How did the BetterBriefs Project come about?

Two strategists wanting to better understand why there’s so much confusion and misalignment around marketing briefs and the briefing process.
An important topic, lightly researched

**UK**
Sample size = 277 (121 marketers and 156 agencies).

**NL**
Reclamebriefing. Een goede brief is het halve werk by SWOCC (2007).
Literature study, including 37 interviews with marketers and agencies.

**USA**
Enhancing Client–Agency Relationships by the ANA (2015).
Sample size = 231 (126 marketeers and 105 agencies).

**Global**
Sample size = 78 (32 brand owners and 46 from agencies) for the ‘17 study.
The aim of the project

A survey to help agencies and marketers better understand where marketing briefs fail and where they succeed.

We hope the results help both parties have better and more objective conversations on how to make briefs better.
An online survey with a difference

Created in conjunction with Flood+Partners.

A quant. survey built to engage and involve people.

Fresh question formats made to capture Type 1 emotional responses and to elicit deeper thoughtful consideration.

The result: a vivid picture generated from over 1,700 highly engaged respondents.
1731 respondents from 70 countries

944 from marketing organisations

and 786 from creative agencies
**Glossary of terms**

- **marketer** = brief-writers, contributors and approvers all employed by a brand (aka the client).

- **creative agency** = account managers, strategists, creatives or management (aka the agency).

- **marketing brief** = the brief written by the client, for the purposes of developing a creative solution (aka the client brief).
Part 1: The Problem

Marketers and agencies are on different planets
Both marketers and agencies agree that briefs are important.

‘It’s difficult to produce good creative work without a good marketing brief’
In the UK, briefs have grown in importance since the last time they were researched.

‘It’s difficult to produce good creative work without a good marketing brief’
However, despite their importance and value, most marketing briefs are neglected. ‘The brief is one of the most valuable and paradoxically most neglected tools marketers have to create good work’.
Both marketers and agencies acknowledge that writing briefs isn’t easy

‘Writing briefs is hard’
And it doesn’t get any easier the more experience you have

‘Writing briefs is hard’
Our findings are fairly consistent across at least 3 markets

‘Writing briefs is hard’
Most marketers think they’re good at writing briefs; most agencies disagree

‘I consider myself/my clients good at writing briefs’
In the USA, this gap has widened since the last time the question was asked.

‘I consider myself/my clients good at writing briefs’
The perceived quality of the last three briefs written/received is concerning

**Marketers**

- 31% not good enough
- 52% ok
- 17% good

**Creative Agencies**

- 75% not good enough
- 22% ok
- 3% good

Base: All 1731
Creative agencies think most marketing briefs lack focus, clarity and inspiration

‘Choose from the list below the words that describe the typical client brief’

- unfocused: 83%
- unclear: 79%
- dull: 65%
- thoughtless: 44%
- shoddy: 39%
- useful: 37%
- useless: 26%
- thoughtful: 15%
- inspiring: 9%
- clear: 7%
- well-crafted: 4%
- sharp: 3%
Most marketers think the briefs they write provide clear strategic direction; most agencies disagree.

‘The briefs I/my client write(s) provide clear strategic direction’
The missing ingredient from most marketing briefs (according to creative agencies)

1. Clear objectives/outcomes: 55%
2. Clear strategy/problem definition: 34%
3. Clarity in general: 30%
4. Single-mindedness: 10%

Base: All Agency 786
Clarity is key in briefs, however most marketers and creative agencies aren’t even speaking the same language

‘The briefs I/my client write(s) contain clear and concise language’
But it’s not just language. 80% of creative agencies feel marketers have a poor or limited *understanding of what they need from briefs*. 

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Poor</th>
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<th>Reasonable</th>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>57%</td>
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Base: All Agency 786
Most marketers feel positive about briefs; creative agencies feel the exact opposite.

- Excited: 64% satisfied, 36% unsatisfied
- Energised: 63% satisfied, 30% unsatisfied
- Motivated: 77% satisfied, 46% unsatisfied
- Satisfied: 65% satisfied, 16% unsatisfied
- Bored: 31% satisfied, 57% unsatisfied
- Disengaged: 51% satisfied, 20% unsatisfied
- Frustrated: 43% satisfied, 35% unsatisfied
- Irritated: 78% satisfied, 67% unsatisfied

Base: All 1731
And there are significant differences in how actively positive people feel towards briefs based on job function and size of agency.

- Brief writers: 82%
- Brief approvers: 79%
- Brief contributors: 65%

### By Job Function:
- Account management: 54%
- Creative: 46%
- Management: 45%
- Strategy: 40%

### By Size of Agency:
- 1-10: 54%
- 11-50: 46%
- 51-150: 42%
- 150+: 40%

_base: All Marketing 945, All Agency 786_
Part 2: The Impact

A lot of time, money and energy is wasted
Staggeringly, briefs often change.

9 out of 10 marketers admit that their briefs change once they are briefed-in.
And rebriefs occur too often for anyone’s liking

‘Rebriefs happen too often’
Most marketers understand the negative impact of a rebrief

- Time lost/wasted: 43%
- Add to cost: 18%
- Leads to confusion: 13%
- Demotivating: 10%
- Positive effect/no problem: 9%
- Damages relationships: 5%
- Necessary because of poor initial brief: 5%
- Worst outcomes: 3%

Base: All Marketing 945
It means that unfortunately, the creative process is not always used for what it’s intended.

6 out of 10 marketers admit to using the creative process to clarify the strategy.
And in the UK, this is happening more than it has in the past

‘The creative process is often used to clarify the strategy’
A lot of time and effort is wasted as a result of poor quality briefs
Poor briefs can have a big impact on marketing budgets

It is estimated that 1/3 of marketing budgets are wasted on poor briefs and misdirected work.
Part 3: A Way Forward

Suggestions for making briefs better
Be clear on the strategy before writing the brief

Creative agencies are twice as energised to work on briefs that provide clear strategic direction.
To help provide clear direction, ensure every marketing brief contains clear objectives.

‘Rank in order of importance the most critical elements of a marketing brief’

1. Objectives – 61%
2. Insights – 18%
3. Target group definition – 13%

Base: All 1731
Bring more structure to the briefing process

More than 7 in 10 marketers state agency briefings could work better if they were more structured.
Get the right people to sign-off the brief

Half the time, the right people aren’t signing-off marketing briefs internally.
A quote that sums up the internal struggle from a passionate marketer in the UK

“My briefs get re-written by committee - and those people are very senior but with no clue about marketing. My briefs get filled with jargon, nonsense and irrelevance, plus audiences, targets and topics are added in order to keep everyone feeling like their area of work is valid. I’m ashamed to send them over.”
General advice

Marketers
Be clear on your strategies and use clear and simple language. Don’t send briefs to your agencies that you’re not happy with.

Creative Agencies
Don’t be silent. Flag what’s missing, clarify what’s unclear with your clients. Better briefs are your responsibility too.
In summary

Invest more time in briefs

Work closer together on briefs

Ensure you’re speaking the same language
The BetterBrief cycle

- better briefs
- richer creative thinking
- better ideas
- fewer rounds of conceiving & approvals
- more time & money saved
- more effective work
- more motivated staff
With special thanks
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