

The Scoping Cheat Sheet

Why you're always behind, and what to do before your team burns out.

For marketing and creative managers who never have enough time to get everything done.



ANDELO



Stop guessing. Start scoping.

Every project that runs over is a capacity problem disguised as a deadline problem. This cheat sheet covers four things: the hidden time costs that nobody accounts for, the warning signs that a project is about to take longer than planned, real time benchmarks for common design work, and a 2-minute calculator to find your actual capacity gap. Use the tables as reference. Use the calculator once, then come back to it every quarter.

Nobody falls behind on purpose. They fall behind because nobody taught them what to count.

14 Things That Sound Like 15 Minutes But Aren't

These are the phrases that eat your time without ever showing up in the brief.

WHAT GETS SAID	WHAT IT ACTUALLY MEANS	IMPACT
"Actually, can we change the key visual?"	One change at the top rolls through the entire campaign.	Start over
"Same as last time but different"	That's a new design dressed as a revision. Treat it like one.	Start over
"Can you match what [competitor] is doing?"	Research, creative interpretation, and approval risk. "Like this but ours" still takes 2-4 hours minimum in our experience.	High
"Can we see a few options?"	Each option is a separate design direction. Three options isn't one task. It's three.	High
"Can we try a different direction?"	No clear direction = guaranteed back and forth. The designer can't hit a target you haven't set.	High
"The CEO wants to have a look"	Additional approval layer. They haven't seen the brief and they'll have opinions.	High
"Can you just update the copy on all 12 sizes?"	That's 12 separate file edits. Each one opened, updated, checked, exported.	High
"Let's also do print versions"	Print isn't a resize of digital. Different colour profiles, bleed, resolution. Separate production process.	Medium
"Can we do A/B versions?"	Each variation needs separate execution. It's never "just swap the headline."	Medium
"Can you also do a Stories version?"	New format, new safe areas, new hierarchy. Every format is its own layout.	Medium
"We'll provide the copy later"	Task gets blocked, then rushed when copy arrives. Now the work is being done to someone else's timeline.	Medium
"It's basically done, just needs a few tweaks"	"A few tweaks" from someone who hasn't seen it yet is a full round of changes. Every time.	Medium
"Oh and can we add a QR code?"	Someone needs to generate it, test it, and provide it. 15 minutes of design waits on days of internal admin.	Low
"Just a quick resize"	Different aspect ratio = new layout decisions. The layout is being rebuilt from scratch, not dragged to a new size.	Low

10 Signs a Project Is About to Blow Up

If you spot two or more of these before a project starts, your timeline just became unreliable. The more you spot, the more hours you'll lose.

WARNING SIGN	WHY IT BLOWS OUT	IMPACT
No approved copy at briefing	Design starts, copy changes, design restarts.	Start over
"We'll know it when we see it"	No creative direction = guesswork. Potential complete rework.	Start over
More than 2 people giving feedback	Conflicting direction = changes that never end.	Start over
Stakeholder hasn't seen the brief	They'll have opinions. Late. After the design is done.	High
Budget hasn't been discussed	The work grows until someone asks what it costs. By then, it's too late.	High
The brief mentions "phase 1"	There are more phases. They haven't been scoped.	High
Stakeholders reference 5+ different visual styles	The direction hasn't been agreed on. You'll design to one style, they'll pick another.	High
Timeline is "ASAP" with no actual deadline	Creates unnecessary chaos that increases the back and forth.	Medium
Previous version was "done by the intern"	There's no benchmark. Expectations are based on something that had no process behind it.	Medium
Legal or compliance review required	Adds days to the timeline that you can't control.	Medium



You don't have a design problem. You have a capacity problem. Everything else is a symptom.

How Long Design Actually Takes

When the brief is clear, the direction is agreed, and the work is scoped properly, this is how long production actually takes.

Complexity key: Simple = template exists, content swap. Standard = new layout, existing brand. Complex = new concept, multiple stakeholders.

ASSET TYPE	SIMPLE	STANDARD	COMPLEX
Social media post (single)	1–2h	2–3h	3–5h
Social media set (5 posts)	3–5h	5–8h	8–12h
Social media stories (set of 3)	1.5–2h	2–4h	4–6h
EDM / email template	2–3h	3–5h	5–8h
Presentation deck (10 slides)	4–6h	6–10h	10–15h
Flyer / poster (A4)	1.5–2h	2–4h	4–6h
Brochure (4 pages)	4–6h	8–12h	12–18h
Pull-up banner	1.5–2h	2–4h	4–5h
Banner set (web, 5 sizes)	2–3h	3–5h	5–8h
Infographic (single page)	3–5h	5–10h	10–15h
Report / annual report (per page)	1–1.5h	1.5–2h	2–3h
Event collateral (corflute/signage)	2–3h	3–5h	5–8h
Campaign rollout (key visual + 10 adaptations)	10–15h	18–30h	30–50h
Event pack (6–8 assets: signage, socials, EDM, program)	12–20h	22–35h	35–60h

Production time estimates based on industry benchmarks and our experience across years of production work for Australian marketing teams. Assumes clear brief, approved direction, and established brand guidelines. Actual time varies by team, tools, and workflow.



So... Do You Have Enough Capacity?

This takes **2 minutes**. We use this framework to evaluate our own capacity every quarter. After a few years of refining it, we've found it's the most reliable way to plan ahead without burning out the team.

**Fill it in for your own team.
The number might surprise you.**

STEP 1

Count Your Monthly Output

WHAT YOU'RE PRODUCING	QTY/MONTH	AVG HOURS EACH	TOTAL HOURS
Social media posts	× 2.5h	=
EDMs	× 4h	=
Presentations	× 8h	=
Flyers / posters	× 3h	=
Brochures / reports	× 10h	=
Event collateral	× 4h	=
Banner / web assets	× 4h	=
Other	× h	=

Monthly hours =

Averages use the Standard complexity midpoint from the table above. Adjust up or down based on your typical complexity.

STEP 2

Add the Hidden Time

The design is only part of the work. Every task carries time that never shows up in the brief.

HIDDEN WORK	SIMPLE TASK	COMPLEX
Writing the brief	~10 min	30 min+
Checking each submission	~10 min	30 min+
Checking revision (allow 2 rounds as standard)	~20 min	60 min+
Admin, email comms, file prep, and buffer	In our experience, 10–20% of total time	In our experience, 10–20% of total time

Add these to every task in Step 1. Your real monthly need is always higher than the design time alone.

STEP 3

Compare to Your Capacity

SCENARIO	MONTHLY HOURS
1 full-time designer (productive hours)	~120h
1 senior designer (after meetings, admin)	~90h
1 freelancer (typical retainer)	40–60h
Production partner (subscription)	60–120h+ (scalable) depending on plan

Productive hour estimates based on labour cost studies averaging 1,558 productive hours/year for full-time employees (Law Insider, Asana Anatomy of Work Index). Senior figure adjusted for meeting and admin load.

For context: At typical Australian agency rates (**\$120–\$250/hr**), a **40-hour monthly gap costs \$5,000–\$10,000** in outsourced work. Hiring a mid-level designer to fill that gap costs \$95,000+ per year once you add super, leave, and insurance, and **\$113,000+ in the first year** after recruitment and equipment.

Sources: DesignRush, Cemoh, Design Business Council, SEEK, ATO, SafeWork Australia (2025–2026).

STEP 4

Now Check Your Worst Month

Your baseline tells you the average. EOFY campaigns, product launches, Black Friday, events, and Christmas don't care about your average.

Think about your busiest month last year. That's the number that breaks teams. Not your average month.

The Number You've Been Avoiding

IF YOUR TEAM NEEDS...	AND YOU HAVE...	YOU'RE...
60h/month	1 FT designer (120h)	Fine. But that designer is also doing strategy, meetings, and admin.
120h/month	1 FT designer (90h productive)	30h short every month. That's your backlog.
180h/month	2 FT designers (180h productive)	At capacity. One sick day and you're behind.
80h/month	2 freelancers (80h)	Covered. Until one ghosts you mid-campaign.

The question isn't "can we handle it?" It's "what happens when we can't?"

Some teams hire. But recruitment takes months, onboarding takes longer, and one new designer doesn't always keep up with demand across every format and channel.

Some teams bring in vendors when it gets busy. That works for peak months. But if you're short every month, that's not a peak problem. That's a structural gap.

A production partner fills the structural gap. An extension of your in-house team. Consistent capacity that scales with demand. No recruitment. Minimal ramp-up. Built to learn your brand quickly.

You don't have a design problem. You have a capacity problem. Everything else is a symptom.

If you've found your gap, we should talk.

[Book a Call](#)

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