



# Make The Logo Bigger!

20 effective ways brand advertisers can master the art form of providing thoughtful, productive feedback to their agency partners during creative reviews.

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Asking the agency *“Can you make the logo bigger?”* after its presentation of a new creative idea is the equivalent of asking your spouse *“What’s wrong with you?”* or *“Why do you never do what I want?”* The conversation is likely to steer in the wrong direction. Good luck with that!

Brand advertisers are frequently being tasked to sit down and review new concepts developed by their agency partners. The “client” previously submitted an input brief to the agency team and is now coming back with a few creative concepts for its approval. Not unlike the professional discipline of writing solid input briefs, too few clients have ever received formal training on how to provide actionable, productive feedback during creative reviews. Not to worry. After spending years advising brand advertisers on how to improve the value and work they produce with their agencies, a few best practices have clearly emerged.

**Here are 20 effective ways to improve the quality of the dialog between the client and its agency during the creative review and provide feedback that ultimately leads to better work.**

**1) Submit a clear, concise client input brief:** It all starts with a quality input brief, which is the client’s most important responsibility, as I highlighted in the recent article *“Are your briefs too tight?”* It’s garbage in, garbage out. No creative review can be expected to go well if the client haphazardly process to come up with robust concepts. Whenever clients try to shortcut the process and rush the agency, the work suffers. Give ample time for the agency to research, reflect, ask questions and come up with brilliant ideas.

**2) Give time for the agency to prepare:** The agency must be able to digest the information submitted and follow its own creative process to come up with robust concepts. Whenever clients try to

# 20 EFFECTIVE WAYS

## TO PROVIDE ACTIONABLE CREATIVE FEEDBACK



shortcut the process and rush the agency, the work suffers. Give ample time for the agency to research, reflect, ask questions and come up with brilliant ideas.

**3) Insist on an in-person meeting:** In today's digital age, we are all guilty of relying heavily on technology and mobile devices to get work done. There are a few times where in-person interactions are vital, however. The creative review is one of those. Being able to read the room, watch expressions and understand the dynamic is a central part of being on the receiving end of what the agency is presenting.

**4) Prepare before showing up:** Once the agency has been adequately briefed, the majority of the work is done by the agency, until the day of the creative concept presentation. However, the client must also prepare for that meeting by doing due diligence in making sure the right internal stakeholders will attend, reviewing the brief to be ready to provide solid feedback, and showing up open minded.

**5) Review the brief and project objectives:** Once everyone is in the room ready for the agency to present, going through the brief objectives before presenting any work ensures complete alignment for all involved. A simple walk-through of the brief (and yes, the most current version) by the client sets the stage for a productive dialog.

**6) Set clear meeting expectations:** This is also an opportunity to be transparent about meeting expectations. If a decision is to be made at the meeting, it should be stated. No conversation can be really productive if there are hidden agendas or undisclosed expectations.

**7) Let the agency present all its ideas first:** It's show time and the agency has been working hard to present these concepts. It is likely to present a few concepts, and discuss how the team

approached the assignment. Let the agency present all of its ideas so everything is on the table before providing feedback. Make sure there is enough time scheduled to do so.

**8) Evaluate the work based on three simple criteria:** As the concepts get presented, the client must always ask himself or herself the following questions: Is it on brief? Is it on brand? Is it inspiring? The work must be addressing the specific assignment captured in the brief. It must support and reinforce the brand. It must be inspiring to captivate audiences.

**9) Ask for input from other participants but be clear about decision making:** The lead client in the meeting has for responsibility to invite all internal stakeholders to share their initial thoughts to the work that was presented. Too many approval layers can kill ideas or muddle them. The lead client should manage internal participants, take that feedback into careful consideration and as final decision maker, make closing statements. The agency should not be put in a situation to make sense of conflicting client feedback without client support.

**10) Determine if more time is needed:** Are you uncertain about the direction you want to take? Do you need to have a side conversation with someone from your team? Do you want to sleep on it for 24 hours? That's fine. If the schedule allows, take more time to form an opinion and provide clear guidance to the agency.

**11) Assess the work objectively:** It's quite common for clients to be influenced by subjective drivers while reviewing the work. It's rather human, and most concepts trigger an emotional reaction that is hard to ignore. However, the client must look at the work as objectively as possible to avoid potential bias. Be transparent and share thoughts openly and respectfully.

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**12) Do not focus on executional details:** The temptation is real to comment on the various tactical and operational elements of each concept and be too granular. It might be a choice of words, the typeface or a color that does not work. However, it's best to refrain from falling into a rat hole, and instead, focus on the bigger ideas being presented.

**13) Ask clarifying questions:** As the concepts are presented, asking clarifying questions will ensure everyone has a solid understanding of each idea and its rationale for being included. It also keeps this meeting conversational and collaborative.

**14) Ask for the agency's top recommendation:** No matter how many concepts were presented, the agency will have a favorite. Most agencies will call it out. If it doesn't, ask which of the concepts it prefers and why. It's likely to be enlightening.

**15) Challenge assumptions or gaps in a productive way:** As the agency presents each concept, it is likely to share what assumptions it may have made. It's the client's role to challenge these assumptions if necessary or identify potential gaps that must be brought forward and debated.

**16) Show genuine appreciation for the work:** Any client who has been on the agency side understands what it takes for agencies to present work. Creative concepts are very personal. People get attached to ideas and creative folks consider the work an extension of themselves. Make sure to show appreciation for the work and efforts put forward by the agency. It will go a long way to make any feedback, even negative, more digestible.

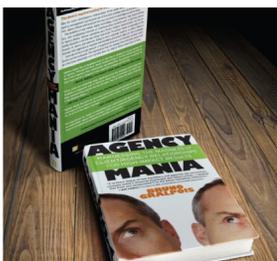
**17) Always start with the positive:** When providing feedback, always start by describing what you like best about the work presented. Then, if needed, drill down into your potential reservations or concerns. Make sure to provide honest, direct and respectful feedback.

**18) Summarize key feedback points:** The feedback provided during the meeting should be synthesized by the lead client to make sure nothing has been overlooked. A summary of the key points made during the creative review will help the agency greatly.

**19) Make a decision — Go, no go, redo:** The options are pretty straightforward at the end of the meeting and unless you require more time, a decision must be made. If the agency must re-concept or revisit the work presented, it will require detailed feedback to course correct.

**20) Close with clear next steps:** The concept review meeting is complete, a decision has been communicated and now, everyone must be clear about who is doing what when. A clear action plan with roles and responsibilities and a schedule keeps everyone completely aligned.

As for the logo size, if you still plan to ask the agency to make it bigger, you were warned. Brand advertisers must invest in helping their marketing teams and project owners get better at providing constructive feedback to agency partners. Better creative feedback will foster better and higher quality work and will ensure brands always make effective use of their agency talent.



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**Bruno Galpois** is the co-founder of Agency Mania Solutions, a premier service and technology firm specialized in helping companies realize the transformational value of managed partnerships. Bruno is the author of best-seller "Agency Mania" and the former chair of the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) Client/Agency Committee and a faculty member of the ANA School of Marketing.

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