

annual report briefing guide

Successful presentation of your next annual report starts with developing the best brief you can.

So that they can provide the highest level of input, it is recommended that the design agency commissioned has a strong grasp of the essence of your business, the markets you serve and the audiences being addressed by your Report.

At corporateprm we help our clients to identify what the key messages are for the target audiences. The design must then focus on delivering these messages in the most appropriate manner, taking onboard the varying interest levels and attention spans of readers.

The use of photography, graphs, tables, headlines, copy as well as the overall look and feel must not only deliver the key messages but also project an image consistent with your broader communications.

Whilst it should be remembered that the Report is only one part your corporate communications mix it is nonetheless a major opportunity to challenge and shape the views of your target audiences.

Many reports suffer from trying to do too much and as a result fail to deliver the key messages clearly and concisely. Research has indicated that the majority of readers only give it a few minutes of their time. It is important that you take account of this by ensuring you drive home your key messages whilst also providing greater detail for those whose interest is deeper and attention span longer.

Your Report needs to satisfy a wide range of statutory and 'best practice' requirements, and to a degree its structure and content are governed by this. However, there has been a tendency for this to divert a certain amount of focus from ensuring that readers of the Report gain answers to the three fundamental questions about your business:

- What is the current state of the business?
- Where do you want to take it?
- How do you intend to get there?

the guide

This document is by no means exhaustive. It is intended only to prompt you to address the fundamental questions that will help you build an effective brief. Some questions may seem obvious while others less so. You may already have a formal briefing document or have nothing at all, whatever the case we hope you will find our short guide of some use.

markets

In some of the best annual reports, the company provides the reader with sufficient information to allow its performance to be gauged against knowledge of the marketplace they operate within.

It is important when writing your Report to avoid the assumptions that could be made if only addressing specialist analysts. The new or potential shareholder with little knowledge of your market should

be able to glean sufficient information from the Report to be in a position to judge the achievements of your organisation.

Consider:

- What markets does your business currently compete in?
- What has been happening in these markets recently?
- What is your known position in these markets?
- What are your strategies for market penetration and development?

your company

It is imperative that the reader is given a clear impression of what is special about your organisation and therefore why it represents a good investment.

core strengths

Consider:

- What are the key strengths of your business and what creates its competitive edge?
- What do your customers think of your business?
- What is the financial strength of the business?

people

Consider:

- how should you present the strengths of the people in your organisation?
- What are you doing to develop and support them?
- What management communication systems are in place or being developed?

products/services

Consider:

- What products and services do you provide?
- What brands do you have and how strong are they?
- How do they relate to market trends?
- What is happening in terms of your brand/product/service development?
- Do you have a technological lead or intellectual property that provides an edge?
- What do your customers think of your products/services

operations/facilities

Consider:

- Highlight your operational strengths
 - What investments are you making to sustain or improve them?
 - How are you funding your development plans?
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where to now?

Having provided sufficient information to allow a good understanding of the nature of your organisation you are now in a better position to present your strategies to take the business forward. Bearing in mind the need to keep particular strategies and tactics confidential it is important to clearly identify the prospects for the organisation.

Consider:

- What are the key short, medium and long term targets for the business in terms of market shares, earnings growth, operating margins, cash movements, capital investment levels, return on investment and profit targets
- What are the key elements that will impact on these?

key messages and highlights

As mentioned earlier it is important to focus on giving emphasis to key messages in your Report. Having considered the topics outlined above it is recommended that you create a prioritised list of key messages and supporting highlights for the year.

Exactly how many depends on a number of factors but consider including in the brief:

- What are the top three key messages you wish to convey?
- What are the top five highlights of the past year?

tone

There are a number of factors that affect what tone should be set for your Report. The existing image portrayed by your business, the nature of its markets and in certain cases the personalities of its principal executives.

In particular the tone of an annual report should consider the current performance of the business. If for example it is a record breaking year in terms of profits then there is reason to show pride in such an achievement. Conversely in a year of lower profits or depressed markets it may look extravagant or lacking in sensitivity to use an overly elaborate format or lavish style for the Report. It can be useful

to think of your business as a person and to consider what the overriding characteristic(s) you wish your Report to transmit such as:

- Conservative
- Flamboyant
- Confident
- Cautious
- Dynamic
- Stable/steady
- Optimistic
- Extravagant
- Thrifty
- Cutting-edge/experimental
- Tried and tested
- Youthful
- Mature
- Pragmatic

other materials

It is always very useful to provide whoever is designing your Report with existing materials such as:

- Your company/product literature
- Your website URL
- Your key press releases issued in the past 12 months
- Your past Annual Reports
- Competitors Annual Reports
- Research reports on what 'City' analysts are saying about your Company
- Market trends reports

specifying your annual report

format

Do you have a preferred size? yes no

(mm) A4 210x297 US ltr 216x279 A5 148x210 other

If other, what are the dimensions? x mm

How many pages do you expect to have in your annual report?

- front end (executive statements, operational review, financial review)
- back end (directors' report, financial statements)

In how many colours is your report printed?

- front end single two colour full colour
- back end single two colour full colour

If full colour, do you have any additional special colours?

- If yes, how many? yes no
- front end one two three
- back end one two three

Do you prefer a particular paper type? yes no

If yes, please specify

Do you prefer a particular binding method? yes no

If yes, please state wire stitched perfect bound thread sewn spiral bound

Other

Do you wish the front cover to be laminated? yes no

If yes, is it? matt silk gloss

How many annual reports do you require in total?

copy

Do you require assistance with writing? yes no

If yes, which sections?

chairman's statement <input type="checkbox"/>	chief executive's review <input type="checkbox"/>	operating review <input type="checkbox"/>
financial review <input type="checkbox"/>	directors' report <input type="checkbox"/>	corporate governance <input type="checkbox"/>

Other

How will text be supplied to the design agency?

	manuscript (hard copy) <input type="checkbox"/>	electronically <input type="checkbox"/>
• front end	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• back end	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

images

Do you have a library of images that can be used for the annual report? yes no

Is new photography required? yes no

- for the front end yes no
- for the board of directors yes no

corporate identity

Will you supply corporate identity guidelines? yes no

Can you supply? yes no

- logos in electronic form
- colour specifications
- typeface specifications

proofing

What proofs are required for signing off? fully printed

- flat proofs digital cromalin (wet proof)
- book proofs (fully bound) n/a

other requirements: please state any other specific requirements

mailing requirements

Are there any other items to be posted with the report? yes no

- notice of AGM
- proxy
- special notices
- other

If other, please specify

Do you require the design agency to distribute the annual reports? yes no

If yes, how many annual reports are mailed out to shareholders and mailing lists?

How will the mailing list be supplied? labels electronically

Do you require the design agency to supply envelopes? yes no

Are the reports posted first or second class? 1st 2nd

some key dates

• design concepts presented by: dd mm yy

• design concepts approved by:

• first draft to design agency:

• final draft required by client:

• sign off final proof:

• posting date:

• AGM date: