

OUT  
OF THE  
SQUARE

*How To*  
**Get the  
Damn  
Budget**

A strategic guide for  
marketers who want  
bold ideas funded.  
And approved.





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## Chapter 01

# Is your *brief* actually ready for approval?

**Before you pitch the creative, pitch the problem.**

The best creative ideas don't get funded because they're clever. They get funded because they're commercially relevant — tied to outcomes your business already prioritises.

If you're asking for budget without that link, your idea is already on the back foot.

In a study by BetterBriefs, 80% of marketers believed they write clear briefs — only 10% of agencies agreed. That gap doesn't just affect creative. It affects whether the idea ever gets signed off in the first place.

This chapter helps you check whether your brief is aligned, strategic, and built to support a serious budget ask.





## What to ask yourself:

### Is this brief tied to a defined business priority?

If your company is focused on retention, but your brief is about driving acquisition, the disconnect will cost you credibility.

### Has your leadership team seen the bigger picture?

If they haven't been brought into the wider marketing strategy, they'll assess this ask as a one-off spend, not a strategic move.

### What's the commercial outcome?

Whether it's market share, customer value, or brand trust, your idea needs to move a lever your boss already has their eye on.

### Are you briefing from strategy, or just reacting?

If your roadmap is thin, scattered or overly tactical, the budget conversation becomes harder before it begins.



## Try this

- 1 Bullet three business outcomes your idea supports — not just marketing KPIs
- 2 Use a “so what” test: why should your CFO care about this?
- 3 Ask your agency to help create a one-pager that connects idea to impact — strategy, spend, and success criteria

## Chapter 02

# What your boss actually wants to *solve*?

**You're solving for creative clarity.**

**They're solving for growth, retention, risk mitigation or efficiency.**

**Same business, different filters.**

If your idea isn't framed through their lens, it's far less likely to get funded — no matter how smart or strategically sound it may be.

This chapter helps you shift the language from marketing logic to business logic and position your idea as a solution to an existing leadership pressure.





## Where senior leaders focus

Based on Out of the Square's experience and global research, here's how different decision-makers typically filter creative proposals:

Stakeholder	Likely focus area	What they need to hear
CEO	Growth, competitive advantage, long-term brand position	<i>How this campaign supports market leadership or future relevance</i>
CFO	Efficiency, ROI, cost control	<i>How this investment reduces risk or drives measurable return</i>
CMO	Strategy alignment, share of voice, team performance	<i>How this strengthens the broader marketing play</i>
GM	Regional or divisional performance, operational execution, short-to-mid-term results	<i>How this campaign drives performance at a local or business-unit level with clear, actionable outcomes</i>
MD	Overall business health, cross-functional alignment, reputational risk	<i>How this initiative aligns with company-wide priorities and presents no surprises commercially, reputationally, or operationally</i>



# Reframe your ask



**STOP**

*Instead of*

*“We need a bigger production budget to make this campaign cut through.”*



*Say*

*“To achieve [priority], we’ve identified a campaign opportunity that can [commercial outcome], provided we resource it to meet its audience and channel requirements.”*

**That’s a business case, not a creative plea.**



## Try this

- 1 Identify what your leadership team is solving for this quarter
- 2 Reword your brief headline or slide titles using commercial language, not campaign language
- 3 Ask your agency to help you write two versions of your campaign overview: one for the creative team, one for your CFO

## Chapter 03

# How to manage up *without* the politics

**You've got the strategy. You've got the idea.  
But now you're navigating layers of leadership  
with different agendas, priorities and filters.  
And suddenly, your campaign isn't just a creative  
conversation – it's a political one.**

This chapter is about helping you manage stakeholders without getting caught in alignment quicksand. It's not about playing the game. It's about communicating in a way that gets taken seriously by the right people, at the right time, for the right reasons.

Because even the best idea won't move forward if it's not framed to land across the leadership table.

This chapter helps you check whether your brief is aligned, strategic, and built to support a serious budget ask.





## Why stakeholders say no *(even when the work is good)*



### 01

#### **They can't see how it links to business objectives**

If your idea doesn't connect to what matters to them, it's easy to dismiss.



### 02

#### **They see cost, not return**

Especially for non-marketing leaders, creative work can appear intangible. It's your job to make the value visible.



### 03

#### **They weren't brought in early enough**

No one likes to be surprised by a spend request. Especially one that looks like it's already been approved elsewhere.



## How to pitch to different people

Stakeholder	Likely focus area	What they need to hear
CEO	Business growth, brand equity, long-term positioning	<i>How this campaign reinforces market leadership or brand trajectory</i>
CFO	Commercial returns, risk, efficiency	<i>The revenue upside, cost control, or long-term ROI of the creative spend</i>
CMO	Share of voice, campaign efficiency, team performance	<i>How the idea elevates marketing effectiveness and aligns with plan</i>
GM	Operational results, budget stretch, business-unit KPIs	<i>How the campaign drives results in their part of the business with minimal disruption</i>
MD	Cross-functional alignment, organisational priorities, brand integrity	<i>How the work delivers business-wide value with clarity, control and no surprises</i>



# The key is not to dilute the idea, it's to reframe it

You're not changing what the work is.  
You're changing how you talk about what it does.



## Try this

- 1 Create a short deck with one slide per stakeholder — each one answering their most likely question.
- 2 Ask your agency to pressure-test your internal narrative: does it resonate commercially, or just creatively?
- 3 Use a “*risk vs reward*” table to show what’s at stake if the campaign is underfunded.

## Keep in mind

**Stakeholders don't all want different things.  
They just speak different languages.**

When you translate your campaign into each of those languages, you become a marketer who doesn't just brief well – you lead well.



## Chapter 04

# Handling classic budget *objections*

**You've done the work. The brief is clear.**

**The idea is strong. The business case stacks up.**

Then comes the pushback.

Budget objections aren't always about the idea — often, they're about timing, confidence, or perceived risk. But how you respond matters. Not defensively, not creatively — commercially.

This chapter provides strategies for shifting the conversation, reframing the ask, and maintaining momentum without eroding trust.



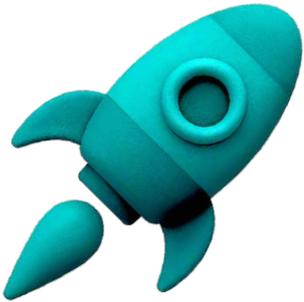


## Objections you've probably heard

What they say	What they mean
<b><i>"Let's just post it organically first"</i></b>	<i>We don't trust the ROI yet – or we haven't seen a compelling reason to invest</i>
<b><i>"Now's not the right time"</i></b>	<i>We're prioritising something else – or you haven't tied this to a current priority</i>
<b><i>"We'll revisit it next quarter"</i></b>	<i>This idea isn't urgent enough to compete – or we're avoiding risk</i>
<b><i>"It's a lot of money for a creative idea"</i></b>	<i>We haven't seen how this connects to growth or mitigates brand risk</i>



# What to do instead of pushing back



## 01

### Reframe from creative cost to business return

John Hegarty's *The Business of Creativity* reminds us that creativity is one of the biggest levers of marketing effectiveness — and brand value. Make that clear. You're not asking for indulgence, you're recommending investment.



## 02

### Anchor the idea to an active business challenge

Make the connection immediate. *"This supports our Q4 retention goal"* lands better than *"This is a great brand play."*



## 03

### Visualise the cost of underfunding

Not as a threat — as a business reality. Use scenarios: *"Here's what happens if we launch with a reduced media spend."*



## 04

### Use language that defuses, not defends

Instead of: *"We disagree — this needs more budget"*

Try: *"We've modelled outcomes at three different budget levels, so you can see where cut-through starts to drop."*



## Try this

- 1 Build a “*Why Now, Why This, What If Not?*” slide to structure your ask
- 2 Ask your agency to develop three investment tiers (e.g. base, standard, stretch) so the conversation shifts from “*yes or no*” to “*what level of impact*”
- 3 Use language like: “*To meet our goal, this is what adequate resourcing looks like*” — instead of “*We need more money*”

## The bigger picture

**Not every idea gets approved.  
But every idea should be evaluated properly.**

When you present creative work as a lever for business outcomes – and when you speak to what’s behind the objection, not just the words – you lead with commercial clarity. And that’s what gets funded.



## Chapter 05

# Prepping the *meeting* that gets a YES

**No matter how good your idea is, if the meeting isn't managed well, the answer might still be no.**

That final pitch moment isn't about recapping the creative. It's about making the business case land with confidence, clarity and the right level of control.

This chapter focuses on how to frame the meeting so that decision-makers feel informed, aligned, and ready to commit.





## What great approval meetings have in common

### **They're not a surprise**

Stakeholders have been brought in early — ideally when the brief was still forming, not when the deck is already finished.

### **They focus on business outcomes, not creative features**

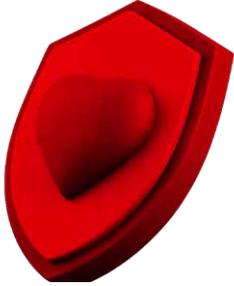
You're not walking them through why the edit works. You're showing them how this idea delivers on what the business needs.

### **They create space for buy-in**

The goal is to land agreement, not just present. That means asking for feedback – not just a sign-off.



## Suggested agenda



### 01

#### The Business Context

Frame the opportunity in terms of risk, return or alignment with active strategy.



### 02

#### The Campaign Concept

Introduce the idea, its purpose, and the strategic lens behind it – not just the creative expression.



### 03

#### Investment Options

Offer tiers where relevant. Show what different funding levels can unlock, and what may be at risk with under-investment.



### 04

#### Outcomes and Measurement

What success looks like, and how it will be tracked – tied to metrics the leadership team actually values.



### 05

#### What We Need From You

Be clear, direct and time-bound. *“We’re seeking approval on X budget and alignment to launch in Y timeframe.”*



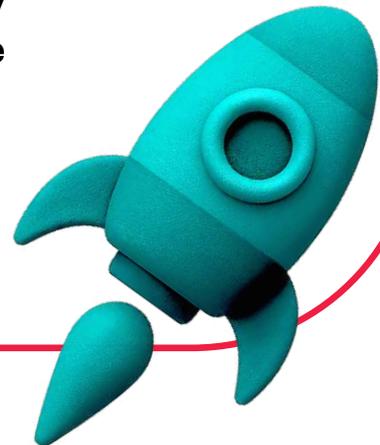
## Try this

- 1 Build a short deck with no more than 5–6 slides – focus on clarity, not credentials
- 2 Rehearse your framing aloud, ideally with your agency partner as sounding board
- 3 Have your risk/reward matrix ready – not as a threat, but as context for decision-making

## Don't forget

**The decision-makers in the room want to say yes – but they need to feel confident they're saying yes to the right thing.**

When you lead with strategy, speak their language, and show you've done the work, you're not just asking for budget. You're demonstrating leadership.



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# Thank you

**Questions? Please don't hesitate to get in touch.  
We'd love to collaborate.**



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