

OUR 6TH ANNUAL REPORT



WHAT CLIENTS THINK 2019-20

A report based on 525 client
interviews conducted on
behalf of design agencies.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

dba

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INTRODUCTION



Jonathan Kirk
Founder of Up to the Light

Welcome to our sixth 'What Clients Think' report, the definitive annual snapshot of the client/design agency relationship. This year's report is based on 525 interviews, our highest number so far.

The report examines some familiar key issues, as well as exploring completely new areas not covered in previous reports. Once again, it is divided into 3 sections. Firstly, 'Client World' looks at bigger picture client concerns and issues. Secondly, 'Winning Clients' looks at agency new business activity and pitching. Thirdly, 'Retaining & Growing Clients' covers client service and client development issues.

The information in this report is based on client interviews of approximately 30 minutes to one hour. Every interview was paid for by individual design agencies commissioning Up to the Light to provide an independent Client Survey for their agency. In this sense, the information is from a high quality source because the interviews are with interested clients who are talking about the relationship with their incumbent agency. Comments are given in a spirit of constructive criticism.

Names of the individual agencies and clients involved are confidential. However, we can share some very revealing statistics when looking across all 525 interviews. As in previous years, it provides a fascinating account of the client viewpoint and provides important pointers for how agencies can strengthen their client relationships and sharpen their approach.

About the agencies

The design agencies cover every discipline and range in size from 5 employees to over 100. All the agencies commissioned Up to the Light to conduct a Client Survey with their key clients. The principal purpose was to monitor the health of their most important client/agency relationships.

Specifically:

- Understand current perceptions of the agency's strengths and weaknesses.
- Understand which boxes clients are putting them in, whether fairly or unfairly.
- Provide a better understanding of client needs and concerns.
- Identify client development opportunities.
- Highlight client service measures that can improve the relationship.
- Spot any problems early so that they can be dealt with proactively.
- Understand how they are compared to competitor agencies.
- Provide an assessment of client perceptions across areas such as creativity, value for money, ability to add value, proactivity, effective listening and commercial awareness.
- Understand how clients see the market more generally – trends and concerns.
- Assess levels of client loyalty.
- Probe areas of client concern.

About the clients

All 525 clients have responsibility for buying design and have relationships with design agencies. Their job titles range from Chief Executives and Board Directors of major organisations to Brand Managers. A very broad range of clients are represented – different industries, UK and international, business to business, business to consumer, not for profit.

Different areas represented include:

- Food and drink manufacturers
- Fashion retailers
- Other high street retailers
- Supermarkets
- Department stores
- Government
- Higher education
- Financial services
- Pharmaceuticals
- Health care
- Charities
- Automotive
- Professional services
- Hi-tech/software
- Sports organisations

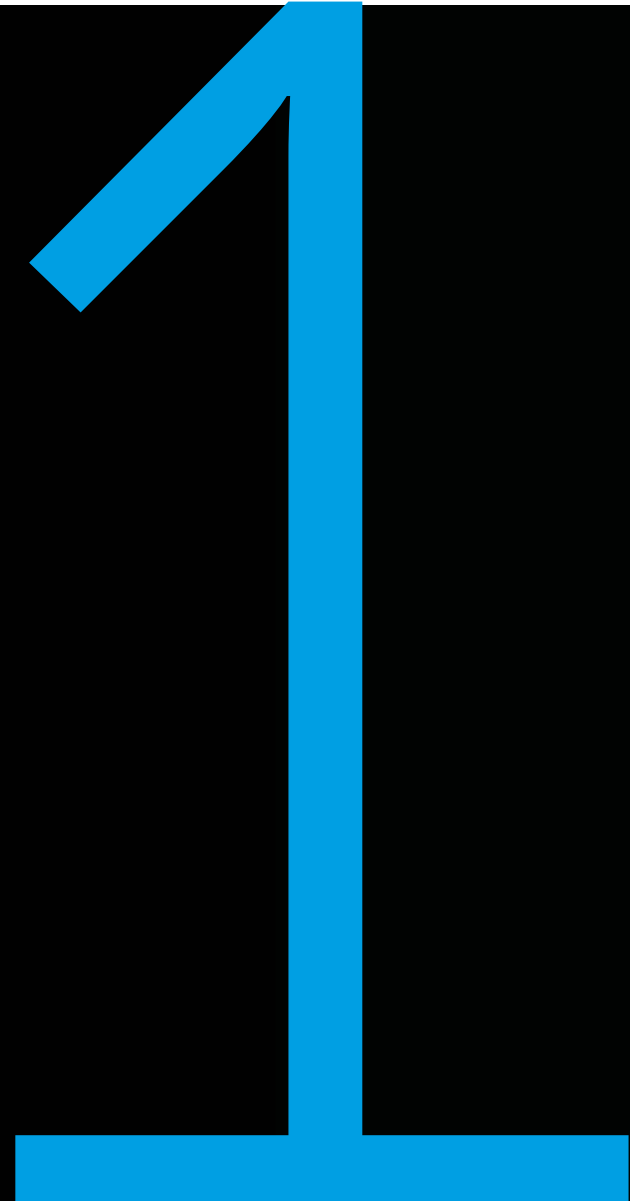
Most interviewees are responsible for day-to-day dealings with the design agency, whilst some interviewees have a more senior overseeing or ultimate responsibility role.

525 interviews
that reveal what
clients are really
thinking. A unique
spotlight on the
client viewpoint.



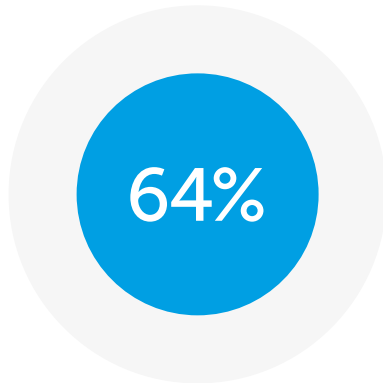
CLIENT WORLD





1.1 Wider issues

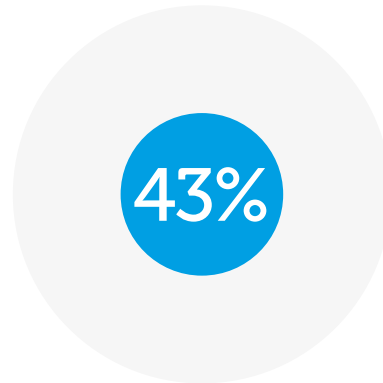
Clients were asked a range of questions about their wider concerns and pressures, beyond the immediate client/agency relationship.



OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT THEIR BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT IS **MORE PRESSURISED** THAN 1-2 YEARS AGO



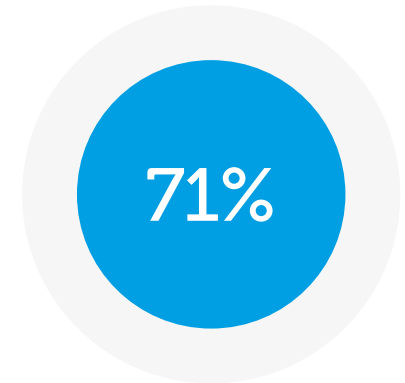
Clients are feeling the pressure. Many are being forced to do more with less – smaller teams, less available budget, needing to justify every cost.



OF CLIENTS STATED THAT **'BUSINESS UNCERTAINTY'** IN THE LAST YEAR HAD CAUSED SOME MAJOR PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES TO BE DELAYED



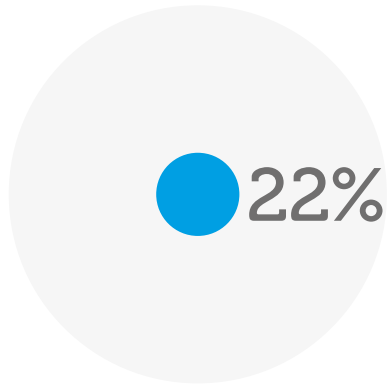
Brexit and the associated uncertainty have cast a long shadow over bigger business decisions.



OF CLIENTS STATED THAT THEY ARE UNABLE TO GIVE AS MUCH CONSIDERATION TO **LONGER-TERM BRAND BUILDING** AS THEY WOULD LIKE



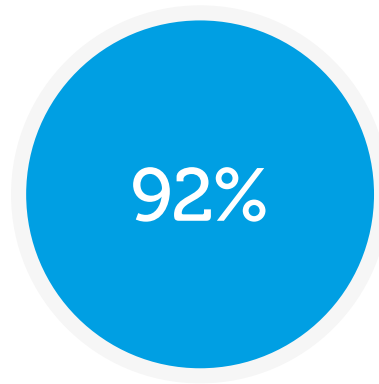
A slightly higher percentage than 2 years ago when this issue was last analysed. There is an increased feeling that clients are engaged in high levels of day-to-day 'firefighting', with little time for longer-term thinking.



OF CLIENTS STATED
THAT **DIVERSITY IS AN
IMPORTANT ISSUE AT
THEIR COMPANY**



More clients, mainly large corporates and particularly US corporates, are looking for agency teams that are more diverse in nature.



OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THEIR
PARTICULAR MARKET TO
BE **DYNAMIC AND FAST
MOVING**



The design industry is largely project based and this naturally results in some lulls between projects. For agencies, plugging those gaps and continuing to communicate through them is important. Otherwise, clients can question whether their agency is up to speed with their 'fast moving market.'

THE NUMBER 1
CLIENT CONCERN

ARE WE
DOING
ENOUGH?



It's an ever-present concern. Is the brand/organisation missing a trick, are we being smart enough, are we innovative enough, are we agile enough, is there a better process, are the insights good enough, do we know enough about our audiences, what are we learning from competitors? A client may write a seemingly clear brief, but doubt is never far away.

1.2 Role & reputation of design

A blue circle containing the text '80%' is centered within a larger, light grey circle.

80%

OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT THEIR ORGANISATION WOULD BENEFIT FROM A **HIGHER LEVEL OF CREATIVITY**

This is creativity in its broadest sense and is more about creative thinking, rather than creative execution. Most clients are talking about proactive ideas outside of project work, but are conscious that there is often little time for such activity. Increasingly, clients are looking to agencies for this level of proactive input.

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38%

OF CLIENTS EXPECT DESIGN TO **PLAY A GREATER ROLE** IN THEIR ORGANISATION/ BRAND OVER THE NEXT 1-2 YEARS

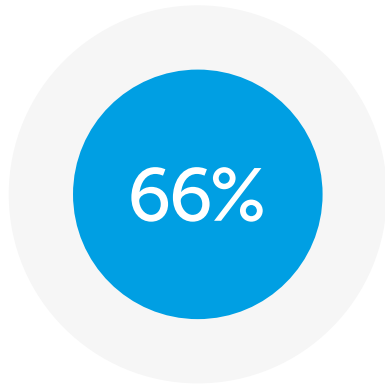
The role and potential of design appears to be well understood. It is also seen as relatively good value for money versus some other disciplines.

A blue circle containing the text '49%' is centered within a larger, light grey circle.

49%

OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT DESIGN AGENCIES HAVE A HIGH RATE OF **STAFF TURNOVER**

This particularly relates to account management staff. The breaks in continuity and the process of bringing new team members up to speed is often mentioned by clients as a frustration.



66%
**OF CLIENTS CANNOT
NAME THREE OTHER
DESIGN AGENCIES**



A similar statistic to last year. Apart from their incumbent agency, many clients struggle to name other design agencies, which reflects the fragmented nature of the industry.

TOP 3 CRITICISMS OF AGENCIES

Lack of follow through

The agency that's great at the front end of a project in terms of thinking and conceptual work, but is weaker at production/delivery stages. Many clients seem to have had their fingers burnt in this area. With newer client relationships there is often the hidden question of 'can they deliver?' Until an agency has delivered end to end on a major project, the jury is often still out.

Lack of commercial understanding

The argument is that if agencies had better commercial understanding, then it would enable them to argue for their creative concepts more convincingly and at a more senior level. Better commercial understanding gives a better business rationale and context to creative work.

Not driving things

The agency that is too passive, too eager to please and waiting to be briefed versus the agency that is proactive, challenging and really driving projects. The latter approach is more conducive to a partnership and, ultimately, makes the client's life easier.

2

1

3

1.3 Client expectations

Clients were asked for the main expectations of their design agency.

THIS YEAR'S TOP 3

On time and on budget

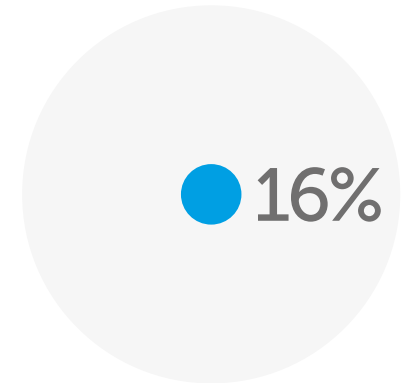
Failing to deliver on time and on budget can be a client talking point long after excellent creative work has been forgotten. For clients, nothing causes more aggravation and potential internal embarrassment. Hand in hand with delivering on time and on budget is a nailed down approach to client service – consistent communication, flagging up issues early, leading the client and driving the project.

Relevant creativity

That doesn't just mean sticking to the brief. It also means pushing parameters and showing clients a new path. However, the key word is 'relevant.' An agency's ability to argue the relevance of their creative work is vital.

Be a real partner

This is often about the agency's commitment beyond the project in hand – proactive thoughts and ideas, being the client's eyes and ears, an ability to take a step back from the project and see the bigger picture.



OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT THEIR DESIGN AGENCY **REGULARLY EXCEEDS** THEIR EXPECTATIONS



A slightly lower figure than last year. Whilst 'regularly exceeds' is a low percentage, it is important to note that their expectations can be quite broad ranging and encompass different aspects of the relationship.

If their expectations only referred to quality of creative work, then this figure would be significantly higher.

Meeting client expectations is about more than simply answering the brief. To exceed expectations is rare.

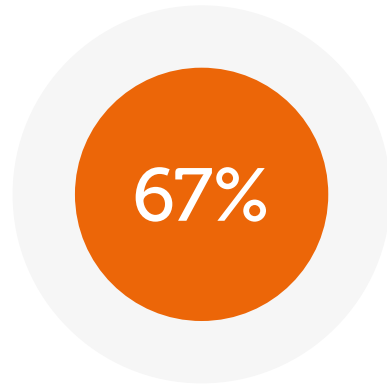


WINNING CLIENTS





2.1 New business activity



OF CLIENTS CONSIDER
AN **AGENCY'S LOCATION**
TO BE RELATIVELY
UNIMPORTANT

Of course, there can be advantages to being located near a client but most client/agency meetings now tend to happen at client offices, a symptom of how busy and pressured many clients have become. Modern communications also tend to make an agency's location less relevant.



OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT
AN AGENCY'S **FINANCIAL STABILITY** IS A KEY FACTOR
IN SELECTION

In a highly fragmented industry with a mass of small/medium-sized agencies, client confidence that an agency is still going to be around in a couple of years' time is important.





60%
**OF CLIENTS BELIEVE
AGENCIES COULD BE
CLEARER ABOUT THEIR
CORE COMPETENCIES**

A fairly frequent client complaint is that agencies tend to over-claim about their capabilities, rather than being clear about what they are best at and what is outside their core area of expertise. Trying to be 'all things to all people' is a common complaint.

TOP 3 FACTORS THAT CLIENTS LOOK FOR IN A NEW BUSINESS PRESENTATION

1. Have they addressed a similar challenge to mine?

This is not just about a direct brand or market comparison. It's more about a similar strategic challenge. An agency can show an example of work from a totally different market, but the strategic challenge could be absolutely relevant. Essentially, clients see agencies because they are seeking the answer to a strategic question. The agency's ability to correctly identify that question and focus their examples of work accordingly is key.

2. Are they experts?

This is closely related to the first factor. Is the agency consultative in approach or just an agency to be briefed? Do they have views and opinions? Do they show an understanding of my brand and market? Do they instil confidence?

3. Can I work with them?

The softer factors are so important. Do they ask the right questions? Are they interested and engaged? Are they enthusiastic and positive? Are they listening? Are they friendly and accommodating or more corporate? Do they feel like a team or does one person dominate?

1 2 3

2.1 New business activity

78%

OF CLIENTS ARE GENERALLY
NOT RECEPTIVE TO DIRECT,
COLD NEW BUSINESS
APPROACHES

The message is that clients are just too busy to respond to cold new business approaches. There are always exceptions, of course, but the old methods of developing business are not working.

89%

OF CLIENTS SAY THEY
ARE **TOO BUSY TO**
SEE SPECULATIVE
AGENCY CREDENTIALS
PRESENTATIONS

This statistic is higher than last year and the year before, confirming yet again that clients are generally too busy to window shop. Presentations have to impart knowledge or offer a point of view because today's clients want to know what an agency thinks, not just what it's done.

Common criticisms of agency new business presentations:

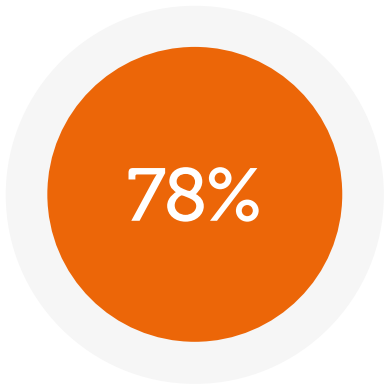
'I didn't learn anything about their work that I couldn't have read on their website'

'I struggled to see the relevance of some case studies'

'They hadn't really thought about us. They were just running through their projects.'

'They didn't show me anything definitive – a project that disrupted a market or really stood out.'

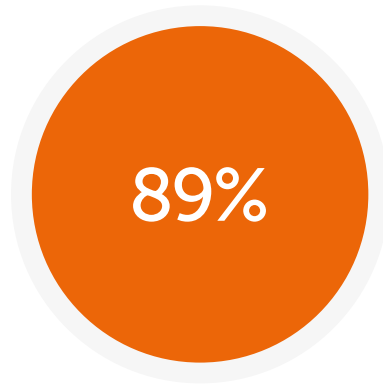
'I didn't get a sense of how they were different or distinctive versus other agencies.'



OF CLIENTS LIKE TO
**'DISCOVER' A NEW
AGENCY RATHER THAN
FEEL 'SOLD TO'**



The same figure as last year's report. Evidence that modern business development is about drawing clients to the agency, rather than the conventional method of 'knocking on doors'.



OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THE
BEST WAY TO SOURCE NEW
AGENCIES IS THROUGH
**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM
COLLEAGUES**



Colleagues are the most trusted source.

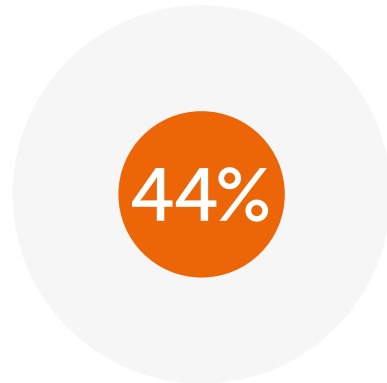
45

MINUTES



Most clients believe this is the optimum length for a new business presentation.

2.2 Website and social media



OF CLIENTS WOULD LIKE TO SEE **MORE VIDEO** ON AGENCY WEBSITES



Not just the classic agency video but examples of work, as well. It's easier to click on a video than wade through a static case study.



OF CLIENTS WOULD APPRECIATE **VIDEO TESTIMONIALS** ON AGENCY WEBSITES



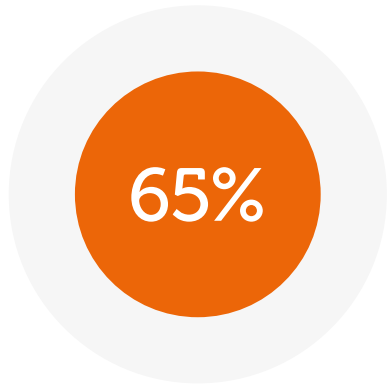
Client endorsement is powerful when done well.



OF CLIENTS CLAIMED **NOT TO HAVE VISITED** THEIR INCUMBENT AGENCY'S WEBSITE IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS



A higher figure than last year. The agency website is a missed communication channel for existing clients. Many had visited the site when selecting the agency (this could be years) but not since.



**OF CLIENTS LAST VISITED
THEIR AGENCY'S WEBSITE
DURING THE SELECTION
PROCESS**



The primary role of the agency website is to be the shop window for new business.

HOW DO CLIENTS LOOK AT AGENCY WEBSITES?

(FOR NEW BUSINESS PURPOSES)

Home page

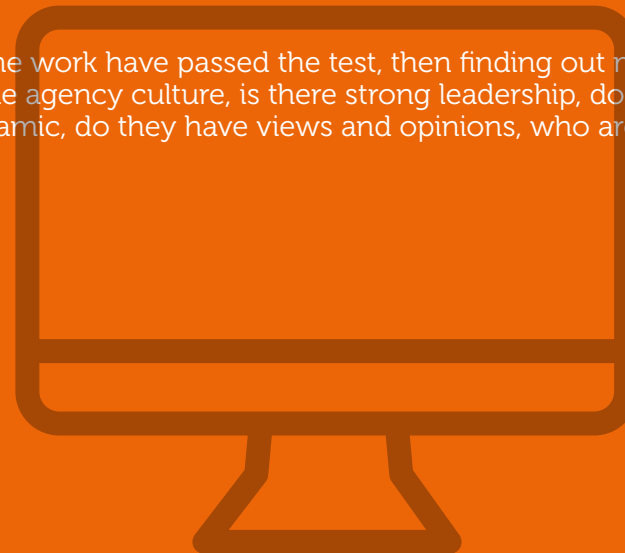
Clients gain important first impressions, often in a matter of seconds. Is the agency small and friendly or big and corporate, is there a point of difference, specialist or generalist, leader or follower, UK or international, design-led or more strategic?

The work

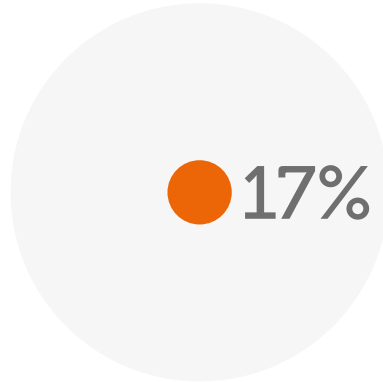
Are there any examples of work close to my world – my market, my type of challenge, anything new and interesting, any landmark or market-disrupting projects that really stand out? What about commercial results, does the work look similar or are they bringing something creatively different to every project? Subjectively, do I like the work?

The agency

If the Home page and the work have passed the test, then finding out more about the agency is the next step. What is the agency culture, is there strong leadership, do they feel confident and ambitious, are they dynamic, do they have views and opinions, who are the people that make the agency tick?



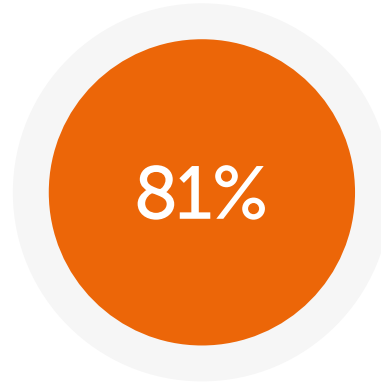
2.2 Website and social media



OF CLIENTS CLAIM TO FOLLOW THEIR INCUMBENT AGENCY ON SOCIAL MEDIA*

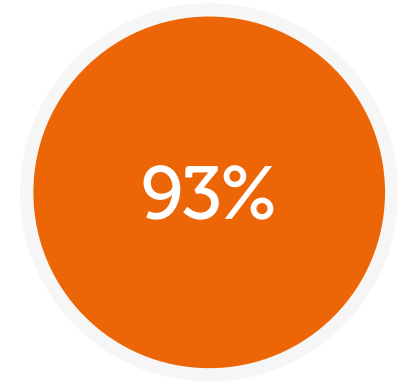
A slight increase on last year but not an impressive figure. Even those clients who do claim to follow are rarely actively engaged.

* Not including LinkedIn



OF IN-HOUSE DESIGN DEPARTMENT CLIENTS CLAIM TO FOLLOW AGENCIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

There is evidence that in-house design departments are following agencies on social media, particularly Instagram. However, Design Managers and other similar job titles are a relatively small part of the overall client landscape.



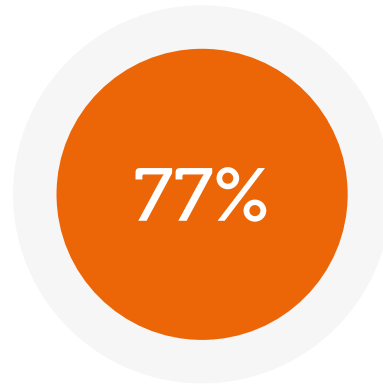
OF CLIENTS CLAIM TO BE ON LINKEDIN AND TO USE THIS PLATFORM

LinkedIn is by far the most useful platform for business development purposes. This is the platform where many clients say their agency should be more active.



OF CLIENTS **COMPLAIN**
THAT AGENCY INSIGHT
PIECES ARE NOT RELEVANT
ENOUGH

'Insight pieces' are defined as agency research, reports, white papers or a particular view on an issue. Clients want relevance, relevance, relevance. Rather than a general trends piece, they want something that drills down into their market and is directly useful.



OF CLIENTS **DO NOT HAVE**
TIME TO READ LONGER
PIECES FROM AGENCIES

Most clients say they scan pieces from agencies and rarely really read them, unless they pass the relevance test. There is an appetite for bite-sized insight but generally not for lengthy reports and white papers.

TOP 3 SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FOR CLIENTS:



LINKEDIN

The most popular platform for clients by a massive margin. Clients tend not to categorise LinkedIn as social media.

INSTAGRAM

More design-orientated clients tend to gravitate towards this platform. A favourite of in-house design departments.

TWITTER AND FACEBOOK

These platforms hardly register with clients. Agencies are generally talking to their employees and peers.

2.3 Pitching

HOW ARE AGENCY SHORTLISTS ASSEMBLED?

Asking colleagues

By far the most popular method.

Incumbent agency

Agencies need to recognise when there is an unstoppable appetite for change. There are too many instances when the incumbent agency is asked to pitch but their chances of winning are minimal.

Reputation

Sourcing high profile agencies in tightly defined areas such as high value retail design or corporate reporting is relatively straightforward, but less so in crowded areas such as packaging design or brand identity.

Design awards

Some clients are Googling design awards as an indication of quality.

New business approach

The agency that has made a timely and relevant new business approach, so is included in the shortlist.

Rosters

Rosters are not the be all and end all. 76% of clients are prepared to look outside the roster for high value projects.



99%

OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT
A PITCH IS GOOD BUSINESS PRACTICE
FOR HIGH VALUE PROJECTS

Exactly the same statistic as last year. The key words here are 'high value projects.' An increasing number of larger clients are introducing project value thresholds where projects above a certain value have to be pitched out. Pitches for high value projects are simply seen as due diligence and sensible business practice.



OF CLIENTS FEEL THAT
PRE-PITCH Q&A SESSIONS
ARE **MORE OF A CHORE**
THAN TRULY USEFUL



Where appropriate, can agencies look at making these meetings a slightly different experience – perhaps more of a workshop than a straight Q&A session?



OF CLIENTS USE SOME
KIND OF **SCORING SYSTEM**
TO EVALUATE PITCH
PRESENTATIONS



The use of formal scoring systems where elements such as 'understanding of the brief' or 'relevant experience' are weighted and given marks has increased in popularity, although some clients admit to 'just knowing' when an agency is right.

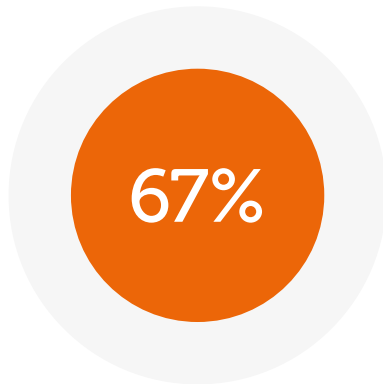


FOR HIGH VALUE
PROJECTS, WHAT CHANCE
DOES THE INCUMBENT
AGENCY HAVE OF
WINNING THE BUSINESS?



35%

2.3 Pitching



67%
OF PITCHES ARE LOST
BECAUSE OF SOFTER
FACTORS OVER AND ABOVE
HARDER FACTORS



The 'softer factors' are about people - strong individuals but a good team feel, a clear pitch leader but not one person dominating, confident but not arrogant, understanding and flexible. Many agencies naturally put a lot of effort into the harder factor of trying to crack the problem, but this is often not the area where the pitch is won or lost.

TOP 5 COMMENTS ABOUT THE WINNING AGENCY

'They just got it'

The winning agency showed that they really understood the client's anxiety points and the nature of the challenge. Their points about the market context and target audiences were spot on.

'We felt we could work with them'

The personal chemistry was right. There was a cultural alignment. It almost felt at the pitch as if they were already working on the project.

'Their creative work showed us something different'

The agency gave the client something unexpected, opened their eyes to something, excited them about what was possible.

'They put in more effort'

The agency went that bit further. They did more research or they took more trouble to really bring a concept to life. They demonstrated more commitment and hunger to win.

'They'd thought about us more'

The losing agencies' presentations had a more generic feel. They could equally have been talking to a competitor. The winning agency made everything more bespoke and relevant.

Pitching is here to stay. Being good at pitching has become vital to agency growth and success.

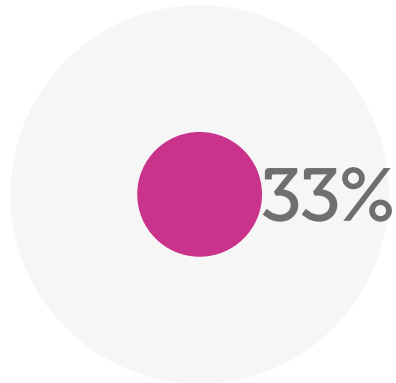


RETAINING & GROWING CLIENTS

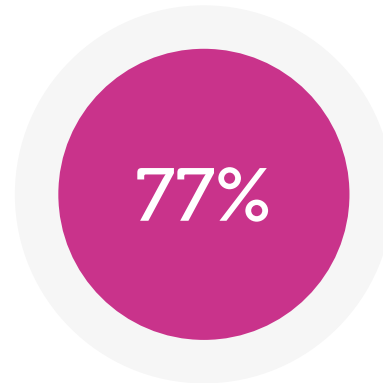




3.1 Client service



OF CLIENTS BELIEVE
THAT AGENCIES
COULD WORK MORE
COLLABORATIVELY



OF CLIENTS WOULD LIKE
THEIR AGENCY TO HAVE
**MORE COMMERCIAL
UNDERSTANDING**

The word 'collaborative' is frequently used on agency websites, but clients' main complaint is about the 'big reveal' model ie. the agency tends to hide away for a few weeks and, apart from the odd email, phone call or status update, the client is left wondering how the agency is faring and what will be presented. From a client's viewpoint, it would be preferable to compare notes throughout the process via interim meetings where early creative thoughts and ideas could be shared, health checked and discussed.

A higher figure than last year. Better commercial nous means greater understanding of the client's world. It also allows the agency to argue a more convincing case for their creative work.

More commercial understanding means a better understanding of:

The client's overall business objectives and strategy.

The business mechanics and how the P&L works.

Operations e.g. how a store or restaurant actually works.

Any commercial data supplied by the client – how can the agency utilise this and make it directly relevant to their work?

Other business functions e.g. spending time with the client's sales force.

46%

OF CLIENTS WOULD LIKE
MORE REGULAR **PROGRESS
REPORTS**

Most clients prefer a light-touch progress report, something that quickly tells them what has happened, what is happening, what's going to happen and by when. Consistency is the key.

WHAT IS STRATEGY?

It is important to note that for some clients definitions of strategy may be slightly different from those of design agencies.

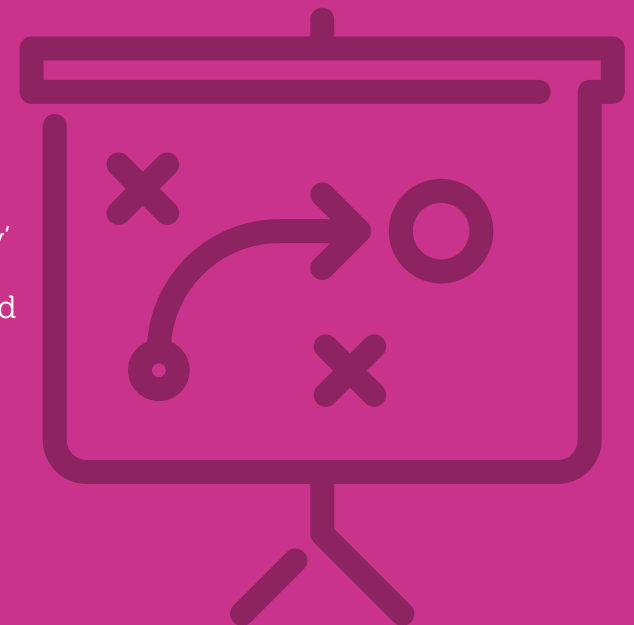
Future direction

23% of clients believe that strategy is something that happens prior to developing a brief. It has a wider context and is concerned with the future direction of the business.

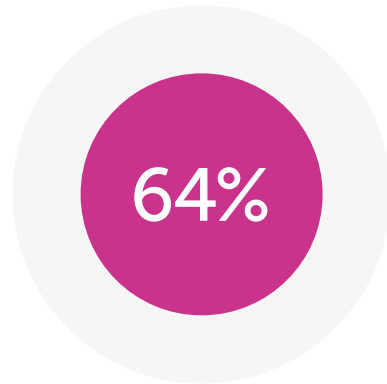
Business strategy

8% of clients believe that strategy is not connected to design. Instead, it is financially based.

Rather than umbrella terms such as 'strategy' or 'strategic thinking', it may be more useful to refer to more specific terms such as 'brand positioning', 'brand strategy' and 'design/creative strategy'.



3.1 Client service



SEE THEIR DESIGN AGENCY AS A PARTNER RATHER THAN A SUPPLIER



This is in answer to a question about whether clients consider their design agency to be a partner, supplier or a bit of both. Given that 'partner' is probably the polite answer to this question, 64% is perhaps disappointing, although in a project-based industry being considered a full partner is more difficult than some agencies realise.

CLIENT SERVICE – TOP 3 EXPECTATIONS

Regular, high quality communication

Keeping the client informed and updated every step of the way. Ideally, this means the client never having to ask.

Honesty and straightforwardness

Open conversations. Being honest about issues, problems and mistakes. Admitting when something isn't your skill set and being able to recommend another company.

Understanding the client's organisation

Understanding the brand is a given. Understanding the client's organisation, its politics and way of working, is crucial to a real partnership.



Real client/agency
partnerships are
difficult to achieve
and maintain.



3.1 Client service



86%

OF CLIENTS WITH A WEAKER
OR MORE VULNERABLE
RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR
DESIGN AGENCY CITED
CLIENT SERVICE ISSUES
AS THE MAIN REASON

This statistic has been consistently high since the first 'What Clients Think' report in 2014. More often than not, it is client service issues that end client/agency relationships rather than quality of creative work.

Examples include:

Budget management

Failing to flag things up early.

Too slow to reveal problems or attempting to 'hide' a problem

Haphazard

Lack of contact reports, client has to chase, 'last minute' feeling, poor communications.

Too passive

Not driving things, supplier not partner mentality.

Making it hard work

Choosing the wrong battles, overly defensive, stubborn.

Occasionally, a clash of personalities/ styles.

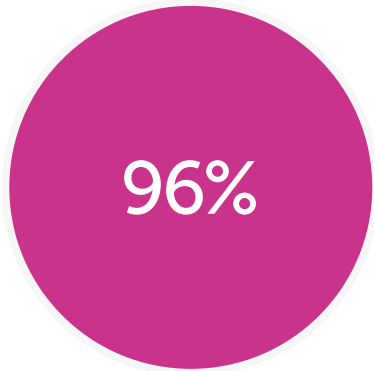
These often represent a deterioration from an earlier point in the relationship when agency keenness and commitment was deemed to be higher.



33%

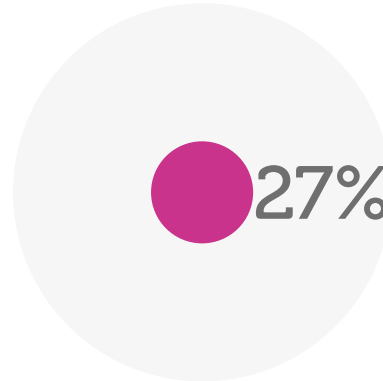
OF CLIENTS REFERRED
TO **AN AGENCY MISTAKE**
THAT HAPPENED OVER
A YEAR AGO

Most 'mistakes' concern client service and production issues, and tend to stay in the memory longer than the glow of great creative work.



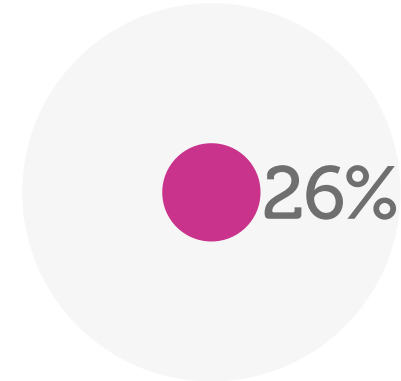
OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT THE **PERSONAL CHEMISTRY** WITH THE PEOPLE AT THEIR AGENCY IS EITHER 'GOOD' OR 'VERY GOOD'

Clients are consistently complimentary about design agencies being a 'good bunch' and 'likeable'. Client relationships tend to be slightly less formal and less corporate than with other marketing services such as advertising.



OF CLIENTS FEAR THAT A SUCCESSFUL DESIGN AGENCY **MAY CHANGE FOR THE WORSE**

Clients generally like to feel that their agency is thriving, but sometimes there is a parallel fear that the agency might lose what makes it special. It may become too corporate, client service might suffer or existing clients could become less important. Such fears may be unfounded but the point is that these clients will be more sensitive to the slightest drop in standards. It is good for agencies to be aware of this when they trumpet their successes.



OF CLIENTS CONSIDER THEIR DESIGN AGENCY TO BE **STRETCHED AND UNDER RESOURCED**

Manifestations of this can include delays in response times, lack of attention to detail, a 'last minute' feeling or gaps in communication. Clients are highly sensitive to such dips in service levels.

3.2 Client development

45%

OF CLIENTS WOULD LIKE THEIR AGENCY TO HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE **BIGGER PICTURE**

It's easy to become entrenched in day-to-day projects, rather than taking a step back and seeing the bigger picture. It is a rare client that doesn't appreciate a quarterly meeting to look at the wider business, think longer-term and discuss proactive ideas. It is also an excellent client development opportunity.

61%

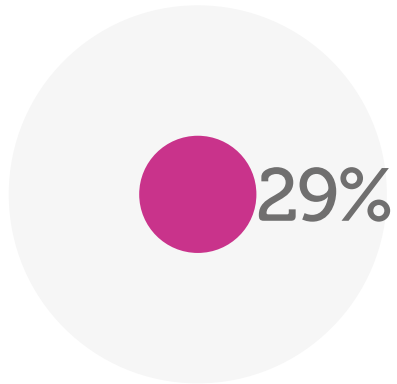
OF CLIENTS **RARELY OR NEVER READ THE AGENCY NEWSLETTER OR CLAIM NOT TO RECEIVE IT**

Don't rely on the agency newsletter to spread the word. This statistic has increased for the third year running. The agency newsletter is generally failing to cut through. Feedback from clients also suggests that newsletters are rarely actually read but scanned for any interesting headlines.

67%

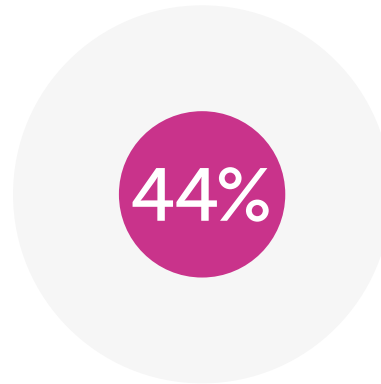
OF CLIENTS PREFER TO RECEIVE **PRINTED COMMUNICATIONS THAN ONLINE NEWSLETTERS**

The number of printed communications landing on clients' desks has vastly reduced while the amount of online communication has vastly increased. It stands to reason that printed pieces are enjoying renewed impact. Like last year, clients often commented that printed pieces have greater longevity and can be tucked away in a bag to read later.



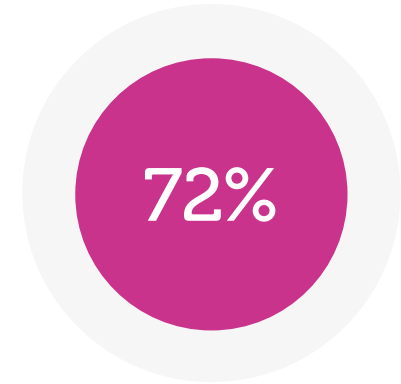
OF CLIENTS WOULD HAPPILY
**INTRODUCE THEIR DESIGN
AGENCY TO A COLLEAGUE**
BUT HAVE NEVER BEEN
ASKED

Referrals and introductions are vital to client development, but some agencies are too passive in this area. Sometimes agencies can forget the simple things like just asking for an introduction.



OF CLIENTS CLAIM
NOT TO KNOW ENOUGH
ABOUT THEIR DESIGN
AGENCY'S **WORK FOR
OTHER CLIENTS**

Face-to-face contact is important here, not just emailed communications. Including recent projects in a newsletter is great but it's nowhere near as powerful as a face-to-face reminder or, better still, referring to a recent project and making it directly relevant to current work.



OF CLIENTS BELIEVE
THAT THEIR DESIGN
AGENCY COULD PROVIDE
**MORE ADDED VALUE
COMMUNICATION**

As in previous years, there is a huge appetite for added value communication as long as it is relevant. Most clients prefer narrower subject fields as opposed to general pieces on trends and branding.

3.2 Client development

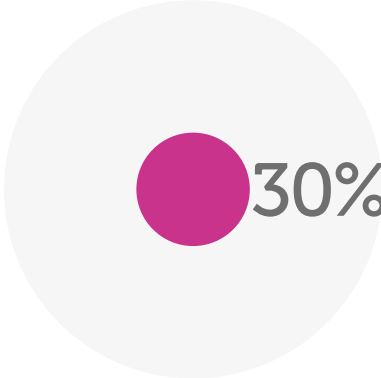
Most clients like to feel that their design agency is keen to win more work. A lack of ambition in this area can be perceived as a passive, slightly sleepy agency culture.



A large light grey circle containing a smaller magenta circle with the text "41%" inside.

OF CLIENTS WISH THEIR
DESIGN AGENCY OFFERED
MORE SERVICES

There is a general client preference for working with fewer agencies to deliver more services. There is a natural advantage in going to their agency for other services when trust has already been established. In this sense, there are often opportunities for agencies to think more entrepreneurially. What related services could be credibly offered?

A large light grey circle containing a smaller magenta circle with the text "30%" inside.

OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THEIR
DESIGN AGENCY COULD BE
MORE PROACTIVE IN THEIR
APPROACH TO CLIENT
DEVELOPMENT

The odd client development initiative is not the same as a structured, consistent approach and always being alive to opportunity. Failing to be sufficiently proactive in this area can also send out the wrong message. Does the agency lack ambition? Is their culture too sleepy or passive?

A large light grey circle containing a smaller magenta circle with the text "43%" inside.

OF CLIENTS WOULD
RECOMMEND THEIR
DESIGN AGENCY
'UNRESERVEDLY'

That means most clients would recommend their agency with caveats – 'not for larger projects...not for very strategic work...not for innovative or blue sky projects...not for international projects...make sure you tie them down on the budget...only if you have deep pockets...make sure they are on top of things and really driving the project.'

3.3 Costs

TOP 3 CLIENT COMPLAINTS ABOUT DESIGN AGENCY COSTS

Costs for smaller items can be disproportionately high

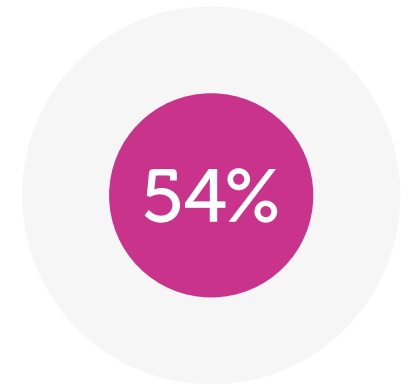
It can be easy to overlook smaller amounts of money and see them as relatively unimportant versus larger fees for main project stages. However, some of these smaller amounts can come back to haunt agencies. These include mark-ups that clients see as excessive or 'extra' items that clients believe should be included in an ongoing relationship. In this sense, small costs can easily assume a much larger significance and raise questions about wider value for money.

The agency's approach to costs is 'one size fits all'

Most clients appreciate that front-end thinking and conceptual design is charged at a premium. Where it can turn slightly sour is when work that the client considers 'implementation' appears to be charged at the same level. In clients' eyes, this can become evidence of agency inflexibility and demonstrate a lack of understanding about client needs.

Lack of regular budget updates

A common irritation is when the agency fails to update the client on where a project is on costs. Worst of all, when this falls into the category of 'nasty surprises'. Clients often say: "We shouldn't be having to ask the agency where we are on costs. They should be updating us regularly and flagging up any issues."



OF CLIENTS CONSIDER
THEIR DESIGN AGENCY
TO BE **GOOD VALUE FOR
MONEY**

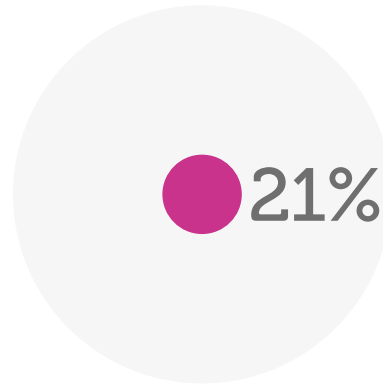


A slight reduction on last year's figure, perhaps reflecting the particularly cost-conscious environment.



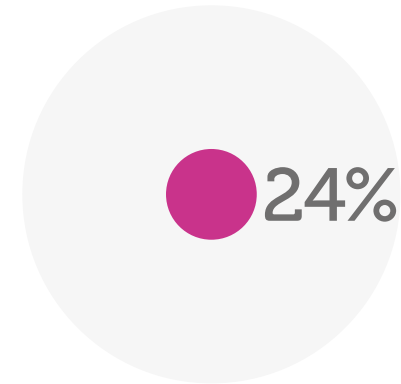
OF CLIENTS CONSIDER
THEIR DESIGN AGENCY
TO BE GOOD VALUE FOR
MONEY IN PART

Judgements about value for money are not all about the commercial success of the end creative result. It's more complex than that, with many other factors coming into play. They often relate to the quality of the client/agency relationship, not just the financial aspects. Perceptions of whether an agency is good value for money go wider and deeper.



OF CLIENTS FEEL
FRUSTRATED BY
'IMMERSION' OR
'DISCOVERY' PHASES

These are clients who pay for such phases with an agency in one discipline and then have to pay for a very similar phase of work with an agency in another discipline. There is a big crossover and a feeling that they are paying twice needlessly. This is a strong financial argument in favour of agencies that can truly integrate different disciplines.



OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT
DESIGN COSTS ARE NOT
AS TRANSPARENT AS
THEY COULD BE

Insufficient information about deliverables, unclear about why a particular phase or task is more expensive than another one, lack of clarity about whether a third party is involved, under-estimating and then asking for more budget.

About Up to the Light

Up to the Light is the leading provider of client surveys to the UK design industry. The consultancy offers expert, objective and experienced advice for marketing services agencies and professional services firms. The consultancy's approach is to challenge ingrained assumptions and offer more effective, insight-led thinking.

Services include:

Client surveys

Business development strategy

Pitching advice

Business differentiation

Training & workshops

Brand positioning & brand strategy for clients

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