

Design

Guide

Sterling Finance (UK) Ltd



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Disclaimer

This guide has been produced by Sterling Finance (UK) Limited for the benefit of its clients and associate offices worldwide who are interested in doing business in the UK.

Its main purpose is to provide a broad overview of the various issues that should be considered by organisation when considering setting up business in the UK.

The information provided cannot be exhaustive and - as underlying legislation and regulation are subject to frequent changes - we recommend anyone considering doing business in the UK, or looking to the UK as an opportunity for expansion, should seek professional advice before making any business or investment decisions.

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Design

Design is not just about the way products and brochures look. It is an essential part of improving your business, developing new products and innovating. Effective use of design can increase sales, reduce costs and present a new image to your customers. Design in business focuses on delivering commercial benefits. You should take a planned approach, with a clear specification for what you are trying to achieve and the right team to make it happen.

1. Focus your efforts

Focus on areas where design offers clear commercial benefits

- It can help you satisfy market needs. For example, designing products and services to meet customers' needs.
- It can allow you to make better use of technology and materials. For example, using lighter, renewable or recycled materials and incorporating energy efficient technologies.
- It can make your communications more effective. For example, creating marketing materials which reinforce the benefits of your product.
- It can improve production efficiency. For example, implementing procedures to reduce errors and wasted time.

Satisfying customers is your top priority, so market research is essential

- What do customers like and dislike about your products and services? Which competitors do they use?
- What image do customers have of your business and products?
- What concerns do your customers have? How can you make their lives easier?
- Ask front-line employees for feedback from customers. Use your sales records to identify the products that sell well and which are in decline.

Suppliers, competitors and employees can also help you identify opportunities

- What causes your employees problems or wastes their time? What are the most common mistakes?
- What new products and technologies are suppliers offering or aware of? What would make suppliers deliver faster or offer you better payment terms?
- What are the key design features of your competitors' products and services? How do they promote themselves? How do your key performance indicators (eg delivery times, percentage of faulty goods) compare?

Keep up to date with market trends and regulations and standards

- Use trade bodies, publications and business contacts.

2. Planning

Whether you are designing a complex environment, product or process, or just a simple leaflet, investing in design minimises the risk of needing to make costly changes later.

Involve any outside help you need right from the start. A methodical approach will help to guarantee a successful outcome.

Manage the design process

- Assemble a design team for the project.
- Set specific, quantified objectives.
- Set a budget. Allow for contingencies and for the cost of external consultants.
- Set a timetable. Include any milestones for the project and the target completion date.
- Plan how you will monitor and measure progress and expenditure.

Prepare a design brief

- A clear design brief is essential whether you will be involving outside help or not. If you are using a design agency, they will work on the brief with you.
- The brief should describe your business background. Who are your customers and what are their needs? What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Your brief should include a clear description of the project. What are your objectives? How will the finished design be used?
- Budgets and timetables should form part of the brief.
- The brief should highlight any other constraints on the design. For example, are there any specific technical or legal requirements?

Turn the brief into a design specification

- The specification is a plan of how to meet your objectives whilst adhering to your budget, timescales and other constraints.

Plan how you will protect your intellectual property

Protecting your intellectual property can reduce the threat from competition. There are several options:

- patent protection for new and innovative products;
- design registration to protect the shape or appearance of a product;
- registered trade marks which distinguish your product from the competition.

Make manufacturing and marketing plans an integral part of the design process

- How much take-up are you anticipating and how long will it take you to meet demand?
- Which components will you make in house and which will you buy in? Will you need to sub-contract any work?
- How can you minimise the cost of components? Can you use standard components and tools across a range of products rather than more expensive custom-made ones?
- What production capacity will need to be available, when? What volumes of supplies will you need? How will this fit in with your (and your suppliers') existing workflow?
- Can you improve your use of technology?
- Can you increase the productivity of your production processes? Are you minimising wasted raw materials and energy usage?
- How will you promote and distribute new products and services?
- Will employees need support?

Premises

Like most design opportunities, effective planning and professional help will reduce losses and increase potential.

Design for sales

- Are your premises attractive to customers?
- Would corporate clothing be an advantage?
- Are products displayed effectively with benefits clearly signposted?

Design for productivity

- What is the workflow from delivery of supplies, through the production process to despatch of finished goods?
- Which employees work together and use the same documents or equipment?
- Can you improve health and safety, and the welfare of employees?

3. The specification

Creating a good design specification is critical to the success of the project. A design consultant can help you avoid making expensive mistakes during this process (see 'Using outside help').

Different types of design present different opportunities and problems. Some of the main issues to consider are outlined below.

What benefits should the design deliver?

- What market needs will products and services satisfy?
- How will they be distinguished from competing products and services?
- Who is involved with work processes and what are their requirements?

What are the key features and functions of the design?

- What does it do and how does it do it? What performance levels must it achieve?
- How durable must it be? What will the product's working life be?
- How will the product be constructed? What materials will it be made from? Can it be recycled?

What does its visual appearance say?

- What image are you trying to create? Are your company image and the image of your products or services consistent?
- Does the standard of your marketing materials match your corporate image?

What quality standards must you achieve?

- Can you design products and production processes to minimise the percentage of faulty goods?
- Are there any formal quality standards or regulatory requirements you must meet?

How will the design be tested?

- Will you develop a single design or several alternative versions? How will you choose between designs (eg by testing prototypes with customers)?
- Do you need to carry out a technical feasibility study before you go ahead? Are there any technical problems that you need to overcome?

Brochures

Brochures (and other marketing materials) communicate with your customers. A good designer will create material which conveys your company image and values. Simplicity and clarity are essential.

Your competitors' marketing material can be a useful source of both good and bad ideas.

- How will you make an immediate impact? This is especially vital if your brochure has to compete with other marketing materials.
- Is it easy to understand?
- Is the type size and font appropriate for your readership? Complicated designs and ornate type-faces may look attractive but can be difficult to read.
- What message are you trying to get across? Is it put simply? Focus on one or two key selling points.
- What image are you trying to create? For example, an expensive brochure can be inappropriate for a cheap and cheerful product and vice versa.
- How will the brochure be used? Size, weight, durability and flexibility can all be important features.

4. The design team

Identify who should be in the project team

- Include employees who are going to be affected by the changes.
- Include people with specific design skills. If necessary, bring in external consultants.
- Include key suppliers and anyone else with an interest in the design.

Communicate the brief to everybody involved

- Explain to employees how the project will benefit them.

Give one individual overall responsibility for the project

- Choose somebody with experience of project management.

Facilitate co-operation

- Hold brainstorming sessions to generate ideas.
- Explain how everything fits together.
- Give every team member an achievable objective.

Debrief everybody at the end of the project

- List all the incremental improvements that have been made as part of the project.
- Identify what works better and what still needs improvement.

Hold periodic discussions to continue the process of improvement

- Review both individual designs and your overall design process.

Packaging

Well-designed packaging has to take account of a wide range of requirements.

What are the functional requirements?

- How well does the product need to be protected?
- Does the product need to be kept fresh?
- How will the product be handled and stored?

What are the aesthetic requirements?

- How will the packaging contribute to the image of the product?
- How will the product be displayed?

What are the environmental requirements?

- Not only is there an increasing volume of regulation to take into account, but many customers prefer environmentally responsible suppliers and products.
- Are you minimising wasteful packaging?
- Can you use packaging materials that can be reclaimed or recycled?

5. Using outside help

Good designers help you to move quickly from a problem to providing a possible answer. Even if there is no quick solution, involving a designer will clarify what else needs to be done.

Your local business support organisation may offer help with design

- They may have in-house expertise or be able to refer you.
- A design adviser can help with most aspects of design. An initial visit to assess your needs can be followed by specific support and advice.
- Design advisers can also help you find suitable design consultants.

Design consultants can help in their own areas of expertise

- Consultants tend to focus on one area of design.
- Before taking on a consultant, prepare a brief. Ask selected consultants to give a presentation on what they can offer, and to provide details of previous projects.
- A good designer will need to fully understand your business and will integrate design advice into your business planning.



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