

# FINIEN

## YOUR BRAND LAUNCH

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### 01

#### HOW TO SELECT THE RIGHT AGENCY PARTNER FOR YOUR BRAND LAUNCH

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## WHY IT MATTERS

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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 information 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 short term—or at least you should not get sidetracked 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 it needs 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 remain true to the task at hand and ask yourself the following question: Who will be best suited to bring my new brand to life—from name through brand identity to a successful digital design? We created a list of things you should (and should not) focus on while going through this tremendously important process with your new brand. With many marketing efforts, you get a second chance, but launching your new brand is not one of them. This chapter will help relieve some of the pressure when it is time to determine which agency or consultancy you should select to lead the task with you. We have provided a list of qualities you should look for in a creative partner. Each quality is weighted according to how much influence it should have on your final selection.



## **1: HAS EXPERTISE IN THE CAPABILITIES YOU SEEK**

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It seems rather logical: if you need someone to fix your car, you go to a car repair shop. If your car has a distinct problem, such as overheating, you should go to a radiator specialist. You have a specific problem, and you need someone with deep knowledge and experience to solve it for you. The same goes for launching a new brand. Finding a creative partner with expertise in brand launches is important and the future success of your company depends on it—even if proper attention to the issue requires additional budgetary expenses. Going to a specialist might mean that once the brand is launched, the deeply specialized agency or consultancy—whose sole focus is to launch your brand—may not offer any additional services. If you select a traditional agency or choose a one-person consultancy or graphic design studio, ensure that they not only have expertise in brand launches but also 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 website.**

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 can offer them, how professional you are, and whether or not they can immediately connect with the brand on an emotional level. Your website 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 the following brand launch capabilities are hard to find in one place:

1. Brand Platform
2. Naming
3. Brand Identity

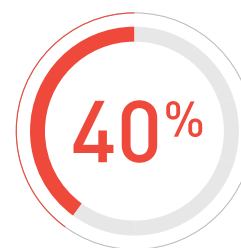


4. Brand Atmosphere® Touch Points and Strategies
5. Functional Website Prototype
6. UI/UX Design
7. Website Scope Documentation For Development Partner

When interviewing your potential match, ensure they can deliver 100% on the above tasks before going into the next evaluation steps.

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

## Evaluation Score



CAPABILITIES

## **2: DEMONSTRATES STRONG CREATIVE**

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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:

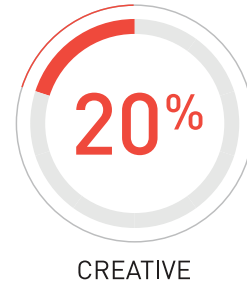
1. You must like the agency's design work overall. Look for many examples of strong design, regardless of vertical or target audience or your personal design preferences. Focus on whether the agency or consultancy is turning out solid, memorable work that feels appropriate for each case study.
2. Does the agency have expertise in naming, or does it just list naming as one of twenty capabilities? Ask them to provide you with the 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. What role does the agency play in designing websites? You need a partner that is as strong in strategy and wireframing/prototyping as with design. The agency you select needs to get the full picture, from user interface to user experience. They need to create responsive Web designs to ensure your target audience 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 the agency's digital design experience and the vendors with whom they collaborate. You want to make sure they are there to connect you with great partners along the way on an as-needed basis.
4. Once you feel at ease about an agency or consultancy's great creative work, be sure you don't get an overwhelming creative ego along with it. As you will be

interviewing 2–4 agency contenders in person (you will, won't you?), test their ego to make sure it 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 that is all too often the case with agencies. You might first notice it when you start getting work that reflects what they envision instead of 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 that their creative approach 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 into 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 and 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 represents their lack of expertise or ownership in the project. If they are simultaneously delighted and puzzled about your question, commenting that they never thought about that particular angle you bring to the table, you learn that they are honest folks who may have overseen something along the way, but they are willing to learn and give credit. This, too, signals a willingness to collaborate and could indicate good partnership potential.

5. Fad creative = Bad brand identity. There is no other way of looking at 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 fad-based branding, shy away from hiring that group for your launch.

### Evaluation Score



### 3: KNOWS YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

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Your perfect partner should be able to pull a few solid projects out of their portfolio that speak directly to your target audience. Note that “target audience” does not mean something as specific as “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, it refers to something along the lines of “Millennials/Gen Y with an active lifestyle, preferably male”—that should suffice to ensure that the agency understands your target. Requesting 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 who has deep expertise in your extremely narrow target market (think “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), which will likely do more harm than good to your brand launch. So be sure they have a couple of projects that talk to the age group of your target audience and do it well.

#### Evaluation Score



TARGET AUDIENCE

## 4: UNDERSTANDS YOUR VERTICAL

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Is an agency's understanding of your vertical (e.g., automotive, education, healthcare) important? Yes. The deciding factor? No. If you have found an agency or consultancy that knows brand launches inside out and has great creative and relevant examples within your target audience, it matters little whether they have expertise in your vertical. You know they will be able to deliver. That said, it would be good to see a few projects that are within your vertical, or touch on it, as part of their pitch because that 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 the previous section: 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 and can create a meaningful and memorable name, identity, and online launch. Resist the temptation to only work with industry experts, but definitely give extra brownie points if a strong branding agency has expertise within your vertical—and we all know it would help you sleep better at night.

### Evaluation Score



## 5: OPERATES WITHIN YOUR BUDGET

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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, either your priorities or the budget allocations are not set correctly. With no sacrifices in quality, deliverables, process, and timeline you should anticipate upward of \$90,000 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 might get away without hiring long-term agencies because the brand has already been developed. You should be equipped with a thorough and meaningful 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

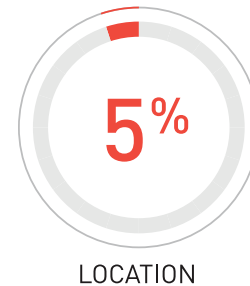


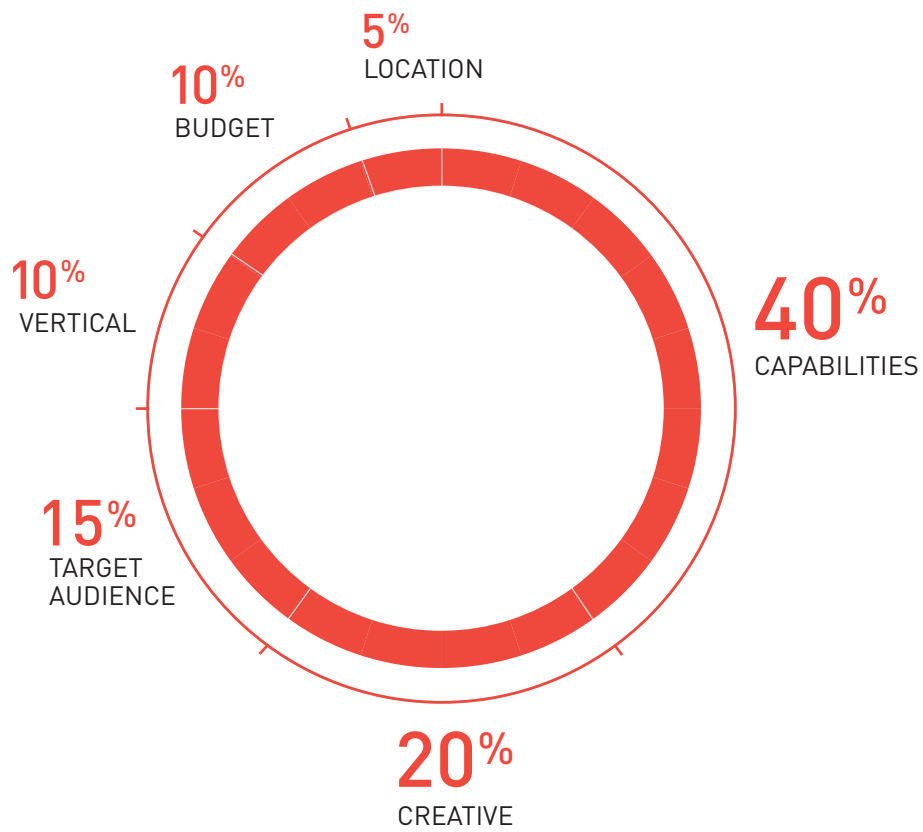
## 6: CONVENIENTLY LOCATED

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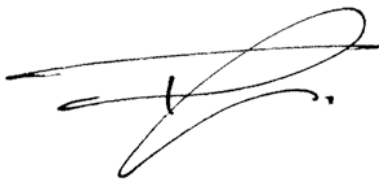
It's an added benefit if your chosen partner is located nearby, and it might save you \$1,000 to \$10,000 in meeting travel expenses, but you should not let your location determine the success of your new brand creation. People are mobile, and technology enables amazing team work. Venturing out of your 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 of 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](mailto: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!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fabian Geyrhalter', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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Principal, FINIEN

Abbreviated portions of this White Paper are taken from our forthcoming Brandtro book entitled "[How to Launch a Brand](#)." Learn more about the book at [HowToLaunchABrand.com](http://HowToLaunchABrand.com).