

FINIEN

YOUR BRAND LAUNCH

01

HOW TO SELECT THE RIGHT AGENCY PARTNER FOR
YOUR BRAND LAUNCH

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WHY IT MATTERS

Looking for the right creative partner to help you launch a new brand is not like a typical search for an advertising agency or a graphic design studio. This may catch you by surprise and that's where it gets tricky. You launch your brand only once, but you have graphic design, advertising and marketing needs on an ongoing basis. The relationship you seek right now is one of short term — or at least you should not get side-tracked looking for a partner for life at this point in the process. It is about finding a partner with expertise in brand launches who understands what will help give your new brand the elements for success. You should not get distracted by an agency's stunning creative work or deep knowledge within your segment. Of course these are important factors, but you need to stay true to the task at hand and ask yourself: who will be best suited to bring my new brand to life - from name through brand identity to a successful digital design? We asked ourselves this question and created a list of things you should, as well as should not focus on while going through this tremendously important process with your new brand. With many marketing efforts you get a second chance. Naming your new brand is not one of these and this guide will help to relieve some of the pressure for you when you need to determine which agency, or consultancy should be selected to lead the task.

1: EXPERTISE IN THE CAPABILITIES YOU SEEK

It seems rather logical: if you need someone to fix your car you go to a car repair shop. If you have a very distinct problem, like overheating, you should go to a radiator specialist. You have a distinct problem and you need someone with deep knowledge and experience to solve it for you. The same goes for launching a new brand. It is important to you and the future success of your company depends on it even if it means more out of your budget than previously allotted for this task. Going to a specialist might mean that once the brand is launched, that agency or consultancy is so deeply specialized (like my consultancy) that they do not offer any other services besides the distinct task of launching your brand. If you choose a traditional agency, one person consultant or graphic design studio, ensure not only that they have deep knowledge of naming and identity design, but also confirm that they can bring your brand to life throughout the process.

You need to focus on how your brand will be launched, and based on our experience and research, it will be mainly through your web site.

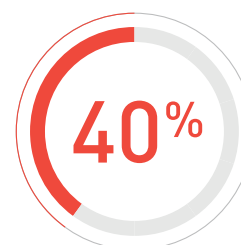
Even if you have a grand store opening or a huge PR event, people will seek information about the new brand first and foremost through your website. They will make up their mind about who you are, what you offer for them, how professional you are and if they can immediately connect with the brand on an emotional level. It is the zenith of your brand, your work to date. The name, identity design, colors, fonts, language, imagery, content, and attitude: the soul of your brand comes to life on the website. This is where selecting a traditional agency or design studio often gets challenging as these capabilities are hard to find in one place, hence we made 'Capability Match' our key reason for selecting the right partner.

When interviewing your potential match, ensure they can deliver 100% (with no weak spots) on the following tasks before going into the next evaluation steps:

1. Brand Insights
2. Name
3. Brand Identity
4. Design Assets
5. Application Designs & Strategies
6. Functional Website Prototype
7. Website Design
8. Website Scope Documentation For Development Partner

With the right capabilities also comes a natural understanding of the proper amount of time allotted for your project. If you feel the agency will take too long to get your fully branded site to your developers, it's a warning sign. This process, if a true process is in place, should not surpass 4 months maximum. For an agency that lacks the capabilities and process, this may be considered a rush and quality will be sacrificed. If those capabilities are in place, you can feel more confident that you will receive a swift turnaround with quality results. So make sure to ask about an estimated turnaround time and key process milestones as part of this evaluation criteria.

Evaluation Score



CAPABILITIES

2: STRONG CREATIVE

We placed creativity as the second most important evaluation criteria, even above vertical and target audience expertise. We are not talking about creative style, but creative substance. When evaluating creative samples, base it on the following points:

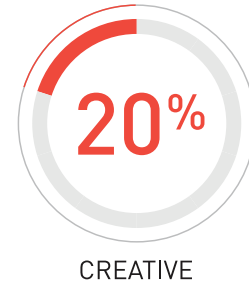
1. You must like the agency's design work overall. Look for many examples of strong design, regardless of vertical or target or your personal design preferences. Focus on whether or not the agency or consultancy is turning out solid, memorable work that feels heavily and consistently branded for each of their case studies.
2. Do they have expertise in naming or do they just list it as one of twenty capabilities? Ask them to provide you with their three strongest naming projects they have done. Make sure you like the solutions. On creative agency websites it is often hard to judge what role the agency played in the creation of a brand. Naming is highly creative and very difficult to nail quickly. It's what every new company needs, but all too often we get swept away by pretty design instead.
3. When designing web sites, what role did the agency play? You need a partner that is as strong in strategy and wireframing/prototyping as they are with design. The agency you select needs to get the full picture, from user experience to user interface. They need to create responsive web designs to ensure your target will be able to view your brand in a way that is tailored to the device they are holding in their hands at the time of brand engagement. Ask tough questions about their digital design experience and vendors they collaborate with when the website leaves their agency and gets put back into your court to get developed. You want to make sure they are there to connect you with great vendors along the way.
4. Once you feel at ease about an agency or consultancy's great creative work, make sure you don't get a great creative ego along with it. As you will be interviewing

2-4 agency contenders in person (you will, won't you?), test their egos to make sure this will not get in the way during your working partnership. As in all aspects of life, big egos can kill otherwise great moments or relationships, and with an agency that is all too often the case. You might first notice it when you start getting work that reflects what they want, as opposed to what you asked for. Yes you need to hire an expert and fully trust their opinion, but you can only do that if you know they will give you honest advice and not overly indulge in their own creative work. They should be fully immersed in their research and insights to ensure their creative matches your needs. How do you test for agency ego? Question one small aspect of a particular case study they present (may it be a color or typeface choice) and see how they react. If they get defensive and snappy, you're getting a little insight of what might happen down the line. If they defend their decision with thoughtful strategy and answer your question, great, they really know what they are doing, even surpassed your knowledge! If they are not defensive but their answer seems weak, basically revealing that you were right in questioning them in the first place, maybe that's a representation of their lack of expertise or ownership in the project. If they are delighted and puzzled at the same time about your question, giving in that they never thought about that particular angle you bring to the table, you learn that they are honest folks that may have overseen something along the way, but they are willing to learn and give credit. This too would be a good partnership as it signals a willingness to collaborate.

5. Trendy creative = Bad brand identity. There is no other way of seeing it, a brand identity shall never be trendy or it is guaranteed to turn into a fad. A logo needs to be timeless. It can be modern, but it needs to stay relevant for years and years to

come. This is even more important when it comes to creative naming of your new brand. Microsoft will not be MCRSFT in 2020, guaranteed. When you see a pattern of trend-based branding, shy away from hiring that group for your launch.

Evaluation Score



3: KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Your perfect partner should be able to pull a few solid projects out of their portfolio that speak directly to your target audience. When I say 'target audience', I do not mean 'Granola bar eating 20-something who drives a Subaru wagon, exercises regularly, has fought at least one bear in his life and owns an orange yoga mat.' No, I am talking about 'Millennials/Gen Y with an active lifestyle, preferably male,' - that should suffice to ensure you feel the agency 'gets' your target', anything more specific than that would be asking for too much, while gaining very little in return. If you do need to engage with a partner that has very deep expertise in your extremely narrow target market (Granola, Subaru, bear and orange yoga mat), you might end up engaging a target audience specialist who knows too little about launching a new brand (but everything about granola) and that will very likely do more harm than good to your brand launch. So make sure they have a couple projects that talk to the age group of your target audience and do it well, rather than the full monty.

Evaluation Score



TARGET AUDIENCE

4: UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR VERTICAL

Important, yes. The deciding factor, no. If you have found an agency or consultancy that knows brand launches inside out, has great creative and relevant examples within your target audience, it matters little if they have expertise in your vertical. You know they will be able to deliver. That said, a few projects that are within your vertical, or touch on it, would be good to see as part of their pitch as it can mean less time on the agency's side during the research and insights phase. You also might walk right into the issue discussed in "3: Knowledge of your Target Audience". You might end up with a specialist in your vertical instead of someone who is specialized in the task at hand: creating a meaningful and memorable name, identity and online launch. Resist the temptation, but definitely give extra brownie points if there is expertise within the vertical - and we both know it would help you sleep better at night.

Evaluation Score



5: ON BUDGET

You may wonder why your budget is only deserving of a 10% evaluation score when it determines which partner you can engage with. Well, it shouldn't. If these steps in launching your brand are not worth a significant monetary investment it either means that your priorities or the budget allocations are not set correctly. With no sacrifices in quality, deliverables, process and timeline you should anticipate \$80,000 to \$100,000 for this part of your brand creation. If done right, money will be saved down the line as ongoing design and development work will turn more into budget-friendly production and less of the costly planning and strategy will be required, saving you tremendous costs in the long run. You won't need to hire agencies long term, since the brand has already been developed. You should be equipped with a thorough style guide so that any inexpensive freelancer can easily adapt your brand elements to new campaigns. In case you did not budget accordingly, these are areas where the budget can be moved from those other line items without affecting your ability to get it done right and to invest in the birth of your new brand from the start.

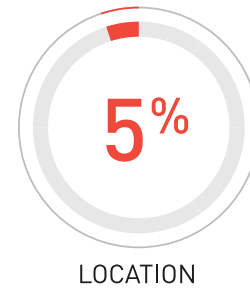
Evaluation Score



6: LOCATION

It's an added benefit if your chosen partner is located nearby, and it might save you \$1,000 to \$10,000 in meeting travel expenses, but you should not let your location determine the success of your new brand creation. People are mobile and technology enables amazing team work. Getting out of your usual stomping grounds for a meeting or two and flying your brand launch partners in to experience your 'natural habitat' will only add to the significance of the relationship, and the task at hand. Choose a partner for their expertise, not their location.

Evaluation Score



That's it. Easy? Maybe not. Easier than before reading the white paper? I surely hope so. Use it for your vendor evaluation and please share your opinion or your own findings with me via fgeyrhalter@finien.com. I am happy to update this white paper with your reader tips over time. Of course you can also try it on us, if you feel we should be a contender in your next brand development agency hunt, we surely would love to be taken to the test ourselves. I look forward to hearing from you!