3. Target Audience

We see this so often omitted in a website brief. Please don't do that!

If the words – target audience don't sit well with you – think of it as who you would like to visit and interact with on your website.

When you define your target audience in a website brief, a good web developer can help you focus your marketing efforts and offer ways to do this.

You may have a number of target audiences depending on your products and services, so list each.

Include:

- Who is the target audience?
- Will this be changing with the new website i.e. are you adding new products / services?

- What are the demographics (e.g. children, adults, social class, income levels, location, etc.)
- How are your target audience accessing your site and how would you like them to access it in future i.e. via their mobiles, laptops or pcs.

4. Assets

Do you have imagery, logos, brand style guide, testimonials, search optimised copy all ready to go?

Will you need assistance with any of these areas i.e. writing search optimised copy, choosing imagery or creating a brand style guide?

These are all important components of your website, but they are not usually offered by a website designer in a website quote. Many website design agencies can offer these services at an added cost.

TIP: Resist the urge to duplicate existing content into your new website – if your current website is letting you down in some way, chances are the content is partly to blame.

Checklist:

- Logos
- Brand style guide – fonts, colours etc
- Imagery
- Videos
- Testimonials
- Awards
- Search optimised copy
- Other items

5. The Old Website

Start with the url – the web address. In order to meet your requirements, the website designer will need to know why your website is no longer suitable.

Quite possibly, if it was built in the mid-00s it is long due for an upgrade. Let the website designer know that – detail anything else that could be relevant. This is where your understanding of [Google Analytics](#) will come in very handy!

Include:

- Why are you replacing the website?
- What do you like or feel is good about the website?
- What don't you like about the website?
- How long ago was it built?
- Have you made upgrades in that time? If so, what types of upgrades.
- Who built it?
- What levels of traffic is it currently receiving and what were historically the best traffic levels received?
- What percentage of the traffic is from smart phones & tablets?
- Which countries are visitors from?
- What are the top 5 web browsers and platforms (Mac/PC/Android/iOS) visiting your website?
- How often do you get a genuine sales lead through the website?
- Who is responsible for updating and maintaining the website?

6. Website Activities and Objectives

Gone are the days where a website is an online 'brochure' outlining products or services. Today a website needs to be interactive, mobile responsive and serve specific functions.

So ask yourself – **what is the aim of our website?**

What do you want your website to achieve?

Think of it this way – what do you want your target audience to do on the website?

Do you want them to subscribe to your newsletter, get a quote, read your blog, purchase products?

In this section, **list in order of importance** what you want your target audience to do on your website.

Example: (extract from a website brief for a Winery with Cellar Door)

We would like the general user to engage in the following activities on the new website. Items are listed in order of importance:

- Purchase wine online
- Book events online
- Contact Functions Manager with enquires and quotes on meetings, wedding and functions
- Subscribe to our newsletter
- Enquire about restaurant bookings
- Download and / or share via social media – tasting notes, menus and other information
- Follow us on social media channels like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram
- Contribute blog comments

7. Website Navigation & Content

In this section, we dig so much deeper – how many pages, in what order? Do you want maps, video, audio AND how do you envisage it all displayed?

Remind yourself why you're writing a website design brief – initially, isn't it to give you a clear understanding of your business website requirements?

You may not have all answers at this stage. Just say so – "*suggestions on navigation and page structure are most welcome*".

Include:

- How many pages?
- Will they all be ready for website build or will you be adding new pages after website launch?
- What page titles would you like to use i.e. Home, About Us, Shopping Cart? Maybe you want to be a little creative with page titles – write it down here!
- Do you want a video on the home?
- Any specific requirements to your industry requires on a website?

8. Website Features

Once you've worked through the above including content and calls to action, you'll have a clear picture of what functions are required in the website, such as:

- An online booking system
- A blog with commenting functionality
- Social media widgets for activity stream
- Members only content area
- Newsletter opt-in
- E-commerce capabilities including sub-sets of specific features, such as – featured products, tasting notes, reviews, specials etc.
- Advertising or sponsors
- Google Map

9. Competitors and other Websites

By this point, you'll have spent a lot of time undertaking structured research on other websites.

So here's your chance to detail your likes and dislikes with **links**.

Possibly start with two or three competitors. Then move onto other industries.

Why other industries?

Website design trends change with user requirements and technology. Your competitors may be three to five years behind. So branch out and check other industries.

Don't think of this as a beauty contest though. Think of this as an end user – test how the websites respond on different devices.

Include:

- Name of company, industry and links.
- What you like and dislike about each website.
- Cover the features and functionality and why it's of interest.
- Colours, fonts, navigation and tone of voice are important also.

TIP: Remember – a good rule of thumb is don't let your personal likes and dislikes cloud your judgement. Undertake this task with your target customer hat on.

10. Other Requirements

This section should cover the areas you haven't as yet detailed.

One detail I personally ALWAYS mention when assisting writing website briefs is **301 redirects**.

What is a 301 Redirect?

A 301 redirect is a permanent redirect from one URL to the other and enables users and search engines to be directed to the correct page.

Think of it this way – not every page on your old website will have the exact same url on your new website. Therefore, your website designer upon launch of the new website should redirect all old website urls to the new website urls.

Conclusion

This is not a definitive guide to writing a website design brief. Nor is there any right and wrong way to write a website design brief.

So if you want to add more detail – go for it! On average, 3 to 5 pages should suffice.