

Design Pitch/Competition Guidelines

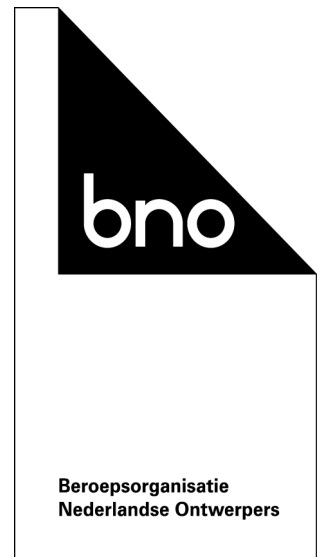


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1 Introduction

These are the Design Competition or Pitch Guidelines of the Association of Dutch Designers (BNO), drawn up and published in co-operation with the Design Management Network (DMN).

In the design sector, as with the advertising sector, pitches and competitions are one way of making an informed decision between design agencies when placing work. In association with the clients represented by DMN, BNO has drawn up guidelines for the competition process. The purpose of these guidelines is to promote professionalism and to obtain the best results.

2 Selection of a design agency

There are many different kinds of selection procedure, varying from meetings at which a client and an agency get to know each other thoroughly, to the comprehensive development of strategic and creative proposals.

A 'lighter' selection procedure focuses on gathering information about agencies and their experience, procedures, etc. Further information can be gathered by having agencies respond to the project briefing in more detail during the meetings. This type of selection is usually referred to as an Agency Search.

There are two other main forms:

- Agency Analysis: the client analyses agencies by considering their views, portfolios, strategies, organisation, staff, procedures, culture, rates, teamwork, etc.
- Agency Competition: in a competition, a number of agencies present actual (specific, strategic and creative) proposals under the same conditions and circumstances.

The Agency Analysis and Agency Search require relatively little effort from the agencies, who generally receive no fee.

These Guidelines focus in particular on agency competitions that require major effort by agencies, using all their expertise and knowledge.

3 When to hold an Agency Competition

There are various ways in which clients can get the best view of suitable design agencies. The question is when the 'weightiest' form, the Agency Competition, should be used. Generally speaking, an Agency Competition can be the right choice if a wide range of new proposals is required (in the short term) and a client's current agency contacts cannot provide them. In other cases an Agency Analysis, an Agency Search or a combination of the two will often suffice.

4 Preparation of the Agency Competition

Competitions require a major investment in terms of time and quality from the participating agencies. You should not therefore hold a design competition unless your plans are serious and follow up is guaranteed from your organisation.

If this is the case, first inform your current design agency about your plans, and agree the use of existing material that may be copyright protected. Also remember to check whether there are any continuing performance agreements or whether a notice period applies.

Draw up a draft briefing for the project in question, focusing in particular on your organisation's expectations in respect of the design. Record in writing as specifically as possible what contribution the participating agencies are expected to make. Determine the criteria that participating agencies must meet in terms of their size, specialist area, organisation (and possibly turnover). Make a list of existing designs that appeal to you.

Gather a wide range of information and documentation from the agencies that meet your criteria and the conditions in the design briefing. In gathering this information, also take into account the knowledge and experience available within your own professional network.

BNO's publication My Dutch Design and online directories may be of use to you in an overall agency search. Further professional information is available on the bno.nl and dmnetwork.nl websites.

5 Selection of agencies

Do not invite too many agencies to take part in the competition. As a rule, a large pool will not lead to better results, but will take more time, both for agencies and within your own organisation. If possible, also have your current agency take part in the competition.

If you wish to receive a mix of views and proposals, select several types of agency. If selecting the right agency is more important than a wide range of proposals, select agencies of a similar type.

Inform all the participating agencies of the names of the other participants and establish a clear-cut procedure and planning schedule.

6 Briefing

Draw up a concise but full briefing to be given to all the participating agencies at the same time, together with the checklist of competition selection criteria. It is important that the briefing clearly states whether you expect only a strategic action plan, or creative proposals as well. Make it clear to the agencies that they must adhere to the briefing.

Provide the participating agencies with information on the scope of the final assignment and give them an impression of the type of relationship and service that you expect the winning agency to provide in future. The fees and the nature of the contract should also be explained. Make it clear to all the agencies from the start how you wish to handle copyrights and other rights relating to the competition proposals.

7 Planning schedule

Make a realistic estimate of the time required by the agencies to work the briefing into a presentation, and draw up a planning schedule on this basis. Bear in mind that there must be sufficient time to allow for the creative process (incubation period) between the briefing and the presentation. A period of six to eight weeks is customary in a design competition.

8 Introductions and information

Synergy is essential, particularly in a long-term client/agency relationship. Allow your employees to get to know the agencies' staff with whom they may be working in the future. Make sure that an experienced staff member is available within your organisation at all times who can act as a contact for the agencies. By gathering information and putting people in touch with each other, this person can contribute to the consistency of the competition.

A previous and personal meeting is recommended, especially in case of long term and strategic projects.

All the participants in the competition must be given equal access to all the relevant explanations, clarifications and background information. Questions presented by individual participants and the answers given must therefore be made available to all the participants at the same time.

It may be important to the project to share market information and relevant research with the agencies on a confidential basis. Be precise and clear about what constitutes confidential information and how it should be handled by the agencies.

9 Financial aspects

Pitches can be remunerated in two different ways:

1. full remuneration
2. partial remuneration

It can easily cost the participating agencies tens of thousands of euros in time, in addition to out-of-pocket expenses, to participate in a pitch. The remuneration is unlikely to cover all the costs, since it is a risk-bearing investment by the agency to pitch for an important assignment.

The client decides whether to pay the agencies full or partial remuneration. It may even opt to pay no remuneration at all.

It is up to the client and the agencies to decide on this point. BNO and DMN do not impose any rules or prohibitions, but they do have opinions on the issue.

A competition is the start of a collaborative relationship between a client and a design agency. That relationship is the outcome of a project of great importance to the client (which is after all the reason for holding the competition) for which the agency puts its best foot forward (in order to secure the contract). Organising such a process for little or no fee would not be a good start for such a relationship, and bears no proportion to the value attributed to it. For this reason BNO and DMN are opposed to unpaid competitions. As stated above, however, clients and agencies are free to accept any types and conditions of competition. These Guidelines can also be applied to unpaid competitions.

10 Rights

If the client pays all the costs of the competition, the unsuccessful agencies cannot use the concepts presented by them for other assignments. This does not, however, automatically mean that the client is allowed to use an unsuccessful concept.

If partial remuneration is paid, the creative output, if any, will remain the agency's property, but separate agreements can be made about the conditions under which the client may use the work.

If no remuneration is paid, it is advisable to limit the request made to the agencies to a presentation of the agency and/or its views. Any works that are the product of an unpaid pitch will remain the agency's property unless other agreements have been made on that point.

11 Preparation of evaluation and decision-making

All the main decision-makers within your organisation should be involved in the competition and should be kept informed throughout the process. You should determine beforehand what part the various people in your organisation will play in the decision-making process and arrange for consensus. Establish an efficient evaluation system that allows you to assess each aspect of the competition, and inform the participating agencies of the procedure in good time. Evaluations and assessments of the agencies and their work should be kept confidential.

You should agree with the agency that the people who present the work will later also be actively involved in the project or process. Set aside sufficient time for the presentations and organise them in good time, so that the people involved within your organisation will be able to attend, ask questions and take part in the discussions.

12 Business agreements

Make sure that the business aspects of an agreement have been completed before announcing a 'winner'. Your legal or purchase department may also be able to play a part. BNO and DMN can, on request, assist you in drawing up a competition agreement.

13 Choice and decision-making

Decide as soon as possible after the final presentations which agency has won the competition. A week is a realistic and customary term. Clearly inform both the winning agency and the unsuccessful agencies of your decision, starting with the latter so that the news is not shared inappropriately. By agreeing with the agencies beforehand as to when they will receive your decision by telephone, you can make sure that all parties are informed on the same day. Remember to also inform your current agency. Finally, make specific agreements with all the parties involved as to how the external communication will be handled.

Provide any feedback personally and handle presentations and information with confidentiality.