The 5 questions to ask at the beginning of an engagement to ensure you can measure design effectiveness

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Design Business Association
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Establishing the Criteria to Measure Design Effectiveness

Design can take many forms and impact a project, process, service, object or business in many different ways. This makes it impossible to have a single effectiveness measure for design.

The ways of measuring how effective design has been are as numerous as the types of issues design is asked to address. How, therefore, do you measure design effectiveness?

The key is in **the brief**.

The critical stage of measuring design effectiveness is not at the end of the project looking back – it is at the start of the project when the brief is being set. This is when client and agency must work together to understand what the objectives are and crucially how they will know when those objectives have been obtained.

Most agencies will interrogate the brief, ask as many questions as they can to understand the requirements. This process just needs to delve a little deeper into the numbers behind the objectives that the client will have set.

Several DBA Members start every single new engagement with a proforma questionnaire that allows them to interrogate the brief, set objectives and understand the underlying metrics that will enable them to prove the effectiveness of their work.

There are 5 main questions that should be answered at the start of an engagement. These will:
— enable objectives to be set
— identify the success criteria
— target key performance indicators
— identify the starting point
— identify other mitigating factors that might influence the outcome

Once the parameters of the engagement, and the KPI's and metrics around what success looks like, have been established it is far easier for the agency to move forward together with the client to reach their shared goal.

"In initial client meetings I identify myself as the "awkward one in the room who will be asking the question 'why' more times than you will be comfortable with". This is to understand fully the reasoning behind decisions, and then try to get a number attached to each decision. We start each project as if we are going to enter it into the DBA Design Effectiveness Awards."

Stewart Steel, Strategy Director, Good
London and Glasgow, 25 people, DBA Member since 2005

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Question 1	
Why are you paying us X amount of money? What are you hoping to achieve? You don't need to mention the fee here, but it focuses minds. For an investment you want to see a return.	What you are looking for here are key identifiable objectives. Between 1 and 3 would be ideal.

Question 2	
How will you know when these objectives have been achieved? Another way of putting this would be - What would be the consequences of achieving these objectives?	This could range from 'gut feeling' to sophisticated KPI's. If it is at the less sophisticated end there needs to be a conversation around what can be measured.

Question 3	
What metrics will you be looking at? What are the numbers that lie behind the objectives being achieved?	These can vary hugely, but need to come back to the objectives, and whether those objectives are being reached.

Question 4	
If you know what numbers you want to achieve at the end of the engagement, what are they now? What is the data that has led you to believe you need to go through this process?	If is all very well know where the finishing line is, but you need to know where the starting line is as well.

Question 5	
What other work will you be doing on this at the same time? Will the project launch with a big advertising or PR campaign? Will staff be retrained in their sales or customer service approach? What else is happening?	If our work is part of a raft of activity how will you know which bits of activity were more effective than others? What can we put in place to be able to isolate separate elements to see which had the greater impact?

And finally…	
Write everything down.	Projects can take months or years to come to fruition. Then they need time in the marketplace to prove themselves. Having records of the original conversations about objectives and metrics makes it far easier to have the conversations around the impact of the design when looking back at a successful project.