



BC

Choosing Your Branding Partner: The Complete Guide

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INTRODUCTION

If you've started your search for a branding team you can trust, you'll know that there are countless options to choose from, each with different processes, timeframes and packages. This guide is designed to help you find the right branding studio for your needs.

To help you make an informed decision, we've created a list of questions and things to look for across five areas: Portfolio, Deliverables, Pricing, Timeline and Culture.

Portfolio

Most studios will have past work for you to view. This gives insight into the types of challenges they've solved, the thought and meaning behind a project and any gains that their clients have experienced post-launch.

Ask Yourself

- Overall, do we like the style of the projects presented in their portfolio?
- What results have they achieved for their clients? These may be intangible or tangible.
- Are the solutions shown appropriate for the clients' goals, audience and industry?
- Is the project well executed and of high quality?
- Does this project have any qualities or elements that may be appropriate for our brand?
- Does the solution differentiate the brand in their space?
- How did they arrive at the final solution? Is it well thought out?

What to Look For

STYLE/AESTHETICS

While a knowledge of your industry may be helpful for your chosen agency to be familiar with, a better indication of capability lies within the styles they can execute. Brands within the same industry will rarely share the same personality and positioning (nor should they if they're trying to stand out). This means that their visuals will differ greatly.

Instead, look at the agency's portfolio to see if they can execute a style or mood that mirrors your new brand direction. You may not know exactly what style your new brand will take, but you might have an indication of some of the qualities it should epitomise. Is it classic or modern? Bold or muted? Sophisticated or fun? Elegant or edgy? Look for examples of visual identities with the qualities you're seeking.

STRATEGY/THINKING

Look for meaning behind the brand. Did they just create something that looks or sounds good, or does there appear to be strategy and thought behind their decision making?

Pro Tip

WHO CREATED THE BRAND?

Some agencies do more than just branding and their portfolio may include projects where they worked on marketing activities like web design or advertising, not branding. While there can absolutely be crossover here, be sure the brand elements you like were created by the agency and not a partner supplier. You'll often find the scope of work and any partners in the description.

Deliverables

Understanding exactly what you'll be receiving for your investment is a critical step in your evaluation. Each supplier will have different inclusions and exclusions, so it's important to pay attention to the details and ask any questions if anything is unclear.

Ask the Agency

- Does your process include a strategy session to define our brand?
- What's covered in your brand strategy session/s?
- Will I receive a document outlining the findings from our strategy sessions?
- How many logo concepts will I receive?
- Can you help me identify sub brand logo concepts? (If applicable)
- Are revisions included in your estimate? If so, how many?
- Will you identify my brand colours?
- Will you identify font options?
- Will you identify or create supporting graphics that I can use or purchase, like icons, photography, illustrations, textures, shapes, lines or other elements?

- Will you identify my brand voice and tone?
- Will I receive a set of brand/visual guidelines?
- Can I see an example set of brand/visual guidelines?
- Can you help me roll out my new brand across collateral?
- What types of files will I receive upon completion?

What to look for?

STRATEGY CONTENT

At a minimum, your strategy sessions should include discussion around the following subjects:

- Audience definition (characteristics of the target audience and what motivates them)
- Brand definition (brand personality/attributes, brand positioning)

You might also like your strategy sessions to cover:

- Brand trajectory (mission, vision, values, purpose)
- Brand voice (how your brand should speak and write)
- Big idea (the new way of thinking you want people to believe in)
- Messaging (brand level messaging snippets like a tagline, value proposition or elevator pitch)
- Naming (choosing a name for your business)

LOGO CONCEPTS

Some agencies will offer one logo concept, others will offer several. Generally speaking, your designer will create many more draft concepts for you, but will only finalise and present those that are best aligned with your brand.

Here, more is not better. We'd rather have one, well considered, appropriate logo than ten logo options of average quality.

LOGO SUITE

Your branding studio will export your final logo in various formats for print and web use. Ensure that your logo will be supplied to you in a vector format which means it can be stretched to any size without pixelating (typical file types are EPS, AI, PDF, SVG).

You should also check that you'll receive positive and negative variations of your logo, for example if you have a black logo, you'll also receive a white version of

the logo. If you have a specific file type you need, be sure to ask your branding team before you commence your project.

REVISIONS

Ensure there is some opportunity for revision and feedback on your logo concept/s. You may not need to use revision time, but it provides a safeguard to ensure you are happy with the quality of the concepts delivered.

SUPPORTING GRAPHICS

Your logo rarely exists in isolation. In addition to outlining your brand fonts and colours it's a good idea to also have a suite of supporting graphics such as icons, photography styles, illustrations, textures, shapes, lines, patterns and other graphics. These elements allow you to create a cohesive, branded look, without needing to put your logo on every inch of your collateral.

GUIDELINES

Look at what is covered in the guidelines as well as how extensively it is covered. The more thorough the documentation is, the less room there will be for inconsistencies in application. For example, in our guidelines, we don't just outline primary colour palettes and codes, we also outline which colours can be paired together and how much of each colour should be used to achieve the right look and feel.

DESIGN SUPPORT/BRAND ROLLOUT

If you'll need support with applying your brand across marketing collateral, such as stationery, signage, websites, pitch decks, brochures and more you may like to check that your branding studio can support you with your rollout, or connect you with someone who can.

PARTICIPATION

It's important that your core team members are able to participate in the process. Check that there are ample opportunities for feedback and collaboration throughout the project.

Pro Tip

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

If your preferred studio cannot offer some of the deliverables you're after, you can always partner with other suppliers to build out a complete solution. They may even have suppliers they regularly partner with and/or can recommend. Just make sure you share any documents or recommendations with these additional teams.

THE LINGO

Please keep in mind that different branding teams may use alternative terminology to describe what they do. Unfortunately, there are no ‘standard’ terms, so don’t pay too much attention to vernacular, you’ll just want to ensure that the items you need are included.

Pricing

Price is an important factor to consider when evaluating your options, but as you'll see, there are many costs businesses forget about when making their decision. Generally, you get what you pay for, but there are plenty of options within everyone's budget.

Ask the Agency

- How much will it cost?
- What costs should I be aware of that are not included in this price?

FIXED VS HOURLY FEES

Most branding studios will give you a flat fixed fee to create a visual identity. To make accurate comparisons, be sure you look at what's included in each quote. Avoid hiring someone based solely on an hourly rate as it's a poor indicator of how much your project will actually cost. This means it could easily blow your budget if they work very slowly or require many revision rounds.

FONT COSTS

Depending on the fonts you choose, it's likely you'll need to pay a fee to license

each font for use on your website, app and/or desktop. The cost of fonts vary greatly, but many brands will be able to license their fonts for \$500-\$1000 or less. If you're on a tight budget, there are also free fonts that you can explore with your branding team.

PHOTOS AND GRAPHICS COSTS

Your branding team may provide art direction on supporting graphics, such as illustration, photography, icons, patterns or layouts. Typically, the creation of these assets won't be included within the price you pay for your visual identity. Instead, you will likely need to pay additional fees to purchase, license, shoot or design these additional assets.

COLLATERAL AND BRAND ROLLOUT COSTS

From business cards to signage, packaging to websites, your business may have many touchpoints that will need to reflect your new brand. When planning your rollout, you don't have to use the same branding studio to create your branded materials, but you can. Costs for each item vary widely based on factors like quantity, page count, production requirements, print management and copywriting.

Pro Tips

LICENSING RESPONSIBILITIES

Ask your supplier if they license assets for you, or if you'll be required to handle their purchase. Be aware of mark ups on the cost of the assets to account for their time and resources.

Trademarking

Trademarking your logo requires consultation with a qualified trademark attorney, and is typically a separate cost that you may wish to factor into your budget.

DETERMINING YOUR BUDGET

We recommend determining how much your branding project is roughly worth to your business to evaluate what you'd be willing to pay. While there are many intangible benefits to branding, there are also several measurable outcomes that can help you create your budget.

For example, branding can save you money in efficiencies, decreased marketing costs and increased staff retention. It can also increase your profitability in elevated sales and the ability to increase your pricing.

So, estimate how much you think a new brand will save or earn you over the

next 12-24 months. Then, allocate a percentage of that estimate towards your branding project.

Timeline

Branding projects can quickly lose momentum if there are no clear timelines and expectations set from the get go. Be informed about how long your branding project will take and how much time you'll need to commit to ensuring its success.

Ask the Agency

- How will we communicate throughout the project?
- Where will meetings take place?
- How long does the whole process take?
- If you receive a variable time window (e.g. 6-14 weeks), ask them — what variables would factor into a project running for 6 weeks vs. 14 weeks?
- How much of our time will we need to allocate to meetings or delivering feedback?
- Will you provide a timeline or schedule at the beginning of the project?

What to Look For

TIMEFRAMES

It's completely up to you what sort of timeline you are willing to accept, remembering that the sooner you're able to rebrand the sooner you can enjoy the benefits of the rebrand! Think twice about agencies who cannot provide you with clear time estimates.

LOCATION

Do you have a preference for online or in-person meetings? Will you have to commute to their office or will they come to you? This may narrow your options for suppliers who are local to you, or who can collaborate online.

COMMUNICATION & AVAILABILITY

Understand how you will communicate throughout the project and how much time you and/or your team will need to commit to the project. If you rarely check emails or have a schedule that requires your branding team to meet outside of typical hours, it's important to know whether your branding team can work within those parameters to deliver your project smoothly.

Pro Tip

STRATEGY DELAYS

We often see long delays between the final brand strategy session/s and the delivery of the final strategy report. This will stall the design process, so ask your supplier to provide a time estimate for how long they will take to complete the report/blueprint.

Culture & Fit

Working on your brand should be an enjoyable process. After all, you may spend a few months working closely with your chosen studio. And, while you don't have to be best mates by the end of your project, you should get along well with whoever you'll be dealing with.

Ask the Agency

- Who will I be working with on this project?
- Where can I see past client testimonials?
- Will I enjoy working with this team?
- Do I have any hesitations based on current communications?
- What do their past clients have to say about them?
- What are their values? Do they align with mine?