

Focus On... Design

What Every Marketing Expert Should Know About Baking (Marketing and Design, a Confectioner's Guide)

By Erin Sarpa, Founder and Principal, EandI Design

Marketing and graphic design go together like cake and frosting. It's perfectly acceptable to have a cake without the frosting, but when you add the creamy, colorful stuff it becomes art that speaks to its audience. A cake with frosting tells the audience about the celebration, who it's for, and how much effort the baker has made on the consumer's behalf. The cake becomes a very compelling marketing piece.

(Sorry, couldn't resist the metaphor!)

As a marketing professional, you have a responsibility to increase market share, promote products and events, and create brand awareness within specific time and budget limitations. In short, you need to bake an awe-inspiring cake. So how can you use design to make the most of your efforts? Effective design starts with a good working relationship that offers clear communication and good chemistry. The next piece of a successful design system is a working process that all parties have agreed upon. And the final ingredient to really great frosting is creative know-how (yours and your designer's).

Communicating with Your Design Team

Good communication begins with common sense. Start with a creative brief: Your designer should have a form you will all fill out. All decision makers involved in final approval should provide input from the beginning. This way the project managers on the marketing side and the design side will spot any disagreement regarding direction before the process begins, eliminating frustration and extra cost later. After the creative brief is agreed upon and the design process has started, send all explicit feedback in writing so both parties have a reference for proofing or future discussion.

And while the technology to see initial design through digital files is a timesaver, nothing can replace a face-to-face meeting with your designer. He/she should come in and present his/her team's work in all its glory and be able to see the expression on your face. That way, you get insight into the creative process and a full explanation of the solutions that are offered. And the design team gets your honest reaction. Good or bad, the designer should know if he/she understands you and your marketing message from the very beginning.

Beyond common sense is an understanding of the craft. In order to get the best result from your designer, you must be capable of providing direction in a language that is specific. Here's an example of a non-specific, useless way to provide direction: "We're looking for something innovative." Now I know you have never said that to YOUR designer, but you'd be surprised how often I hear it. A better way to get your creative team started would be: "Our audience ranges from 35 to 50 years old, has a medium level of technological understanding and is fairly conservative. They are familiar with our corporate color scheme and have received two mailings this year. The goal of this piece is to let them know that our company, while keeping its established values, is introducing a new product." Along with budget and possibly format specifications, this information will provide your design team with a strong launch pad for creative. The designers will be able to make assumptions about the use of color (based on the audience's familiarity with the corporate color and introduction of a new product), type style, and size (age group).

The Design Process

All design firms have a process that they follow. Some will have documented their process in a detailed format so you know what to expect throughout a project and what the design team expects from you. Others will have a rhythm and will summarize their procedures verbally in the beginning of a project. Either system can work, provided that all parties understand and agree to deadlines, responsibilities, and limitations. Following is a typical design process:

- Launch meeting
- Creative briefing
- Research
- Define weak spots
- Define objective
- Set milestone schedule
- Initial concept development
- Internal critique
- Choose top three design solutions
- Fine tune concepts into comps
- Presentation of comps
- Written approval of chosen direction
- Client provides content
- Application to various pieces
- Revisions (up to three per piece)
- Final proofs

- Written approval
- Final files released

All of these steps should be accounted for in a schedule with the understanding that if one date is missed, it is likely that all of the following dates will be compromised. Defining the process in the early stages of your working relationship will set expectations and prevent headaches.

The Craft of Design

Most designers are educated very specifically in their field. Their training includes conceptual thinking, typography, color, form (2D and 3D), media, illustration, painting, photography and art history. Your contribution is to provide clear direction and know your audience. In other words, the best thing you can do for the creative process is to allow it to happen. Set your designer free by not providing specifics about type or color. She has seen more typefaces than you can imagine, and spent a good year in design school learning about the psychology of color. If you are not comfortable with your designer's experience or style, look for a new designer until you find one that you don't have to art direct.

Open your mind to possibilities, for there is rarely only one solution. When your design team presents ideas, listen to the explanation for each piece before reacting. After you have heard their pitch, pay attention to your instincts. After choosing the direction that your team agrees best fits your marketing objective, provide clear feedback. Work closely with your designer to iron out any inconsistencies and give her any specific information that might impact your audience and the success of the piece.

Sweet Success

If you work with a designer who understands you, has a process that works, and can be trusted implicitly to meet your goals and your deadlines, then you can officially have your cake and eat it too.

Erin Sarpa is the founder of [EandI Design](#) in San Jose, California. She has been a designer for thirteen years and still looks forward to coming to work.