What goes into a business website brief?

A thorough brief saves time and money

Every business website development project starts with a brief. A clear brief tells the design and development team what the site needs to do, who it serves, and how it should work. Without one, projects drift. Scope creeps, deadlines slip, and the final site often misses the mark. A good brief does not need to be long, but it does need to cover the right ground.

A business website brief should define the project's purpose, its audiences, the content structure, the desired user journey, and the practical constraints like budget and timeline. When the team understands these elements from the start, they can build a website planned around business goals rather than guesswork and personal taste.

Project purpose and business goals

The first section of any brief should state why the site exists. Is it meant to generate leads, sell products directly, build credibility, or support existing customers? Many sites try to do all four and end up doing none well. The brief should name the primary goal and then list secondary goals in order of importance.

For example, a service company might want its site to convert visitors into phone calls or contact-form submissions. An ecommerce site needs to move people from browsing to checkout. A business website that supports multiple markets may need to present different content depending on the visitor's region or industry. The brief should spell out which outcomes matter most so the design and content decisions align with them.

Target audience and user profiles

A brief that describes the audience in detail helps the team make better choices about layout, language, and functionality. Instead of saying "our customers are businesses", the brief should describe who those businesses are. What size company? What industry? What role does the person visiting the site hold - owner, procurement manager, end user?

If the site serves more than one audience, each one should be described separately. A manufacturer might sell to both distributors and consumers. Those two groups have very different needs and will look for different things on the site. The brief should explain how the site should serve each group, and which group is the priority.

Value proposition and key messages

Every page on a business website should reinforce what makes the company different. The brief should capture the core value proposition in one or two sentences, then list the key messages that need to come across. This keeps the copywriting and design on track.

A common mistake is to include every product feature or service detail in the brief and expect the site to show everything equally. That approach buries the most important points. The brief should identify what sets the company apart and make sure the site gives those points prominence.

Sitemap and page hierarchy

The structural outline of the site belongs in the brief. A sitemap shows how pages relate to each other and what lives under each section. The page hierarchy matters because it affects navigation, internal linking, and how search engines understand the site.

The brief should list the main sections and the key pages within each. It does not need to name every single page; a top-level structure with the important subpages is enough. The team can fill in the rest during the design phase. But the brief should make clear which pages are essential and which are nice-to-have. That distinction affects the project scope and the budget.

User journey and conversion path

Knowing how a visitor moves through the site is just as important as knowing what pages exist. The brief should describe the typical user journey from arrival to conversion. Does the visitor land on a blog post, read a case study, and then request a quote? Or do they go straight to the product catalogue and add items to the cart?

Mapping the conversion path in the brief helps the designer place calls to action, forms, and navigation elements where they will do the most good. It also highlights any gaps. If the desired journey includes a step that has no page yet, the brief makes that clear before development starts.

Content model and content requirements

A business website lives or dies on its content. The brief should describe the content model: what types of content the site needs and how they relate to each other. For a typical business site that might include service pages, case studies, team profiles, blog articles, and testimonials. An ecommerce site adds product pages, categories, and customer reviews.

For each content type, the brief should note what fields are needed. A service page might call for a description, a list of deliverables, a pricing section, and a call to action. A product page needs images, a description, specifications, and a buy button. Defining the content model early

prevents rework later when someone realises the design cannot accommodate a key piece of content.

The brief should also state who is responsible for creating the content. Will the client provide text and images, or does the development team need to produce them? Content creation takes time and money, and the project scope should reflect that.

Project scope and constraints

A brief that leaves out practical boundaries is incomplete. The project scope section should list what is included in the project and what is not. For example, the scope might cover design, development, and launch but exclude ongoing maintenance or content updates. It should also note any third-party services the site will integrate with, such as payment processors, email marketing platforms, or customer relationship management systems.

Budget and timeline are part of the scope. The brief does not need to give exact numbers if they are still being negotiated, but it should give a realistic range. A team that knows the budget can propose a solution that fits, rather than designing something that cannot be built within the client's means. Similarly, a realistic timeline allows the team to plan the work in phases and set expectations for delivery.

Technical requirements and constraints

Some technical details belong in the brief. Does the site need to be hosted on a specific platform? Must it integrate with an existing customer database? Does it need to support multiple languages or currencies? Are there accessibility standards to meet, such as WCAG compliance?

The brief should also mention any design preferences or restrictions. If the client has brand guidelines, those should be attached or summarised. If there are colours, fonts, or layouts that are off limits, the brief should say so. The goal is to give the design team enough direction to work efficiently without boxing them in.

When the brief covers these areas thoroughly, the development team can build a website planned around business goals. The site will serve its intended purpose, meet the audience's needs, and stay within the agreed budget and timeline. That outcome is what makes the effort of writing a proper brief worthwhile.