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Top ten tips on writing effectiveness case studies

By Design Business Association

Taken from our experience of successful DBA Design Effectiveness Awards entries, here's a top ten list of things you may want to consider when putting together a compelling case study.

Being able to measure, and demonstrate the effectiveness of your work is an essential tool in the development of your design business.

Taken from our experience of successful DBA Design Effectiveness Awards (<http://www.effectivedesign.org.uk/>) entries, we have drawn up a top ten list of things you may want to

1. Measurable results

‘Effectiveness’ is defined as ‘assessed according to actual rather than face value’. Without measures, results are meaningless. Solid, quantifiable outcomes are key to proving effectiveness – so look for tangible ways to measure the impact that your work has had.



Gold winner: Lick Frozen Yogurt
(<http://www.effectivedesign.org.uk/winners/2016/food-producers/lick-frozen-yogurt>) **Client:** Lick **Design:** This Way Up

2. Have clear objectives

What will success look like? The measurement of effectiveness starts with a clear set of objectives – from these you will be able to understand exactly what you should be measuring.



Gold winner: Buster Plughole Care
(<http://www.effectivedesign.org.uk/winners/2016/household-goods-home-construction/buster-plughole-care>) **Client:** Challs International **Design:** Elmwood

For example; if your client tells you that they want to increase sales by 6%, you will need to understand the current sales results and set markers to measure how sales have been affected post design.

If their objectives are woollier – e.g. ‘move into new markets’ – you are wise to try and interrogate these before the project starts. Which new markets? How many? How quickly? From answering these questions, you will have a firm handle of what success will look like and have a place to start measuring.

3. Link your results to your objectives

Once you have a clear set of objectives, this should give you an easy list of the measures that you want to present. Results should directly reflect the objectives – and vice versa. You may well find that you have produced results that weren’t originally targeted for i.e. sales have increased so much that new products have been developed, or you have reduced the amount of packaging, saving waste. Do always talk about these too, as they demonstrate that you have over delivered on the original brief.



Gold winner: Johnnie Walker Houses
 (<http://www.effectivedesign.org.uk/winners/2016/bewalker-houses>) **Client:** Diageo **Design:**
 LOVE

4. Bring out the human impact

If there has been an impact on people's lives – be it environmental or behavioural, be sure to mention it. It can make a strong case study even more compelling.

5. Keep qualitative data to a minimum

As a crude rule of thumb, if you can focus on 80% quantitative results you can afford around 20% of your results to constitute qualitative, anecdotal evidence such as quotes and feedback. It works best as a support to hard facts and figures.

6. Create a context for the results



Gold winner: Voice of Our Brand
 (<http://www.effectivedesign.org.uk/winners/2016/fixe-line-telecommunications/voice-our-brand>) **Client:** Virgin Media **Design:**
 Engine Service Design

Your audience (be it a Design Effectiveness Awards judge or a potential client) will likely have little specific understanding of the product and market that you are presenting, so you can strengthen your results by framing them in the context of how ambitious or challenging these aims were. For instance, a 6% increase in sales means little until you explain that the market was declining by -3%.

7. Talk about the design solution in context to the objectives

When talking about how exactly you approached and met the brief, be sure to talk about the creative execution in relation to the objectives. Don't spend time telling them which blue you chose to use, explain why blue was the right choice to position the product to the desired audience.

8. Address other influencing factors

The key to proving the ROI of design is the extrapolation of other factors that may have influenced the results – was there a large-scale advertising or PR campaign? Price promotions? Celebrity endorsement? It certainly isn't the end of the road for your case study if these elements were employed, but you will want to understand the impact of any activity. How long did the ad campaign run for? Can you compare it to previous levels of spend on PR? Have they spent less this time, with greater results? Failure to address these issues will undermine your case.



Gold winner: Wyevale
Garden Centres

(<http://www.effectivedesign.org.uk/wir-leisure/wyevale-garden-centres>) **Client:** Wyevale Garden Centres **Design:** Kiwi & Pom

9. Talk about further design investment

There is nothing that says success more than evidence of further investment in design. If your client went on to re-brand other products, or commission a further comms campaign, this speaks volumes for the value of your work.

10. Don't forget to talk about saving money as well as making it

In tough economic times, design's ability to come up with solutions that save money can be as impressive as the ability to develop new business. If you've done both, well, who wouldn't want to hear about that?

DBA Design Effectiveness Awards: Be a winner

Irrefutably prove the value of your design work to business.

Judged by business leaders and entered jointly by client and designer, the DBA Design Effectiveness Awards are both rigorous and authoritative. They celebrate the power of design to drive business success and provide compelling proof of why design is a sound commercial investment.

More information on the DBA Design Effectiveness Awards website (<http://www.effectivedesign.org.uk>).



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