

# MORE HUMAN CREATIVE BRIEFS



**“A great brief is like a strategic diving board – strong, solid and weeks in the making – it is ready to be used by creatives to leap from it and perform glamorous feats of creation that will wow everyone.”**

Mark Ritson



# WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT THEN?

Most humans ignore most ads. Because most ads are massively ignorable.

And the reason most of them are so skippable is not because anyone sets out to make them shit. Whether it's TV, press, radio or c\*ntent, no one wants their ad to to blend in (bland in?) and get lost in all the noise.

But that's what happens, 9 times out of 10. For lots of reasons - lack of courage, lack of knowledge, lack of experience, lack of education, lack of self awareness. But NONE of these ads that people actively avoid come from a brilliant brief.

Most briefs look and sound the same. So the work that comes out of them does too. But if you want to engage with humans, empathise with them, excite them, entice them, entertain them, then it all starts with a more human brief.

Time to change things up then. And fill your next brief to the brim with gorgeous humanness.

# STEP 1. WRITING IT



**START WITH A BIG  
BANG.**



Almost every brief I see starts with 'The background'. Usually only there to say “We need to launch our new whisky/current account/disruptive fragrance for guinea pigs.”

Tucked away on page 2 is the insight. Then somewhere after that is the proposition.

Reframe things. Start with the problem this brief is trying to solve. What’s the big challenge? What’s bugging our audience and how can we solve that? What is new, different and genuinely disruptive about this? What behaviours can we change with this? Start with a bang.

To quote the stone cold classic, Miller’s Crossing, WHAT'S THE RUMPUS?

The whole point of this is to ultimately get a human's attention. So start doing that right from the start.

# TOP TIP

Why not start with a big bold headline - not an ad headline, a REAL one? A newspaper one. Remember them?

How can you sum up the problem our audience of humans are facing? You know, the one we're about to crack with a cracking idea. You'll intrigue your creative team from the off. This one got me going.

"LET'S STOP SO MANY FARMERS DYING EVERY YEAR."

Don't think this project has that sort of news in it? It does. There's a problem to solve here, a story to tell.



**WHY ARE YOU  
TALKING LIKE  
THAT??**



Hey wait a minute, I know you! That's not how you speak! Why do you suddenly sound like you're being forced to recite a marketing manual from memory. At gunpoint.

Don't use jargon. Especially to mask a lack of genuine insight. Don't sound like you think a business SHOULD sound like. Don't say things like 'We want to zag when the world zigs.'

Please. God. Don't sound like you work in marketing.

Let's lose all this ABC, C2DE stuff. It's not Sesame Street. Talk like you would talk to an actual human.

Add a personal story in. Make it relatable. Choose your words carefully. Add jokes! Be weird. Take a point of view. Say something offbeat. Tell a story. Cut down chunks of corporate text.

Put your amazing self into it.

# TOP TIP

When you write it, look away from your screen, imagine you're telling a pal or your folks about this.

You're in the pub, or you're having a cuppa, you're excited to share what you're working on.

And you want them to be too.

How would you persuade them?

Charm them? Convince them? Stop them from looking at their phone?



**GRAB A SPADE,  
CRACK ON**



Saying things like “all millennials” or ‘all homeowners” is not going to make your messaging accurate or true. These are actual HUMANS. So who are they? Really? (and yes, for b2b, these are STILL HUMANS).

People share EVERYTHING online these days, so go digging and find out more. What bugs them? What do they love, what do they need, what do they hate? What's their typical day like? Who else do they like out there, how do they feel about guinea pig fragrance right now?

Get inside people’s lives, get inside their heads and so when you get in front of them you’ll have something to say they’ll want to hear.

**ALSO** - dig elsewhere. Look at competitors, look at ads in other countries, look at specialist magazines in that industry. Can you visit their factory etc? Look at ads that have won awards in this sector. I guarantee you’ll find an extra insight or 3 you didn’t have before.

# TOP TIP

Where do your audience go to hang out? Or, because we're in the problem solving business, go to moan? What words crop up on the social media channels and industry forums that they use when talking about all this?

"Despair, frustrated, ..... nightmare, genius, unhelpful, amazing, if only..." Use them in your brief to paint a fuller picture.

And you know, you can just talk to people. Not in some ghastly staged research set up. Just have a chat.

You'll definitely know someone who knows someone who is an IFA. Or is into oats. Or seriously loves ferries. Send a quick email. Get a genuine inside scoop.



**EASY NOW...PUT  
THE SCISSORS  
DOWN.**



Yes, it might be pet insurance AGAIN. Yes, it's exactly the same brief as last year. No, there's nothing new to say. No, it's not better than anyone else's.

That's no excuse for cutting and pasting from the last brief you did.

This happens all the time and it's understandable when you're busy. But aside from the fact that your creative team won't read that bit if they think they've seen it before, it sets the wrong tone for the whole job.

The same goes for just pasting in the client's brief. It's what YOU can add that will make the difference.

There's ALWAYS gold in them hills.

**GET A RIGHT  
GOOD SWEAT ON.**



It's not easy. Which is why 99% of briefs are not great.

It should be hard. You have to come up with a simple, persuasive, compelling, unique, relatable, inarguable, fascinating, real world story about why your double glazed windows are in fact much better than those from the mob down the road.

Containing a clear and specific message about your product, which can be delivered in a really distinctive way.

So take your time. Set aside enough time. If it only takes you an hour, it's probably not going to cut it.

It doesn't have to be a chore. It should be your time to shine, blow minds and get your team all over excited.

# STEP 2. SHARING IT



**WHAT DO OTHER  
HUMANS MAKE  
OF ALL THIS?**



If you're finding it tricky, ask for opinions.

From colleagues, from creatives, from pals you know who might buy whatever this is you're selling.

You don't need 20 different opinions, but asking, "This is where I'm going with this, what do you reckon?" can and does provide some tasty extra nuggets.

And who doesn't love those?

**UNTIE THAT  
STRAIGHTJACKET.**



The interesting, more human stuff happens when you give people a bit of freedom.

That's when they come up with the less cliched and the more unexpected.

Don't be too rigid. Obviously, wildly off the wall ideas that have nothing to do with the Big Problem are, well, a big problem. But the best briefs have room to roam.

"Yeah, but the client has signed this off." Well go back and tell them there's new angle that will rock their world.

See also - "We've already had an idea...". Your ideas are of course valid and creative teams aren't the only one who can come up with ideas. But... any creative worth their salt doesn't need or want "a creative starter for 10". It's an immediate straightjacket. Keep it, just keep it out of the brief.

**ARE YOU SITTING  
COMFORTABLY?  
THEN I'LL BEGIN.**



Tell a story to bring your brief to life. Give it a beginning a middle and an end. Start with 'Once upon a time'.

No, really. Why not? Beats going on about flippin' Q1 KPIs.

And see all those neat and tidy boxes? They have to link up. And flow. Like chapters.

Problem links to audience links to insight links to solutions links to brand. All should flow from one to the other.

Keep all the shopping list stuff out of the way and focus on a tight, well structured, compelling tale.

**WE CAN ALL  
READ, CHEERS.**



Don't read your brief out to your creative team, word for word.

Chat to them like they're humans.

And right now they want your hot take on it all to get them interested and fired up. Then they can go away and read all the details.

Enthusiasm is infectious. Put some passion, energy and excitement into it.

Because if you don't, it's likely there won't be any in the work.

# STEP 3. ABUSING IT



**IT'S ALL IN THE  
NAME.**



It's called a 'brief', not a 'lengthy'.

Keep it tight. Keep it relevant. Keep it punchy. Be ruthless. Chop. Hack. Slash.

And don't cheat by attaching 18 pdfs (yes, that has really happened) that your team has to wade through.

Oh and less is more, but less can be less than we need to do the job.

So include the essential stuff, and the essential stuff only.

**JUST, YOU KNOW,  
BE MORE  
INTERESTING.**



Is your brief interesting to read? I mean, honestly, if you didn't write it, would you read it?

Have another look. Get someone else to give it a read. Is it really that attention grabbing?

Be brutal. Be honest.

If you don't find it interesting, or make it interesting, then no one else will.

Inject some deep fried intriguing thoughts into it.

Do you have a point of view in there to make the reader really think?

# PARADISE BY THE DASHBOARD LIGHT.



Be more Meatloaf.

As the late, great man once sang, "Let me sleep on it, I'll give you an answer in the morning."

Write it, go to bed and look at it again in the morning.

Like all creative work, it will always seem a little different.

And like all writing, when you read it out to yourself, and I mean read it aloud, you'll see it differently.

**YOUR  
PROPOSITION  
PROBABLY  
SUCKS, AND  
THAT'S OK.**



Don't worry, most propositions aren't great on the first pass.

It takes an extra bit of graft to get this bit right.

This really deserves a whole doc of its own, because it's the most important bit of your brief.

In the meantime, until some kind hearted, award winning writer type does just that, in a nutshell, concentrate on just ONE thought.

Not something that vaguely sounds like a headline. But the ONE benefit that makes this irresistible to your audience.

What's the SINGLE most important thing you can say about it?

# TOP TIP

Write down all the words that make the product/service unique.

Then try to construct sentences out of all the words you've just written down.

As they say...

**THE MAIN THING IS TO MAKE THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING.**



**BECAUSE IF YOU  
CAN'T SAY  
ANYTHING NEW,  
YOU'LL SOUND LIKE  
EVERYONE ELSE...**



CHRISTMAS 2021 CAMPAIGNS...

**COCA COLA - CHRISTMAS IS MAGIC WHEN WE  
SPEND IT TOGETHER**

**WAITROSE – BECAUSE TOGETHER WE CAN  
MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE**

**GAP – ALL TOGETHER NOW**

**IKEA CANADA – ASSEMBLE TOGETHER FOR  
THE HOLIDAYS**

**VODAFONE – TOGETHER WE CAN**

**MCDONAD'S – TOGETHER & LOVIN' IT**

**GUINNESS – TOGETHER AT LAST**

**TOYOTA – LET'S COME TOGETHER THIS  
HOLIDAY**

**QUALITY STREET – GET TOGETHER WITH  
YOUR FAVOURITES THIS CHRISTMAS**

**FORNUM & MASON – COME TOGETHER WITH  
A FORTNUM'S HAMPER**

**UNIQLO – WARMER TOGETHER**

**LUFTHANSA – TOGETHER AGAIN**

**EXTRA GUM -TOGETHER AGAIN**

**PANDORA - TOGETHER AGAIN**

**REAL WORLD,  
REAL LIFE  
EXAMPLES.**



STORY write great briefs. And so they make great ads. This brief for VELUX could have just said "We need to create a campaign to sell more roof windows in Q3." Or "Improve your home with roof windows." But they found a real nugget in that they bring in TWICE as much daylight as vertical windows.



So the brief was, "**How can we actually show people this?**" Using home-improvement influencer, Charlie Luxton, and a customised pop-up house, we made a film that brought the brief to life.

The result? A Gold Award at the Marketing Society Star Awards and a whopping 26% sales uplift.

More here - [storyuk.com/our-work/veluxr](https://storyuk.com/our-work/veluxr)

Tesco Bank produce gift cards throughout the year, and it can be hard saying anything new about them. So we tried a different approach. We went digging. And found our audience for student gift cards were typically parents of students heading out of the family home for the very first time, trying to make sure they had money to spend on non alcoholic items.

That audience, in most briefs, would've been 'Parents of students'. But, with a little persuasion, became "Parents of students who suddenly find they're empty nesters and need a bit of cheering up themselves."

Gift Card sales in 2021 went up by 65% and Tesco Bank won Best Creative Marketing Campaign at the Gift Card & Voucher Association Awards. And yes, that's a real thing, apparently.



**They get a treat,  
you get a spare room.**

Send the student in your family off with a Student Choice card.

Harvey Norman Boots M&S BROWN THOMAS LEE STYLE SPORTS JUST EAT Currys PC World Woodie's

Tesco's change of mind policy does not apply. Your legal rights are not affected. Selected Tesco stores only. Subject to availability. Read the T&Cs on the card before you buy. Available to buy at tills with a cashier only.

Like me, you probably saw these shared on the likes of LinkedIn an awful lot. They're from Adam&eveDDB, who created a range of explosive special builds. The brief could've just been "We need to celebrate the launch of chili-infused Marmite Dynamite.' And would have ended up being as bland as this mayo launch poster that appeared everywhere. Instead, according to the agency, "Unilever asked us to blow the doors off their Marmite Dynamite launch." And everyone noticed.



# A HUMAN BRIEFING CHECKLIST.



- What is the big problem this is solving?
- Whose problem am I solving?
- How is it interesting?
- What feels different and new here?
- Have you left space for exploring different angles?
- Is it simple enough?
- What emotion am I trying to generate?
- Do you sound like a human?
- Does it read like a story?
- Does it contain one big, bold, clear and specific message about your product?

# How The Creative Brief Writer Matures

## 1. I Am Smart!

Look At All My Information!

## 2. I Am Confused!

Look At All My Information!

## 3. I Have Hunches

But I Also Have All The Information!

## 4. Information Is Cool

But Here's The Thing, I Think?

## 5. Here's The Thing!

This Thing Will Haunt You!

@MARKPOLLARD