

Creativity is a culture, not a process



By [Jason Kempen](#)

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The key to creating a truly iconic brand does not lie within the process but rather within the culture of the agency. This is what many companies pay for when they purchase design, although they may not realise it. The ability to balance the two concerns is a skill that all clients should look for when engaging with a creative service agency to recalibrate their brand for these changed times we live in. One needs to ask oneself, does your design agency meet your needs across tangible and intangible criteria? Is your design agency flexible enough for you? There are a few key areas one needs to consider when looking for a design agency.

Relationship

It's a big deal to entrust the right agency to bring your brand to life in a strategically insightful and creatively compelling way. It requires the agency to work closely together with the client, often to ensure a strategic direction for a new creative idea. For agencies, working with each of their clients' unique corporate cultures, it is essential to fulfil expectations, smooth out difficult relationship issues and stabilise the agency's current base of business. All business owners realise that working closely with your client is important for success.

One of the advantages of working with a smaller agency is the team is able to meet with the client more frequently and develop a more personal relationship. Larger agencies have many departments and often have procedures and restrictions that prevent direct contact with the client. In a small agency, complaints can be handled faster and on an individual level, making long-term client relations easier and more profitable. Smaller agencies have fewer internal hurdles and red tape when implementing changes and making decisions, resulting in more efficient responses to client queries, complaints and campaign decisions; offering their clients streamlined products and services.

Brand Custodian

Being the architects of the brand, your design agency decides what attributes it should possess, how the brand will communicate to various audiences, ultimately creating the overall image of the brand and the maintenance thereof.

Being a brand custodian requires a design agency to develop a brand that goes beyond the tangible product being offered. Many a time design agencies lose sight of the overall goal and create a brand that doesn't emotionally relate to the consumer.

Being the brand custodian, your design agency should realise that while creating the "it" factor, it is also important to maintain the true essence of what the brand is about. Creating an emotional bond between the client and the product, gives

the brand the perfect opportunity to improve or sustain their market share.

Skill

Smaller agencies require their employees to wear many hats, allowing each individual to not only know their own set of strengths and weaknesses but also be very well acquainted with one another's roles within the agency; increasing the overall level of expertise and service delivery. Before one can start the process of design, you of course need to know what your client's needs are. It is imperative that the agency is flexible to changing trends and has understanding of your market, thus knowing when it is appropriate to push boundaries and when not to. Choose an agency that doesn't simply follow trends and stand on the shoulders of giants, but rather sets the trends and is in fact, in their own right, a "biggie" in the making.

Even re-hashing a good idea will lead to staleness and consequently become unappealing. Don't choose an agency which is stuck in a rut and doesn't venture outside of its comfort zone. A remarkable agency is one with a legacy of challenging itself and winning, one of setting not only themselves apart as a branded team, but also assisting clients to win with the work that they do. This comes not only with experience but with a sound understanding of the design strategy. Does the agency have insight? That is, does it have an understanding and knowledge of the sector or industry within which the client operates? Technically, does the agency have a sound understanding of the brief? How does the agency use its knowledge and expertise to create something individual?

Cost

Apart from the soft intangible areas, let's not lose sight of the harder tangible areas. For example, let's take the issue of cost: are your expectations linked to the price you pay or the quality of work produced? Different agencies operate under different cost structures. Some have a flat rate they charge per job, while others apply an hourly billing system. A good design agency should have a balance between the two. The reason for the latter is that developing a creative concept has an intangible value to the client. It may take one day or two weeks to get there, but the perceived value remains the same regardless. Big agencies, by definition, have more employees and a greater billing system but that doesn't necessarily mean that they are more experienced or offer more specialised expertise.

Lastly, an agency needs to consider the importance of local regulatory standards such as the Consumer Protection Act (CPA) when presented with a brief. Any misunderstanding with the design can result in pulled products and costly legal battles. However the new regulations challenge manufacturers and agencies to once again think out the box in terms of execution and innovations. Not only does this reinforce the power of brands and allows them to invest in long-term brand equity but reworks the message being made while regaining the trust of the consumer.

Choose the design agency that is flexible, knowledgeable and dedicated - one that is supremely confident. You shouldn't be paying for more than what you are receiving, but neither should you skimp on something as important as your brand's image.

ABOUT JASON KEMPEN

Jason Kempen (32) was born in Cape Town, the son of a Dutch father and a South African mother. Despite a school background including both academic and artistic pursuits, Jason's primary interest in the creative world led him to enrol at the renowned AAA School for Advertising where he graduated with Honours after completing a three year diploma. Contact details: website www.fountainhead.co.za
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