



**The only thing  
that matters in  
design is the words**

Without the right thought, the right big idea and the right words, surely design becomes no more than decorative art. The interplay between all these elements is essential to success, whether the design involved is for a brand or a brochure.

**So how do you get the interplay right and end up with a result that communicates exactly what you want it to?**



# Great design is a great idea told simply

Getting to simplicity isn't easy. There are many daily challenges that conspire to overcomplicate. Here are six challenges we come across regularly.

## 1 Everyone's a writer

Well written copy is an art form. Being factually correct is one thing. Expressing it so the writing sings is another. It takes practice and patience to create a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. To use short sentences. To use sentences of medium length. And to engage the reader with a sentence of considerable length at the right time.

The trouble is, everyone thinks they can write. Some of the least accessible copy we encounter is either too academic or verbose, when simplicity would suffice.

Here's an unnecessarily long online reply to a customer who asked if a product was available:



*"We are currently in the process of consolidating our product range to ensure that the products that we stock are indicative of our brand aspirations. As part of our range consolidation we have also decided to revisit our supplier list and employ a more intelligent system for stock acquisition. As a result of the above certain product lines are now unavailable [from us], whilst potentially remaining available from more mainstream suppliers."*

Writing is a creative discipline and needs to be respected as such.

## 2 Poor writing = Poor thinking

Is bad writing the fault of the person writing or the fault of the thinking that the writer has to work with? Thinking has to be as good as the writing. As companies try to articulate their purpose with clarity, it's clear that some are better at it than others. Take Google. An internet search engine, a software company, a technology company, operating in a highly complex environment. Yet its mission is simple: to organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.

It's a purpose that transcends everything they do and create. It wasn't arrived at by chance. It took considered thought and expressed with equal consideration, and clarity.

### 3 Writing and designing are separate tasks

A final produced piece of creative is a careful combination of words and images. Creating harmony between the two means writing and designing in harmony. Good design is not the final part of a processing line, but a combined iterative journey that starts and finishes, with design and words together.

### 4 Style over substance

Most award winning design is clear and focused.

Take Argos 'Simple Value' products. 140 lines of essential products for the home and everyday items. The 'Simple Value' products speak for themselves - the packaging reflects this. But simple doesn't just mean basic. By adding a twist in the product descriptions the copy elevates the conversation, empathy and customer engagement beyond the ordinary. It's simplicity with added value. Great design is often a simple idea told simply and not an opportunity to showcase latest thinking and ideas.

### 5 Without the sector vernacular, people won't get it

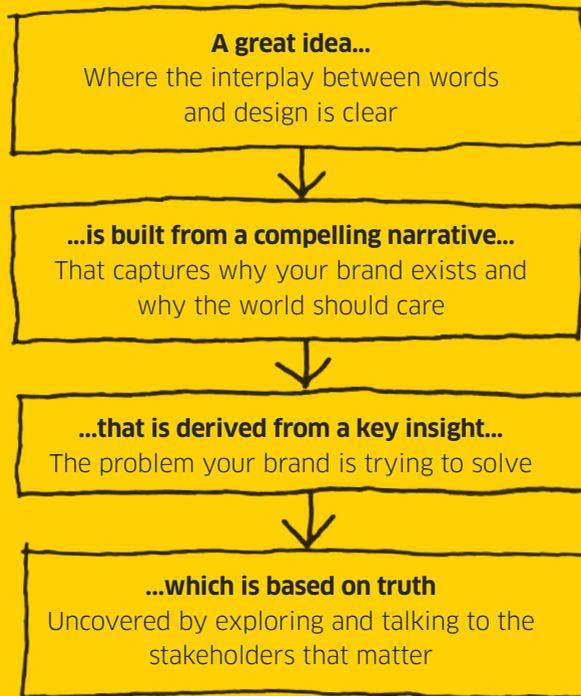
A common misconception exists that if you're talking to an audience within a specific sector, you have to follow suit and use the sector vernacular. Not so. It's true, certain sectors talk in a specific way, be it the use of three letter acronyms, specific terminology or bland generic statements. What's important is having your own voice, style and tone that supports your personality, irrespective of the vernacular.

### 6 Groupthink

Managing stakeholders is complicated. Signing off creative or copy with multiple stakeholders can be the death of a clear and single-minded idea. Setting the ground rules at the start is critical. Separate the need for engagement and input from sign-off. As a general rule of thumb, the smaller the sign-off committee the more single-minded the idea.

# There's no quick fix

There are many other challenges but unfortunately no quick fix. Making sure you build your idea from the right place will help.



If you want Time Out to think about creating great design, get in touch and we'll ensure your words and design sing together in perfect harmony.

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