

SHOULD WE WORK TOGETHER?

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What will it be like if we do? Read this guide to find out.

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INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS GUIDE MATTERS

We at CBC are well aware of how the typical agency/client relationship works...and the unfortunate conditioning of both agencies and clients that has come from this traditional dynamic.

This guide was written to be a transparent full disclosure that working with CBC is probably not what you're used to.

We are not in the business of talking people into things. Our goal is to help us both evaluate a fit—it's not to try and persuade you to work with us.

We believe there is nothing more important than being honest with each other about working styles, our policies and procedures, and our expectations of each other. This guide is intended to get those items out on the table for discussion before deciding to work together.

After reading this guide, you may decide CBC is not the right agency for you. That's fine—better to figure it out now than later, after we've both invested in the relationship.

A FEW PREFACING NOTES

Before we begin, let's go over a few items to create a common understanding and avoid accidental misunderstandings.

We are mutually evaluating each other

Our job in the sales cycle is to facilitate a mutual evaluation of the fit between your needs and our expertise. You must choose us and we must choose you.

CBC sells expertise, not time

Our time is free; it's our thinking that is expensive. If you are looking to buy time, bandwidth or specific technical skills, CBC isn't the right choice.

CBC doesn't respond to RFPs

You are welcome to send us an RFP to initiate the conversation, but please know in advance that our process for discussing potential engagements is a verbal two-way discussion, rather than a one-way written submission.

We need to meet with everyone involved in making decisions

An initiative as important as the one we are potentially discussing requires that all the people involved in making decisions (both on our side and yours) are part of the conversation.

CBC proposals are primarily verbal

A 40-page written document may be a corporate comfort blanket, but in our experience two things are true: you really don't enjoy reading proposals, and we don't enjoy writing them. We will clearly outline our proposed plan to you—verbally. Once we agree to work together, we will draft a written, thorough contract, to satisfy our mutual need for documentation.

DECIDING IF WE SHOULD WORK TOGETHER

WHAT WE LOOK FOR IN CLIENTS

As you evaluate CBC, you are scoring us on the criteria that are important to you. Meanwhile, we're doing the same! Below are the criteria CBC is literally scoring you on, to assess the quality of the potential relationship between us:

You...have worked with a professional firm before

To be clear, working with us likely won't be much like your previous experiences. But if you've never worked with an professional firm at all, you're a little too green for our way of doing things.

You...want to win

Your work is not about filling the timesheet until 5 pm so you can go home. You want to beat the hell out of the competition. You not only want to win, you want them to lose.

You...like us for the right reasons

It's our expertise and unique approach to experiential brand development that turns you on, not our prices, technical skills or ability to recreate our previous work with other clients for you.

You...have the resources to truly engage with us

You have the need, desire and budget to see your relationship with CBC as a deep engagement with at least a year-long horizon, rather than just a project. Anything shorter than a year or so doesn't provide for the depth of engagement we both need.

You...are upfront about your budgets

Rather than playing coy about your financial resources, or asking for "quotes" to compare with other vendors, you are upfront about your budgets and are willing to have a transparent conversation about how to use that budget.

You...let us diagnose the problem and prescribe the solution BEFORE applying it

What you want most from us is to diagnose your problem, prescribe a solution (strategy), and then apply the solution (implementation). In that order. You don't want us to jump straight to "design," or to simply execute your own ideas.

You...respect that our work will produce us a profit

Not sure why, but some companies don't like the idea of an agency making a profit. No offense but we're running a business here, just like you, and profit is a requirement.

KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL WORKING RELATIONSHIP

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM CBC

Once we have begun working together, here are the things you can count on from CBC:

Our Honest Opinion

You can count on getting our open and honest opinion and recommendations in everything we do. We aren't here to tell you what you want to hear just to make you happy. After all, you're paying for our expertise, and we want you to get your money's worth.

Big Thinking without Boundaries

We don't limit our ideas to the conventional boundaries of financial services marketing and branding. Instead, we develop big ideas that are on-strategy, and we're agnostic toward the media and channels they use. Please don't be surprised when we present you with ideas that are completely unconventional to banking.

Cracking the Whip

You expect us to complete the work on-time, on-budget and on-scope...and to create a product of unmatched quality. In most cases, you play a role in the work. That's why sometimes we have to crack the whip to keep you on track and focused. Don't be surprised or offended if we firmly manage you. It's part of what you're paying for.

Humility

If we make a mistake—which happens now and then—we will be upfront about it with you. We reserve the right to get smarter during our work together.

WHAT WE EXPECT FROM YOU

Likewise, once we have begun working together, we will be expecting the following of you:

The Bulk of Your Business

We only take on a few new clients each year. In order for us to have the impact on your business that we want to have—and you deserve to receive—we need to really dig into your situation. We expect you to become approximately 8-12% of our business for the year. If you can't realistically spend at least \$50k in a year with us, it may be best to look for a project-based agency.

Strategic Thinking

Keep your personal tastes and strategic assessments separate. Not to be rude, but we don't care if you hate PMS 374; we're developing a brand, not painting your bedroom. But if you have a strategic argument for why that color does not fit the agreed upon brand strategy, we want to hear it.

Promptness

Timely delivery of information to us. Prompt payment of our invoices. Punctuality in meetings. We're doing important work together, and we need your support and respect in that. Please keep up.

A Sense of Humor

Sometimes you may need to lighten up a bit. Our work together needs to be fun or the quality will suffer and the experience will be miserable.

WORKING WITH CBC

WORKING STYLE AND PROCEDURES

Hours

CBC's standard hours of operation are 8:30 am to 5:00 pm Pacific Standard Time. Because many of our clients are in different time zones, we are happy to schedule meeting outside these hours as needed.

Meetings

CBC believes in efficient and focused meetings—both via phone and in-person. We require a defined start time, agreed-upon duration and an agenda to outline what will be accomplished. We will meet in person when it's important and necessary, but the majority of our meetings will happen via phone and Internet, using web conferencing tools as appropriate.

Project Briefs

CBC develops project briefs at the outside of each component of our scope of work. A combination of a work order and a creative brief, the document outlines the objectives, parameters, audience and key message strategies to be employed. Clients must review and approve project briefs before further work begins. This is a crucial step for ensuring our work meets your business needs and preventing accidental miscommunications that cause the work to suffer.

Change Orders

CBC understands that projects inevitably require minor adjustments, and we are happy to maintain a reasonable level of flexibility. Change orders are one of the tools we use to maintain close management our most critical resources: our experts' time and energy. This ensures we can deliver on the commitments we've made to you, and our other clients as well.

When the scope of work increases, CBC will provide a change order for approval before continuing work. This can happen when additional rounds of revisions are needed, when approvals on previous steps are retracted (see "Approval Policy") or when additional deliverables are added to the scope. CBC will also provide a change order for substantial timeline changes resulting in a change in the total project duration of 25% or more (for instance, if a 60 day project timeline becomes a 75 day project timeline). The change orders will include a supplementary fee to reflect the difference from the original project agreement to the new one.

Approval Policy

Many steps in the CBC process are cumulative—they build upon confirmation of previous steps. As a result, CBC requires definitive client approval at various points in the process. Whether it's a written email confirmation or a signed document, please be prepared to commit your approval when CBC asks for it.

STANDARDS

Communication

Clear, open and strong communication is obviously key to a healthy working relationship. We use email extensively for efficiency, to deliver documents and stay in touch with our clients. When either we or our clients have an important question, a concern or a clarification, we prefer speaking via phone. Our communication standard is to respond to phone messages and emails within one day.

Timelines

Managing our human resources—the talent that produces the ideas we sell—is absolutely critical to CBC. As a result, we respect timelines and expect our clients to as well. That means our clients commit to delivery of information, feedback, and other deliverables to CBC at agreed-upon times, and CBC does the same in return. For most projects, changes in timeline durations should be very minimal. As mentioned in the “Change Orders” section, CBC issues change orders for timelines that change by 25% or greater in duration.

Budget Management

Along with managing timelines, budget management is the other critical resource management focus for CBC. Unless there is a change order, CBC commits to delivering projects with no more than 10% total variance from the estimated budget or range.

Conflicts of Interest

Conflict of interest is not a concern at CBC, but we respect it can be for our clients. CBC’s standard is to give its all to clients, regardless of their market or geographic location. We maintain a transparent list of clients we work with to ensure all prospective clients are fully aware of who we work with. By default we do not promise any exclusivity to clients. However, if our clients feel it is necessary, CBC will sell market exclusivity to the client at a to-be-determined fee.

Terms

Fees

Our fees may seem fairly expensive. And the nature of our work makes it hard to find a comparable reference point; we are a mango in a sea of apples. Our fees reflect the value of our work, not the time we spend creating it. As such, they tend to be nice round numbers. We don’t negotiate our fees, but it is possible to discuss whether the scope of work can be adjusted. CBC provides either firm estimates or estimate ranges depending on the work.

Markups

CBC adds an industry-standard markup (typically 15-25%) to all materials it purchases on behalf of clients, such as printing, media, photography and other materials. Travel expenses are submitted for reimbursement at cost with no markup.

Payment Terms

Invoices will be submitted based on the payment schedule outlined in each project agreement. Should the client cancel or place this project on hold (whether by request or 30 days of inaction), the client is expected to pay fees relative to work completed to date, with a minimum of 50% of the total project agreement fee. The first invoice in new relationships is due upon receipt. All other invoices are Net 30 unless otherwise specified. An interest rate of 1% per month will be charged to past-due invoices.

Copyright and Intellectual Property Ownership

The copyright and other intellectual property rights for any creative concepts, strategies, copy, or designs CBC develops shall automatically be transferred to the client upon full payment of applicable invoices. We reserve the right to use this project for our own self-promotion purposes and portfolio, including online and print reproductions of our work. Client acknowledges that all work produced by the agency does not violate any copyrights, patents or other rights.

Errors and Omissions

CBC makes every effort to ensure its work is free of errors and omissions, but cannot warrant this. We suggest you review the work thoroughly before committing it to production, as the client assumes ultimate responsibility.

Confidentiality

CBC maintains strict confidentiality of business information provided by clients. We are happy to complete a non disclosure agreement upon request. CBC does not handle data files containing information about the client's customers (for instance, a list of a bank's customer names and addresses, online banking login information, etc.).

Indemnity

The client shall hold CBC harmless against any liability anywhere in the world, including liability arising from copyright infringement and libel that results in any way from your use of our creative services and counsel on this project. We agree to work with your legal advisor to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations, as necessary.

Legal Proceedings

In the unlikely event that legal proceedings become necessary, the prevailing party shall be entitled to reimbursement for all legal fees.

ThankYou.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Brand and Marketing Strategy for Banks and Credit Unions

Creative Brand Communications is the leading brand development agency for the financial services industry. We help entrepreneurial banks and credit unions develop experiential brands that result in profitable customer relationships.

We provide:

- Brand strategy consulting and marketing strategy consulting
- Marketing agency services
- Word of mouth marketing