to the light

OUR 7TH ANNUAL REPORT

What Clients Think 2021

A report based on 580 client interviews conducted on behalf of design agencies.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

dba

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Introduction 03
About the agencies 04
About the clients 04

1 Covid world 06
1.1 Reacting to change 07
1.2 Big challenges 09
1.3 Client expectations 12

2 Winning clients 14
2.1 New business activity 15
2.2 Website and social media 18
2.3 Pitching 21

3 Retaining and growing clients 26
3.1 Client service 27
3.2 Client development 34
3.3 Costs 37

About Up to the Light 39

INTRODUCTION

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Founder of
Up to the Light

This has been a year like no other, with Covid-19 casting a long shadow over clients' thoughts and actions. Our 7th 'What Clients Think' report, the definitive annual snapshot of the client/design agency relationship, is a fascinating insight into the current client viewpoint. This year's report is based on 580 interviews, our highest number so far.

Covid-19 is responsible for creating new challenges and, in some cases, has accentuated existing trends. The report revisits some key issues, as well as exploring completely new areas not covered in previous reports. The report is divided into 3 sections. Firstly, 'Covid World' acknowledges the influence of Covid-19 on the bigger picture. This section looks at wider client pressures and concerns, over and above the client/agency relationship. Secondly, 'Winning Clients' looks at agency new business activity and pitching. Thirdly, 'Retaining & Growing Clients' covers client service and client development issues.

It is important to say that every interview was paid for by individual design agencies commissioning Up to the Light to provide an independent Client Survey for their agency. In this sense, the information is from a high-quality source because the interviews are with interested clients who are talking about the relationship with their incumbent agency. Comments are given in a spirit of constructive criticism.

Names of the individual agencies and clients involved are confidential. However, we can share some very revealing statistics when looking across all 580 interviews. As in previous years, it provides important pointers for how agencies can strengthen their client relationships and sharpen their approach.

About the agencies

The design agencies cover every discipline and range in size from 5 employees to over 100. All the agencies commissioned Up to the Light to conduct a Client Survey with their key clients. The principal purpose was to monitor the health of their most important client/agency relationships.

Specifically:

- Understand current perceptions of the agency's strengths and weaknesses.
- Understand which boxes clients are putting them in, whether fairly or unfairly.
- Provide a better understanding of client needs and concerns.
- Identify client development opportunities.
- Highlight client service measures that can improve the relationship.
- Spot any problems early so that they can be dealt with proactively.
- Understand how they are compared to competitor agencies.
- Provide an assessment of client perceptions across areas such as creativity, value for money, ability to add value, proactivity, effective listening and commercial awareness.
- Understand how clients see the market more generally – trends and concerns.
- Assess levels of client loyalty.
- Understand issues on the horizon that clients are concerned about and may influence what clients want from their agency in the future.

About the clients

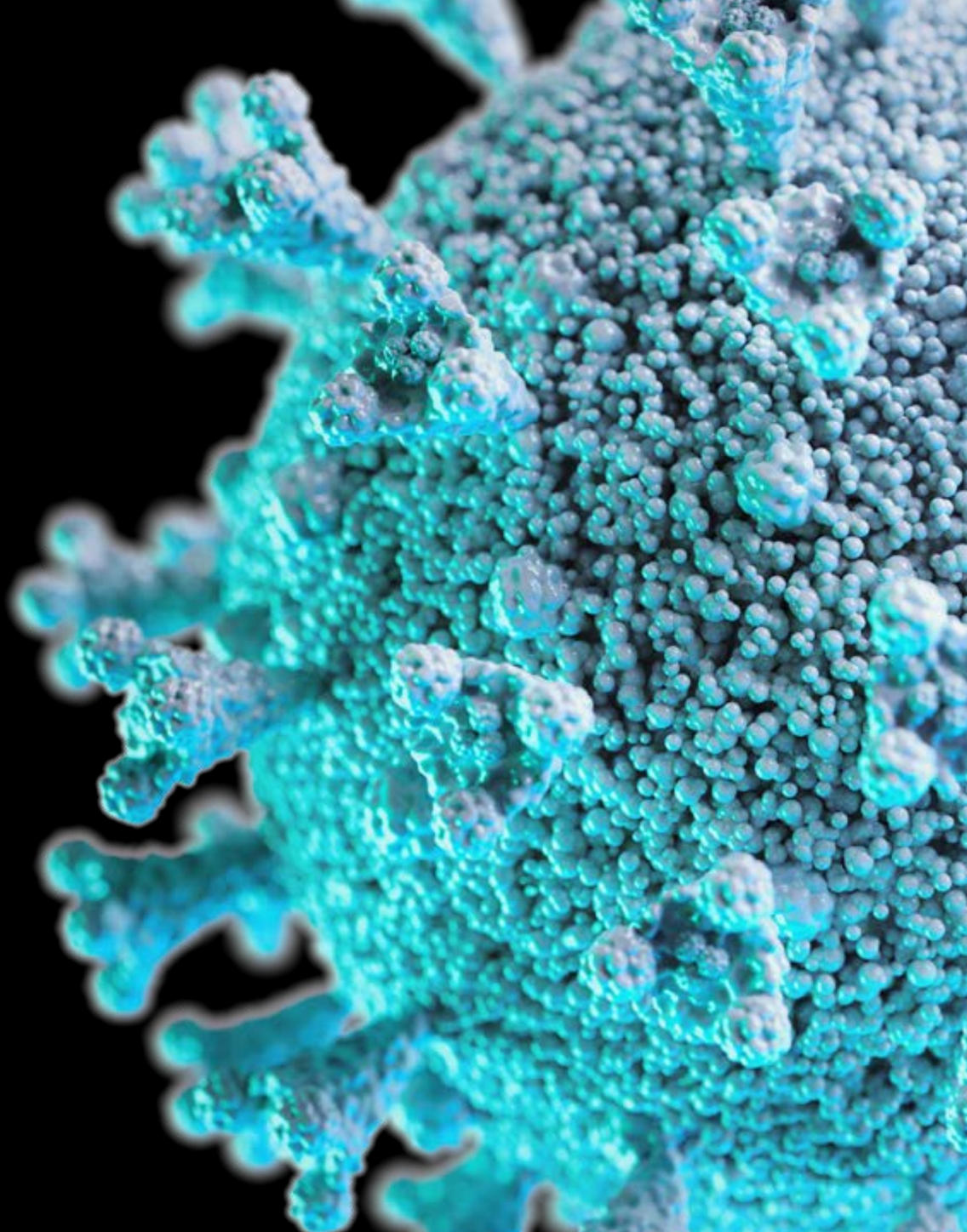
Their job titles range from Brand Managers to Board Directors and Chief Executives of major organisations. All 580 clients have responsibility for buying design and have relationships with design agencies, whether day to day or in an overseeing capacity. A very broad range of clients are represented – different industries, UK and international, business to business, business to consumer, not for profit.

Different areas represented include:

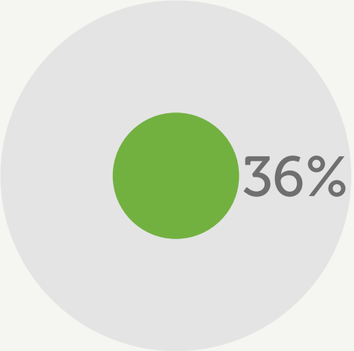
- Food and drink manufacturers
- Financial services
- Pharmaceuticals
- Hi tech/software
- Mobile telecoms
- Government
- Higher education
- Health care
- Charities
- Automotive
- High street retail
- Supermarkets
- Professional services
- Sports organisations

580 interviews that reveal what clients are really thinking. A unique spotlight on the client viewpoint.

1 Covid World

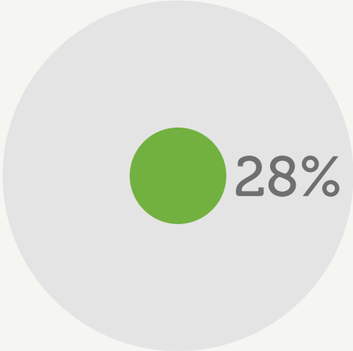


1.1 Reacting to change



OF CLIENTS FEEL THEIR BUSINESS **REACTED TOO LATE** TO THE CHALLENGES CAUSED BY COVID

The sooner companies reacted to Covid, the more options and control they had across their businesses. Speed was paramount.



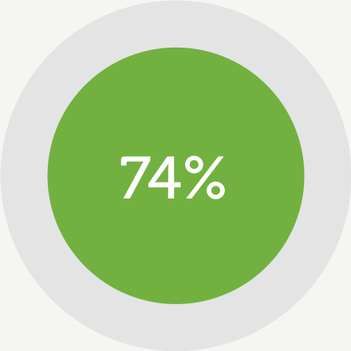
OF CLIENTS ADMIT TO **FEELING ENERGISED** BY THE OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE AND NEW IDEAS OFFERED BY COVID

It's not all doom and gloom. Yes, some sectors have had the rug pulled from under their feet, but other sectors have fared well. There is a level of excitement in some quarters that Covid has given permission to think differently and break through existing parameters.

OF CLIENTS STATED THAT THEY ARE **MORE REACTIVE** THAN THEY HAVE EVER BEEN

There is a strong feeling among clients that, 'We are simply reacting to events.' The overall mood is tactical, rather than strategic.

1.1 Reacting to change



OF CLIENTS ARE FINDING IT **EXTREMELY DIFFICULT** OR IMPOSSIBLE TO PLAN AHEAD

Clients are having to deal with what's right in front of them. Covid has resulted in a frustrating inability to plan ahead.

OF CLIENTS STATED THAT THEY ARE EITHER STRUGGLING OR FAILING TO KEEP UP WITH THE **PACE OF CHANGE** IN THEIR MARKET

Another statistic that bears out the more reactive, tactical environment that many clients are operating in this year. These clients describe the pace of change as 'alarming' or 'confusing.'

OF CLIENTS STATED THAT THEY ARE UNABLE TO GIVE AS MUCH **CONSIDERATION** TO LONGER TERM BRAND BUILDING AS THEY WOULD LIKE

A 19% increase on last year. Covid has accentuated an existing trend.

1.1 Reacting to change

A DIFFICULT BALANCE

Agencies need to achieve a difficult balance. In the current environment where clients are tending to highly value pragmatism and agility, the need for agencies to never lose sight of the strategic bigger picture is more important than ever.

Need to be
Pragmatic & Agile

- Very responsive
- Speedy turnaround
- Not rigid processes, 'Just get it done'
- A supportive ally, 'On our side'

Need to be
Big picture & Strategic

- Longer term thinking
- Brand guardian role
- Client's eyes and ears
- Seeing beyond the task in hand

1.2 Big Challenges

TOP 3 COVID BUSINESS CHALLENGES

1

Adapting operations

Mainly to meet changing customer requirements and channel choices. These range from increasing online fulfilment to enabling more real time insight to drive better decision making.

2

Reintegrating furloughed staff

How do clients reintegrate furloughed staff back into the business? How can they adapt and evolve their roles?

3

Real estate footprint

Covid has raised a lot of questions around property portfolios. Many clients are asking whether their real estate footprint is fit for purpose, both now and when we come out of Covid. This applies to back office space, not just obvious areas such as retail square footage.

TOP 3 COVID MARKETING CHALLENGES

1

Inability to plan ahead

A huge frustration for many clients, as they have been forced to put medium and longer term plans on hold.

2

Trying to keep up with the pace of change

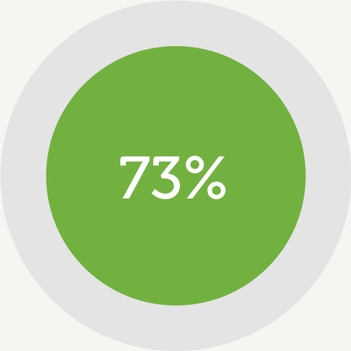
Pace of change has been a feature of recent years, but Covid has reinforced this challenge.

3

Seeing opportunities but lacking resources to take advantage

There is no shortage of ideas and opportunities. The real challenge tends to be which ones to prioritise. Which ones can they deliver on, given that many clients have smaller teams that are under greater pressure?

1.2 Big Challenges

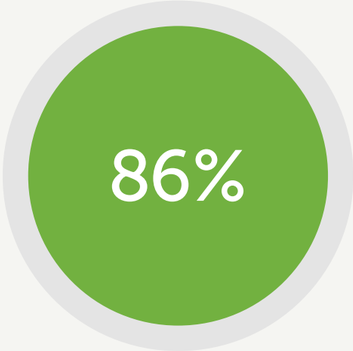


OF CLIENTS STATED THAT **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION** IS A MAJOR BUSINESS PRIORITY

Our previous reports have contained some grumbles that the importance of digital is not always truly understood at Board level. Covid has exposed weaknesses in digital capability and helped to push this issue up the agenda in senior places.

OF CLIENTS STATED THAT **'DIVERSITY'** WAS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE AT THEIR COMPANY

This statistic has more than doubled since last year. Big corporates, particularly in the USA, are demanding to see diversity in their agency teams. An obvious lack of diversity can now affect an agency's ability to win new business.



OF CLIENTS ARE CONFIDENT THAT THEIR BUSINESS WILL COME OUT OF COVID IN **SUSTAINABLE SHAPE**

For all the challenges of Covid, there is still an overall mood of resilience and optimism.

1.3 Client expectations

TOP 3 EXPECTATIONS OF THEIR AGENCY

1

Be a real ally

This mainly refers to the fact that clients are having to move fast, so agency responsiveness and pragmatism are in high demand.

2

See the bigger picture

Most clients are very locked into their own brands and sectors. They are increasingly relying on agencies to be their eyes and ears. They are hungry for interesting analogies with brands in other markets facing similar challenges, observations as to how competitors are shaping their offers and communication, any insights they may have missed. All this falls into the realm of proactivity, so often the point at which a good client relationship becomes an excellent one.

3

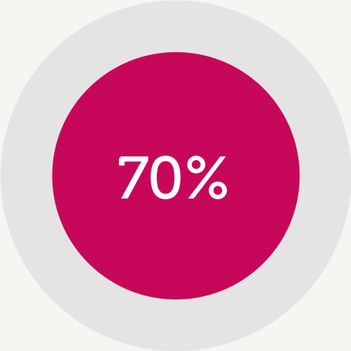
On time and on budget

Every year 'on time and on budget' is there or thereabouts in our top 3 client expectations. The reason? Failing to hit timings and budget has the highest potential to make a client's life difficult or cause them embarrassment with colleagues.

28% of clients admit to feeling energised by the opportunity for change and new ideas offered by Covid.

2 Winning clients

2.1 New business activity

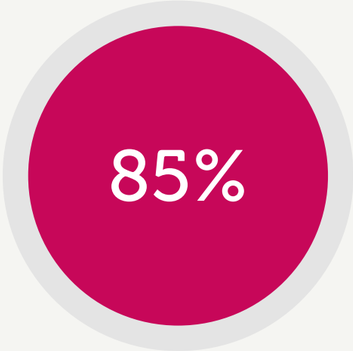


OF CLIENTS **APPOINT** AN AGENCY AFTER A 1-2 YEAR LEAD TIME

Agency new business is a long game. Quick wins are hard to find.

OF CLIENTS FEEL **LESS INCLINED** TO CHANGE AGENCIES IN THE CURRENT COVID ENVIRONMENT

Appointing a new agency is time consuming and is tending to be lower on the agenda when there are so many other challenges.



OF CLIENTS LIKE TO **'DISCOVER'** A NEW AGENCY RATHER THAN FEEL 'SOLD TO'

A slightly higher figure than last year's report. Further evidence that modern business development is about drawing clients to the agency, rather than outdated notions of new business as a 'numbers game' and 'knocking on doors'.

2.1 New business activity

MAIN FAILINGS OF VIRTUAL PRESENTATIONS:

1

Too many slides

The barrier of presenter/ audience is reinforced in a virtual environment. Too many slides mean less opportunities to interject, make a comment or start a discussion.

2

Not enough opportunity for discussion

Discussions tend to be less natural and more stilted. A rigid presentation format with too many slides makes this situation worse.

Difficult to get a real feel for the agency

Each slide sucks all important people chemistry out of the meeting. Do we need to redefine the agency presentation for a virtual environment? Perhaps, think 'meeting' and 'discussion', rather than 'presentation'. After all, there was a world before slides.

3

TOP 3 CRITICISMS OF AGENCY NEW BUSINESS PRESENTATIONS:

1

Too generic

It feels a bit 'cut and paste'. Not enough 'homework on us.' 'They could equally have been talking to one of our competitors as to us.'

2

Too much 'About us'

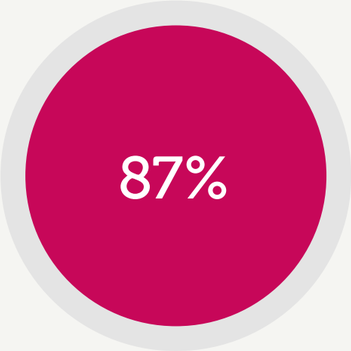
No presentation has ever been criticised because the 'About us' section wasn't long enough.

Case studies not relevant enough

Too many stories of how the agency got from A to B, as opposed to focusing on the strategic issue that was being addressed. Most clients come to agencies because they are seeking the answer to a big strategic question. The agency's ability to correctly identify that strategic issue and show the relevance of their case studies to it is crucial.

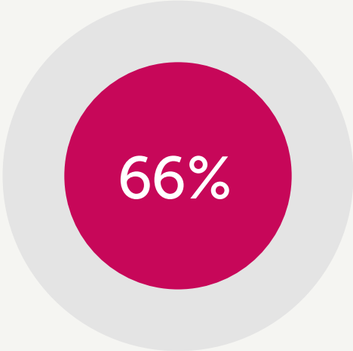
3

2.1 New business activity



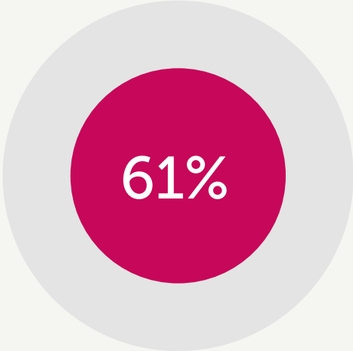
OF CLIENTS CONSIDER AN AGENCY'S LOCATION TO BE **'RELATIVELY UNIMPORTANT'**

A 20% increase on last year. Another case of Covid accentuating an existing trend, although in a positive way. The remote environment of Covid may have finally ended the regional agency's anxiety about whether to open a London office. In fact, 'London' and 'regional' descriptors are increasingly irrelevant.



OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT AN AGENCY'S **FINANCIAL STABILITY** IS A KEY FACTOR IN SELECTION

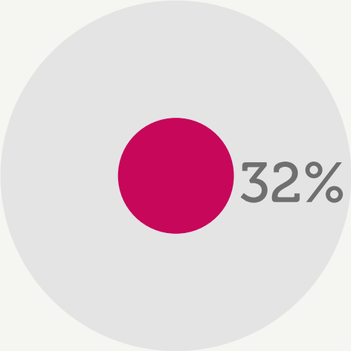
In a design market dominated by small to medium sized agencies, clients want to be sure that an agency will still be around next year. Covid related concerns about the economy have contributed to a 13% increase in this year's statistic.



OF CLIENTS PREFER **NOT TO DEAL** WITH A 'BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER' OR 'NEW BUSINESS DIRECTOR'

Job titles that shout 'sales' are a turn off for clients.

2.2 Website and social media



OF CLIENTS CLAIM TO **FOLLOW** THEIR INCUMBENT AGENCY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Nearly double last year's figure. This does not include LinkedIn which clients tend not to categorise as social media. In some ways, clients have been slightly more relaxed in the home working environment and this has probably helped to boost social media engagement. Also, the confines of lockdown have increased the desire to reach out more.

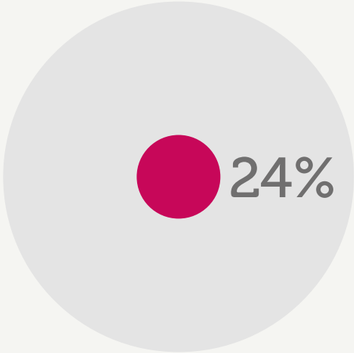
OF CLIENTS CLAIM TO BE ON **LINKEDIN** AND TO USE THIS PLATFORM

A similar statistic to last year. LinkedIn is by far and away the most important platform for clients and agencies.

OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT AGENCIES TEND TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO **PROMOTE THEMSELVES** RATHER THAN SHARE KNOWLEDGE

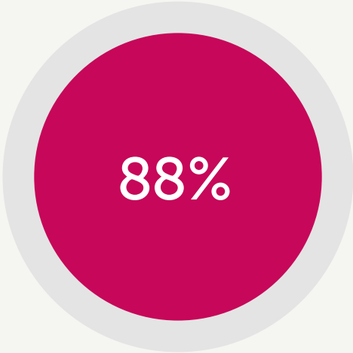
There is an ongoing complaint that too many agencies use social media for trumpet blowing 'broadcasting', trivia and recruitment rather than useful knowledge sharing.

2.2 Website and social media



OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT AGENCY SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY IS **NOT RELEVANT ENOUGH**

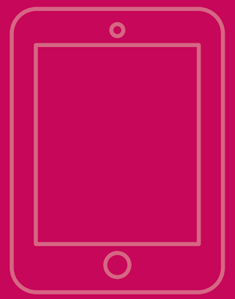
Lack of relevance is a common client complaint. Whether it's a webinar, podcast, agency event or insight piece, relevance is key. Narrower subject fields get more traction with clients.



OF CLIENTS WANT A WEBSITE TO QUICKLY SHOW THEM WHAT AN AGENCY **IS BEST AT**

Clients like to quickly identify an agency's core competency. With so many agencies offering so many services, this can be difficult. Nailing and articulating how and where you excel is crucial.

TOP 3 CRITICISMS OF AGENCY WEBSITES:



1. Work lacks business context

Complaints that work is too often presented as a beauty parade of visuals, as opposed to really explaining the business challenge.

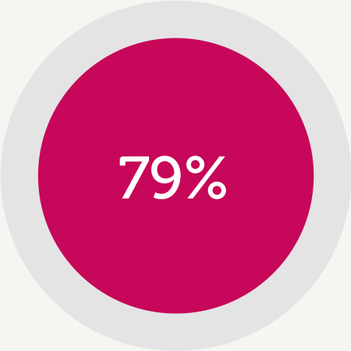
2. Not particularly distinctive

A feeling that many agency websites conform to expectations and are of a good standard. However, real points of difference are rare. Agency positionings, offers and the language used tends to merge.

3. Not current enough

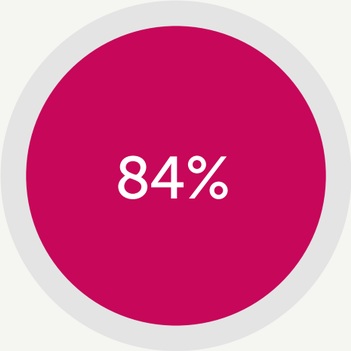
Not enough new work shown, out of date news sections, not enough regular opinion pieces on blogs, not enough reasons to revisit the site. The agency shop window needs to communicate a busy, dynamic and current agency.

2.2 Website and social media



OF CLIENTS DO NOT HAVE TIME TO READ **LONGER PIECES** FROM AGENCIES

Most clients read pieces (articles, posts, insight pieces) from agencies intermittently and tend to scan, rather than truly read. Bite sized insight seems to hit the spot, not lengthy reports and white papers.



OF CLIENTS PREFER AGENCY WEBSITES THAT INCLUDE **VIDEO**

The caveat to this is, 'As long as the video is good.' Clients' definition of 'good' is when the video actually tells them something useful and interesting. Superficial videos featuring a succession of unexplained images, pumping music and happy agency people can misfire. Video case studies tend to be more appreciated.

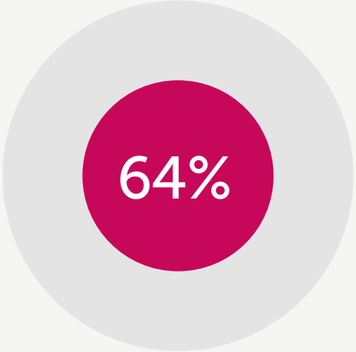
OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT THEIR OWN PROJECTS COULD BE **BETTER PRESENTED** ON THEIR INCUMBENT AGENCY'S WEBSITE

The moral of the story is to involve clients in the process of writing and approving case studies, providing a testimonial (written or video) and feeling a sense of ownership and pride in the result.

2.3 Pitching

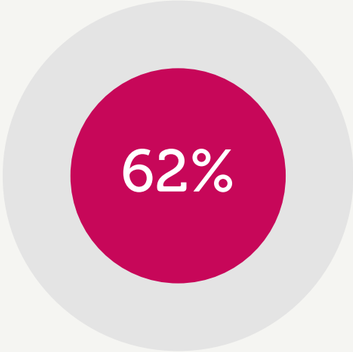
OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT A PITCH IS **GOOD BUSINESS PRACTICE** FOR HIGH VALUE PROJECTS

This statistic has remained unchanged for the last 3 years. It should be noted that a 'high value' project is not an everyday assignment. It means a brand directional project, vital to the brand's future and with a big budget to match. For such a project, a pitch is seen as professional good practice and due diligence.



OF CLIENTS TAKE NOTE OF **AWARDS** WHEN SOURCING AGENCIES

Googling awards is a surprisingly common occurrence when sourcing agencies for a pitch shortlist.



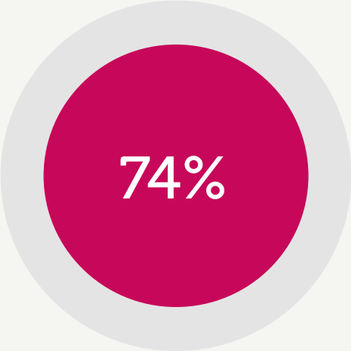
OF WINNING PITCHES WENT **AGAINST** A SPECIFIC PITCH REQUIREMENT

Proof that clients don't always know what they want until they see it. The message for agencies is to trust in your experience and expertise.

2.3 Pitching

OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT AGENCIES **'PLAY IT TOO SAFE'** IN PITCHES

Agencies sometimes lose sight of the fact that a pitch is part of a new business process. It's about being memorable and standing out versus competitors. Clients want to know what you *think*. What's your advice?



OF CLIENTS STATE THAT AGENCIES GENERALLY SPEND TOO LONG **TALKING ABOUT THEMSELVES** IN PITCH PRESENTATIONS

A very similar statistic to last year. There is a general impatience for agencies to talk about the client, not the agency. If you are 15 slides in and still talking about the agency or telling the client what they already know, then it might be too late.

OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT AGENCIES FAIL TO USE THEIR **CASE STUDIES** TO BEST EFFECT IN PITCH PRESENTATIONS

It is easy to lose the thread of case studies. Why is this case study relevant? How do these case studies directly relate to the client's strategic challenge? Do we really need 6 case studies when 3 will make the point? Too many visual slides can quickly become wallpaper. Weaving examples of work into the presentation in order to emphasise specific points is often a better approach than a case studies section.

2.3 Pitching

OF CLIENTS USE SOME KIND OF **SCORING SYSTEM** TO EVALUATE PITCH PRESENTATIONS

A 10% increase from last year. Common categories are 'understanding of the brief', 'understanding of our brand', 'quality of credentials', 'strategic thinking', 'added value', 'creativity', 'ability to challenge', 'value for money', 'quality of the people' and 'fit with our culture'.

OF PITCHES ARE LOST BECAUSE OF **SOFTER FACTORS** OVER AND ABOVE HARDER FACTORS

A similar figure to last year. Our research shows that on average, only 20-30% weighting is given to the 'creative concepts' or 'ability to answer the brief' type categories. The bulk is given to areas such as 'quality of the people', 'understanding of our brand', 'fit with our culture', 'challenging us' or 'adding value.' These are more nuanced and subtle.

FOR HIGH VALUE PROJECTS, WHAT CHANCE DOES THE INCUMBENT AGENCY HAVE OF **WINNING THE BUSINESS?**

38%

2.3 Pitching

'YOU CAME A VERY CLOSE SECOND'

Most agencies have been told this. In fact, our interviews show that this is rarely the case. There is usually clear water between the winning agency and the rest. A key question to ask is, 'What can we learn from the winning agency?' This usually gets to the heart of the real shortcomings.

TOP 5 REASONS FOR LOSING A PITCH

1

'The team wasn't convincing'

It felt disjointed, presentation skills were poor, one person dominated, one person hardly said anything,different disciplines weren't presented in an integrated way.

2

'They didn't get it'

The agency misunderstood the target market, didn't ask the right questions or interrogate the brief hard enough, failed to understand the subtleties, their understanding of 'evolution' or 'revolution' was different from the client's.

3

Not as much effort as the winning agency

Winning agencies frequently go above and beyond. This may be extra effort to bring a concept to life and show how it can work across different channels. They may have interviewed consumers or visited far flung retail stores. Whatever it is, the winning agency's presentation feels less generic and more tailored.

4

Good thinking but it lacked clarity

Lots of good thinking and pertinent issues raised, but beware of the presentation that leaves the client more confused not less. Offering clear advice, a clear direction and making it easy for clients to buy is crucial. Remember – a pitch is new business, not a real project.

5

Not clear on delivery

Client service, the programme of work and how everything will be delivered is a really important area for most clients. Agencies can easily see this part of the presentation as relatively unexciting but failing to give it the time it deserves is a mistake. Plenty of clients have felt let down by agencies in the past. This is rarely about the quality of strategic thinking or creativity. More often than not, it has been down to client service and delivery issues. Reassurance on these issues is an important part of the pitch presentation.

62% of winning pitches went against a specific pitch requirement.

3 Retaining & growing clients

3.1 Client service

44%

OF CLIENTS **EXPECTED MORE** FROM THEIR AGENCY SINCE COVID STRUCK

Clients have generally been leaning on agencies more heavily during Covid so client expectations of agencies have been high.

3 THINGS CLIENTS WISHED AGENCIES DID MORE DURING COVID:

1 **'We've got a great idea'**
An acid test for agencies. When was the last time you called a client and said, 'We've got a great idea'? Especially one that is not directly related to a specific project.

2 **'Be our eyes and ears'**
This can be anything from monitoring competitors, spotting trends or bringing knowledge gained from other brands and markets to a client's particular situation.

3 **'Check in more'**
It doesn't always have to be a formal, scheduled meeting.

52%

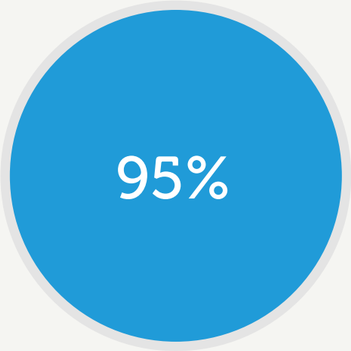
OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE GOT TO **KNOW THE PEOPLE** AT THEIR AGENCY BETTER DURING LOCKDOWN

A positive consequence of lockdown is that clients know more about the real lives of agency personnel. Exposure to their children, pets and home environment has enabled clients to see them as people beyond the work scenario.

3.1 Client service

OF CLIENTS HAVE EXPERIENCED PERIODS WHERE **SERVICE LEVELS** HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY DROPPED

Clients tend to have extremely sensitive antenna where service levels are concerned. Drops in service levels are usually associated with the agency being stretched and under resourced, either generally or at particular points. The challenges of Covid have not helped.



OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT THE **PERSONAL CHEMISTRY** WITH THE PEOPLE AT THEIR AGENCY IS EITHER 'GOOD' OR 'VERY GOOD'

Design agencies are generally willing, enthusiastic and really care about what they do. Clients continually refer to agency teams as 'likeable', 'personable' and 'fun'.

OF CLIENTS WISH THEIR AGENCY WAS MORE **SELF-CRITICAL**

Where client/agency relationships are relatively secure and stable, clients appreciate an agency's ability to be self-critical. Some agencies can be too content to accept praise, rather than seek improvement.

3.1 Client service

88%

OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT THERE IS **LESS TIME** FOR CONSIDERATION AND REFLECTION

During Covid there has been an increased need to 'just get it done.' It is an agency virtue to be super responsive but, when clients have significantly less time for consideration and reflection, agencies need to try and fill this gap.

35%

OF CLIENTS HAVE EXPERIENCED **AGENCY PROCESSES** THAT ARE OVERBLOWN OR TOO RIGID

The agency process can sometimes feel like a sledgehammer to crack a nut. Clients appreciate an agency's ability to identify projects that are in the 'just get it done' or implementation category, then adjust their processes accordingly.

84%

OF CLIENTS WITH A WEAKER OR MORE VULNERABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR AGENCY MENTIONED **CLIENT SERVICE ISSUES** AS THE MAIN REASON

A very similar statistic to previous years. It proves, once again, that client service issues are the main bone of contention when it comes to strained or broken client/agency relationships.

3.1 Client service

MOST COMMON CLIENT SERVICE ISSUES

DAY TO DAY

Not flagging things up

- Hiding problems
- Weak budget management
- 'They should have come to me, rather than the other way round'

OVERALL

Not driving things

- Difference between managing and 'driving'
- Taking responsibility and taking pressure off client

DAY TO DAY

Attention to detail lacking

- Typos and small errors
- Lack of quality control
- 'Are they too busy with other clients?'
- 'Are they too stretched?'

37%

OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT THE ABILITY OF AN AGENCY TO WORK WELL WITH OTHER AGENCIES IS **CRITICAL**

Larger clients frequently have different agencies and a requirement for those agencies to work together as a team. This can be fraught with difficulty.

3.1 Client service

CLIENT FRUSTRATIONS WHEN AGENCIES WORK TOGETHER

1

TENSIONS AROUND

Competing not teamwork

- Some grey areas caused by overlapping skills
- Some jockeying for position
- Agencies fighting for a bigger slice of the pie

2

BEWARE OF

Clashing egos

- Reduces team ethic
- Choosing the wrong battles
- Making it personal

3

DEFINING ROLES

Want to be lead agency

- There can only be one lead agency!
- Agencies need to understand and accept their position in the team

3.1 Client service

COVID LOCKDOWN - 3 BIGGEST ONLINE COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

These are the most mentioned issues:

1

More difficult to evaluate creative work

While seeing creative work is a generally enjoyable part of clients' jobs, evaluating creative work can also be a source of worry. Viewing work online rather than in a face to face presentation has reinforced that nervousness.

2

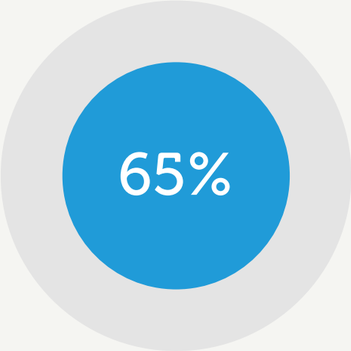
Brainstorm sessions more difficult

For all the improvements in virtual workshops, nothing matches a real workshop with all the participants in the same room.

3

Lack of 'natural' conversations

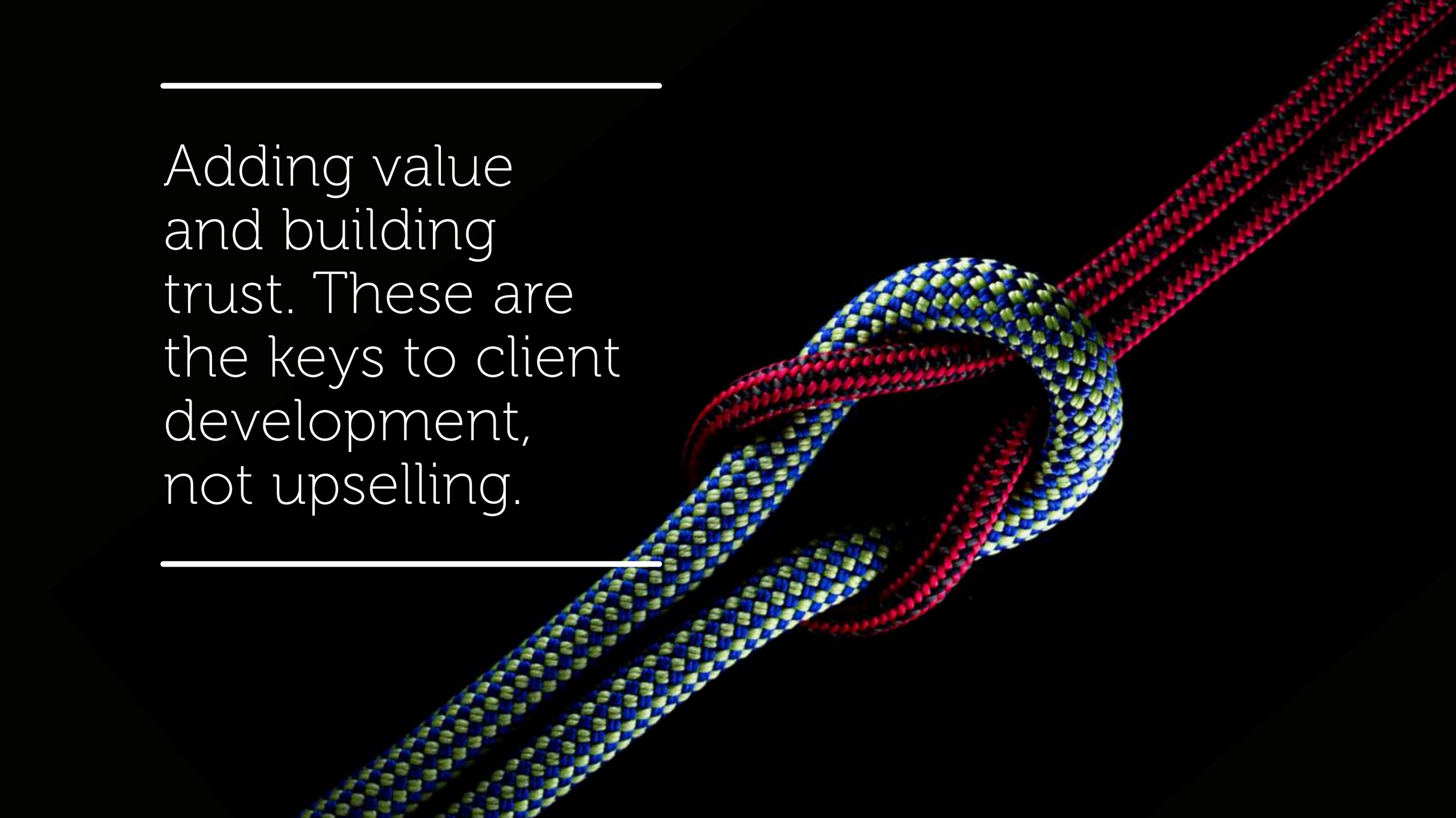
Sometimes it's those conversations before or after a meeting, in an office corridor or over a coffee that spark thoughts and ideas. Virtual meetings tend to be fairly rigid and clients miss those more natural conversations.



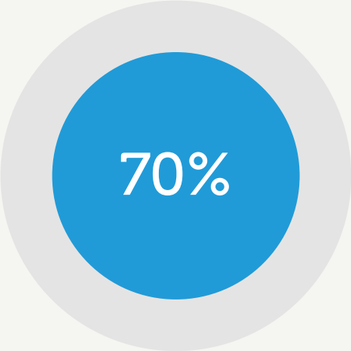
OF CLIENTS SEE THEIR DESIGN AGENCY AS A **PARTNER** RATHER THAN A SUPPLIER

When relationships are largely project based, being seen as a true partner is not straightforward. It's a real achievement. Most clients interviewed express the desire for a partnership. Unfortunately, however, a few client organisations have entrenched cultures where all agencies are routinely viewed as suppliers.

Adding value and building trust. These are the keys to client development, not upselling.



3.2 Client development



OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT **GOOD CLIENT DEVELOPMENT** STRENGTHENS THE CLIENT/ AGENCY RELATIONSHIP

The key word is 'good'. This means proactive thoughts, ideas and proposals. It's about adding value, not just chasing business.

OF CLIENTS WISH THEIR INCUMBENT AGENCY OFFERED **MORE SERVICES**

Once trust has been established, there are opportunities to offer clients different services that may be outside the agency's existing core offer. 'If they offered that service, I'd buy it' is a familiar cry. Some of these services may be a leap too far, but others could be just one small entrepreneurial step away.

OF CLIENTS HAVE BEEN **IRRITATED** BY AN AGENCY'S ATTEMPT TO WIN MORE BUSINESS

Most clients understand that an agency wants to develop more business, but choosing the right time and place is vital. Clients tells us that the best client development is where the agency is coming with value added ideas, for the client and themselves.

3.2 Client development

41%

OF CLIENTS FEEL THAT AGENCIES COULD DO A BETTER JOB OF **FILLING THE GAPS** BETWEEN PROJECTS

With design being largely project based, there are inevitable gaps. For agencies, it is important to find ways of filling these gaps and maintaining a dialogue. Silence can be deafening and send the wrong message.

40%

OF CLIENTS WOULD **RECOMMEND** THEIR DESIGN AGENCY UNRESERVEDLY

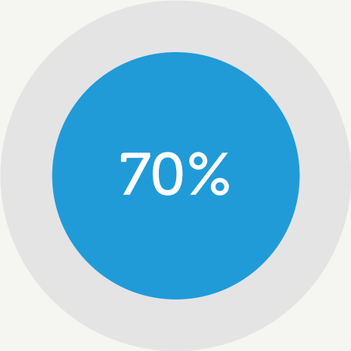
This doesn't mean that 60% of clients would not recommend their agency. For example, only 15% of clients have serious caveats. For most agencies, clients can be a great source of potential referrals.

69%

OF SENIOR CLIENTS (MARKETING DIRECTOR LEVEL AND ABOVE) STATE THAT A BUDGET CAN ALWAYS BE FOUND FOR A **GREAT IDEA**

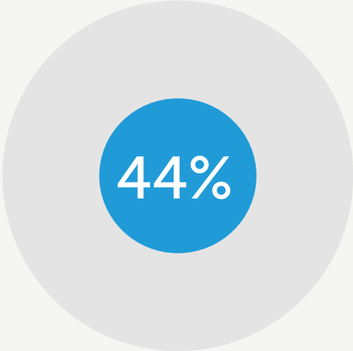
Great ideas call for special circumstances.

3.2 Client development



OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT THEIR DESIGN AGENCY COULD PROVIDE MORE **ADDED VALUE** COMMUNICATION

As revealed in previous reports, there is huge client appetite for shared knowledge. Relevance is key, though.



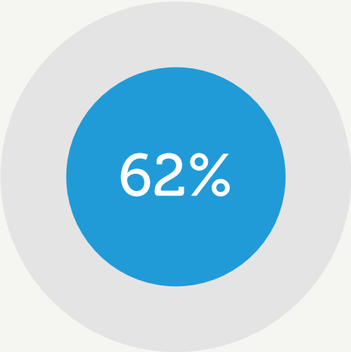
OF CLIENTS ARE NOT AWARE OF THEIR AGENCY'S **FULL SKILL SET**

We ask clients whether there are any particular types of project or challenge for which they wouldn't consider their incumbent agency. This often highlights perceived skill gaps or a response of, 'They might have that service but if they do, then I'm not aware of it.' Clients need to be proactively reminded about an agency's full offer, with supporting evidence.

OF CLIENTS CLAIM NOT TO KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT THEIR DESIGN AGENCY'S **WORK FOR OTHER CLIENTS**

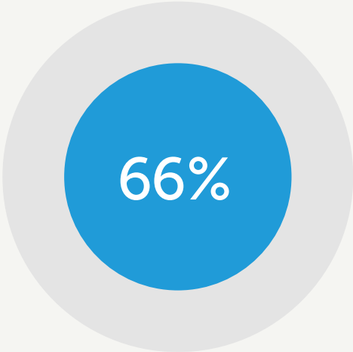
While an agency can't betray client confidences, there are similar challenges that can be highlighted and interesting analogies to be made. Putting case studies on the agency website or in a newsletter is not the same as proactively bringing relevant examples of work to the client table.

3.3 Costs



OF CLIENTS STATE THAT THEIR MARKETING BUDGETS **HAVE BEEN CUT**

There is an old maxim that brands should increase marketing spend during a recession, not decrease. The reality is that many companies moved quickly to cut costs when Covid hit. Covid has had a negative impact on many marketing budgets, but by no means all. While there are obvious casualties such as hospitality, high street retail and events marketing, some other areas have fared well.



OF CLIENTS STATE THAT THEIR **FOCUS AND BUDGET** HAS SHIFTED TO DIGITAL CHANNELS

Covid has stimulated some major changes in consumer behaviour. Digital skills, particularly social, are at a premium.

OF CLIENTS IN LARGE CORPORATES STATE THAT AGENCIES HAVE A **LIMITED UNDERSTANDING** OF HOW PROCUREMENT PROCESSES WORK

A better knowledge of how procurement processes work can benefit agencies.

3.3 Costs

48%

OF CLIENTS BELIEVE THAT AGENCIES COULD BE **MORE PROACTIVE** AT KEY BUDGET PLANNING STAGES

It is crucial that agencies know when clients are planning their activity and when budgets are being prepared. In effect, coming up with timely ideas for how clients should spend their money.

44%

OF CLIENTS CONSIDER THEIR DESIGN AGENCY TO BE GOOD **VALUE FOR MONEY**

A 10% reduction on last year's figure. A cost conscious environment has been a feature of our previous reports but the Covid factor has accentuated this.

46%

OF CLIENTS CONSIDER THEIR DESIGN AGENCY TO BE GOOD **VALUE FOR MONEY** IN PART

Reasons for 'in part' include niggles about disproportionately high costs for smaller items, costs not always being fully transparent and poor communication by the agency around budget management.

About Up to the Light

Up to the Light is the leading provider of client surveys to the UK design industry. The consultancy offers expert, objective and experienced advice for marketing services agencies and professional services firms. The consultancy's approach is to challenge ingrained assumptions and offer more effective, insight-led thinking.

This report is dependent on agencies commissioning Up to the Light to interview their clients. If you've found this report useful, then just imagine how insightful and valuable a bespoke survey with your clients will be. Do get in touch if you'd like to discuss a client survey for your agency.

Services include:

- Client surveys
- Business development strategy
- Pitching advice
- Business differentiation
- Training & workshops
- Brand positioning & brand strategy for clients

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