LBD Studio
An award-winning creative practice.

How to choose a design agency

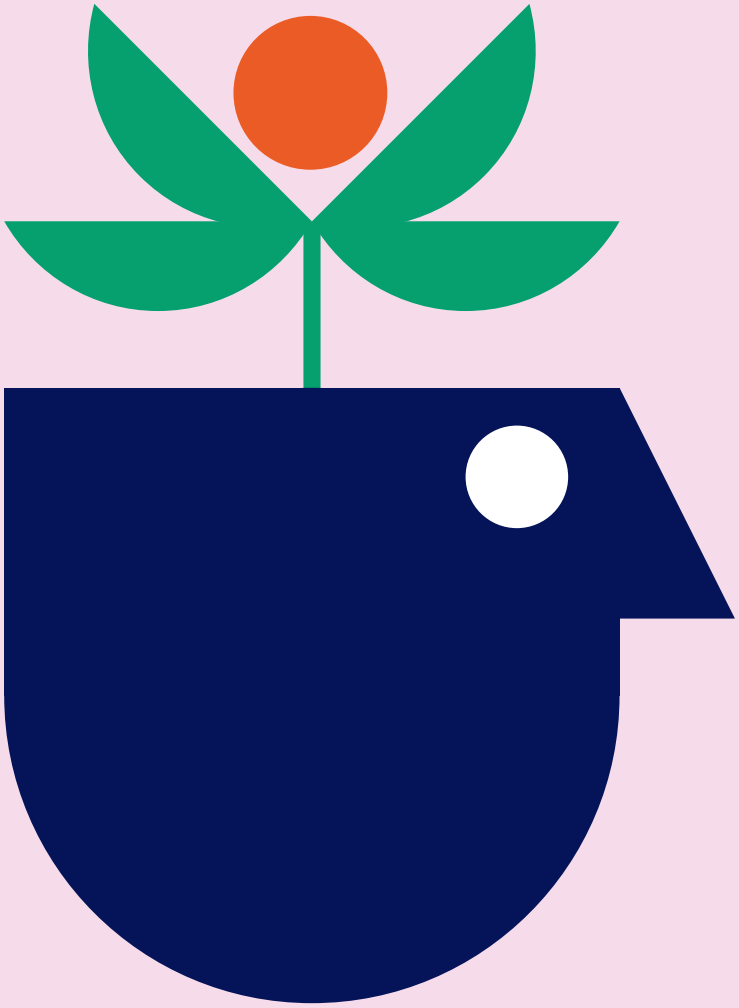
Think Tank™

002

Let’s think about this differently.

We don’t want to walk you through a generic checklist for picking a design agency. Run a quick Google search and the AI results will show you just how generic things can get.

There are essentials — expertise, experience, specialisms, high-calibre services and a solid portfolio etc — that every agency worth it salts has, and offers. But these elements aren’t distinctive enough to help you find the right team to realise the value of your brand work.



The big assumption

Many agency websites are built for clients who are shopping for a service they know they need. They have a tight brief and know what kind of deliverables they expect.

Services pages are created to be the mothership.

But there's a problem here. A significant number of studio clients say they find it difficult to understand the rationale behind multiple services and what binds them together.

That was one of the findings from the 2024 What Clients Think report by Up to the Light and the Design Business Association. The report also found that 59% of clients struggle to understand what an agency 'does best' from their website.

Here's one of the other concerns — 79% of clients say they can't pay attention to long-term brand building as much as they would like to.

'79% of clients say they can't pay attention to long-term brand building as much as they would like to.'

Source: Up to the Light & DBA

Painting the plane while still flying

Marketers are absorbing more responsibilities while teams are shrinking and skills and knowledge are diminishing. As a marketing lead, you're probably painting the plane while still flying.

- **Almost half of all marketers (46.2%) say that they turned to outside help for an element of marketing in 2024**
- **Over half (53%) of marketers working in B2B have done so**

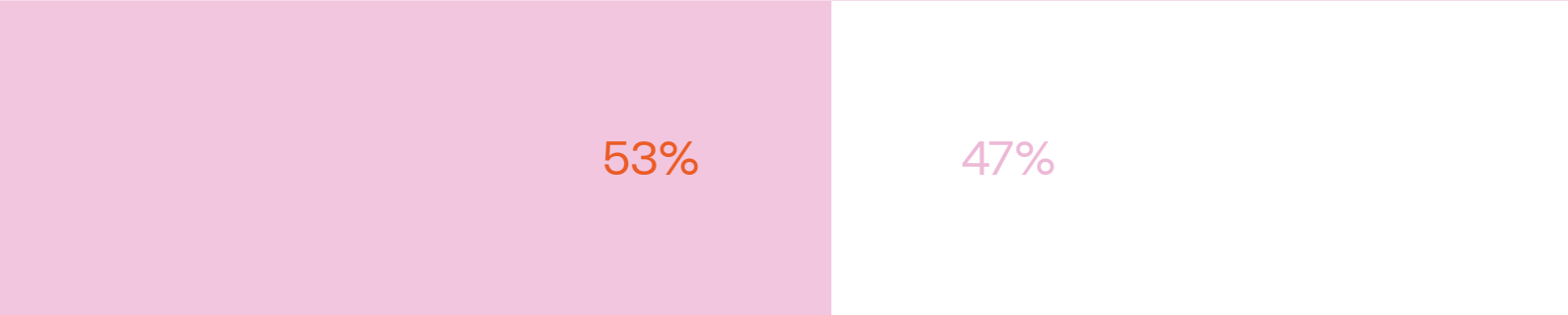
Parking work isn't an option. Having a unique, authentic, consistent brand identity — from URL to IRL — and staying relevant is what separates you from competitors. You need to bring in outside design help.

The information you find on the agency website, a clear offer, the visual and verbal identity, testimonials and work that is explained and demonstrates strong experience in your market — with strong results, thought leadership content, will give you information to narrow down the list. To find the right fit, look beyond a flashy presentation. Go deeper on how the agency's approach and perspective can be applied to your brand and think about whether you'll have chemistry with the people delivering it.

So, keep reading to learn about the 7 things we deem important.

53% of marketers working in B2B rely on external agencies.

Source: Marketing Week



1. Strategy

Creative without strategy is just pixels.

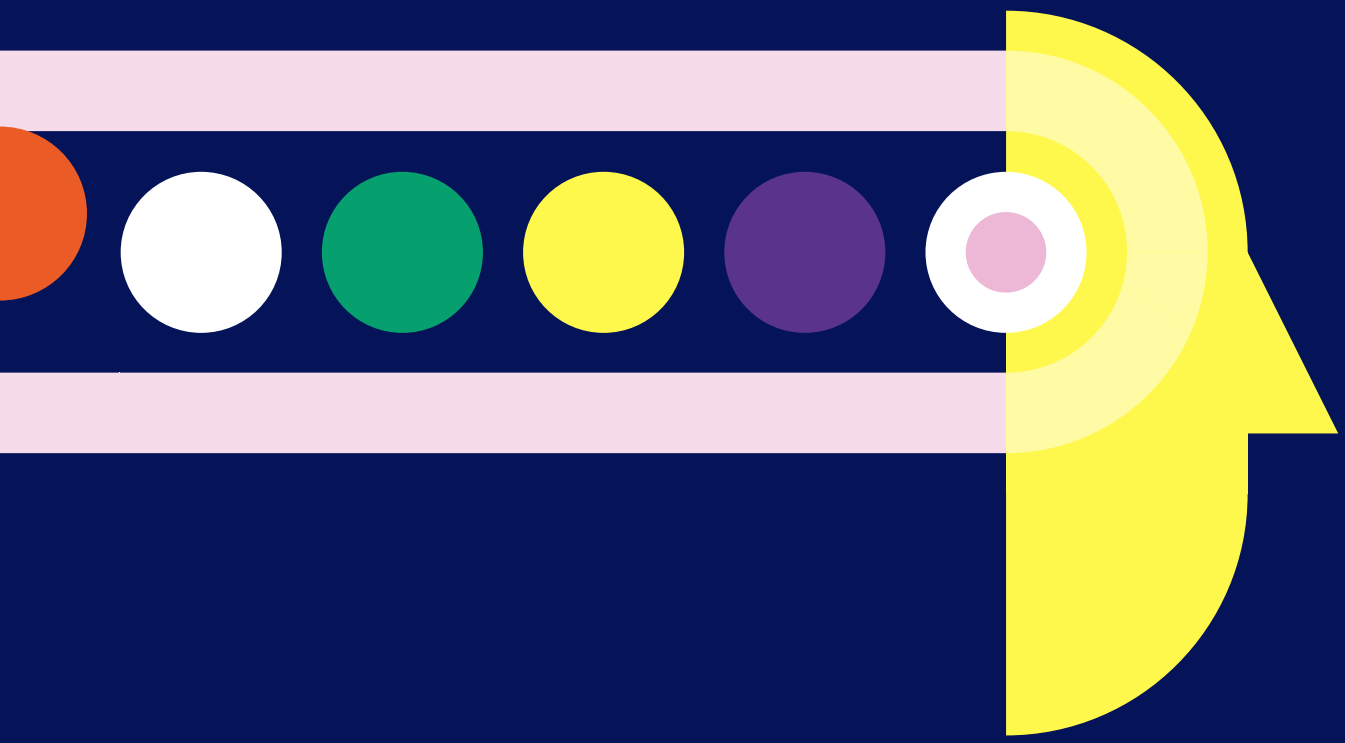
Agencies live and die by an ability to align brand strategy and creative. The best Creative Directors are also fanatical planners.

They'll use customer, business, competitor and market research to find your strongest position and make a plan to move there. They'll unearth opportunities no-one else has seen and find the dead ends.

Strategy defines what your brand stands for. These are the blueprints that inform everything from your logo and messaging to how your brand behaves, engages and wins day-to-day. Well-crafted strategies drive more than just visuals — they help you build those emotional connections that transform a company into a brand that's loved and remembered.

Five questions to think about

1. Who needs to be around the table?
2. What's the time commitment?
3. What's the research process?
4. How do we connect brand strategy and business results?
5. How will success be measured?



2. People

Standing together, shoulder to shoulder.

As mentioned earlier, you probably haven't got the bandwidth to take a step back, think strategically, breathe life into projects and then drive them forward.

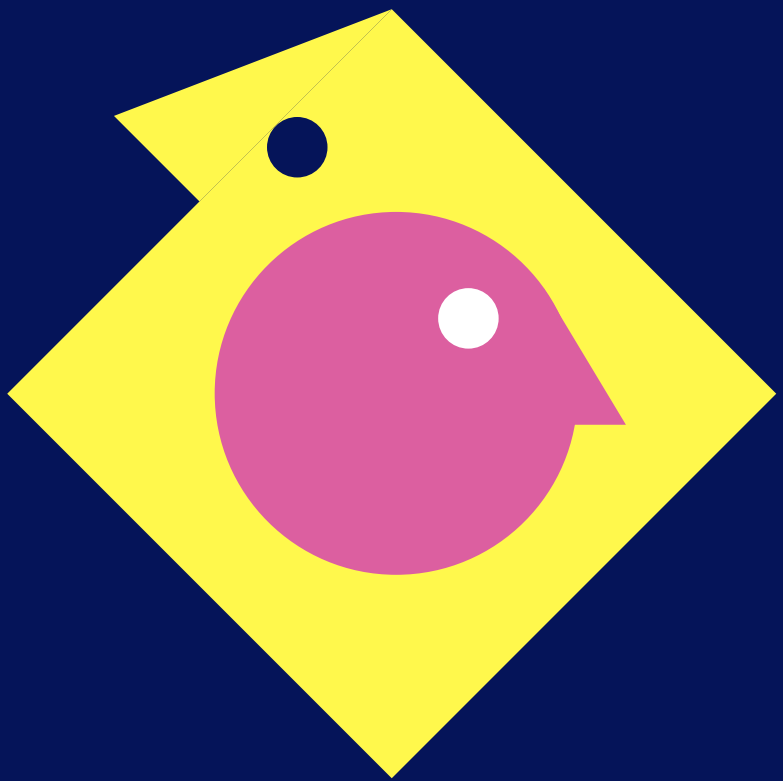
Projects can take forever because of a lack of leadership, both on the client side and agency side. Things quickly get chaotic and messy.

We make it happen. We'll find what makes you and your business tick, then work with you shoulder to shoulder until your brand is where it needs to be. We also like to believe we're good fun to work with.

We'll make a real point of understanding your business and work with you to build a brand you can be proud of.

Five questions to think about

1. Are their processes easy to follow?
2. Are their observations underpinned with research?
3. Have they been there and done it themselves?
4. Do you have chemistry?
5. Are their recommendations creatively exciting?



3. Clarity

What's the team line-up?

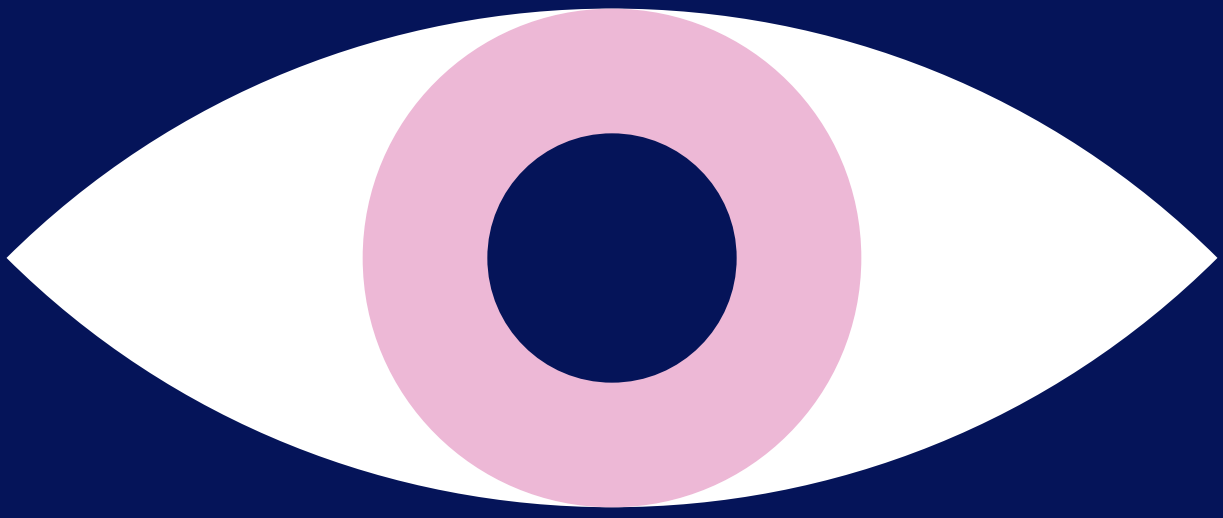
Seek clarity on who'll be working on the project to completion, how the agency handles project management and who's responsible if deadlines start to drift.

Can you trust in their ability to bring things back on schedule and within budget? Since creatives run our studio, you'll deal directly with the people producing your work. This means we can respond to opportunities quickly, getting the right people in the room to overcome your challenges and move your brand forward.

Our small team of award-winning senior creatives have decades of hard-won, 'big brand' experience. We made our names working internationally, advising clients like Adidas, BBC, Google, Sonos and UNICEF.

Five questions to think about

1. Do they understand the challenges you face?
2. Can they see the bigger picture?
3. Who's responsible for each phase of work?
4. How can we collectively meet deadlines?
5. What's the sign-off process?



4. Communication

Leaving egos at the door.

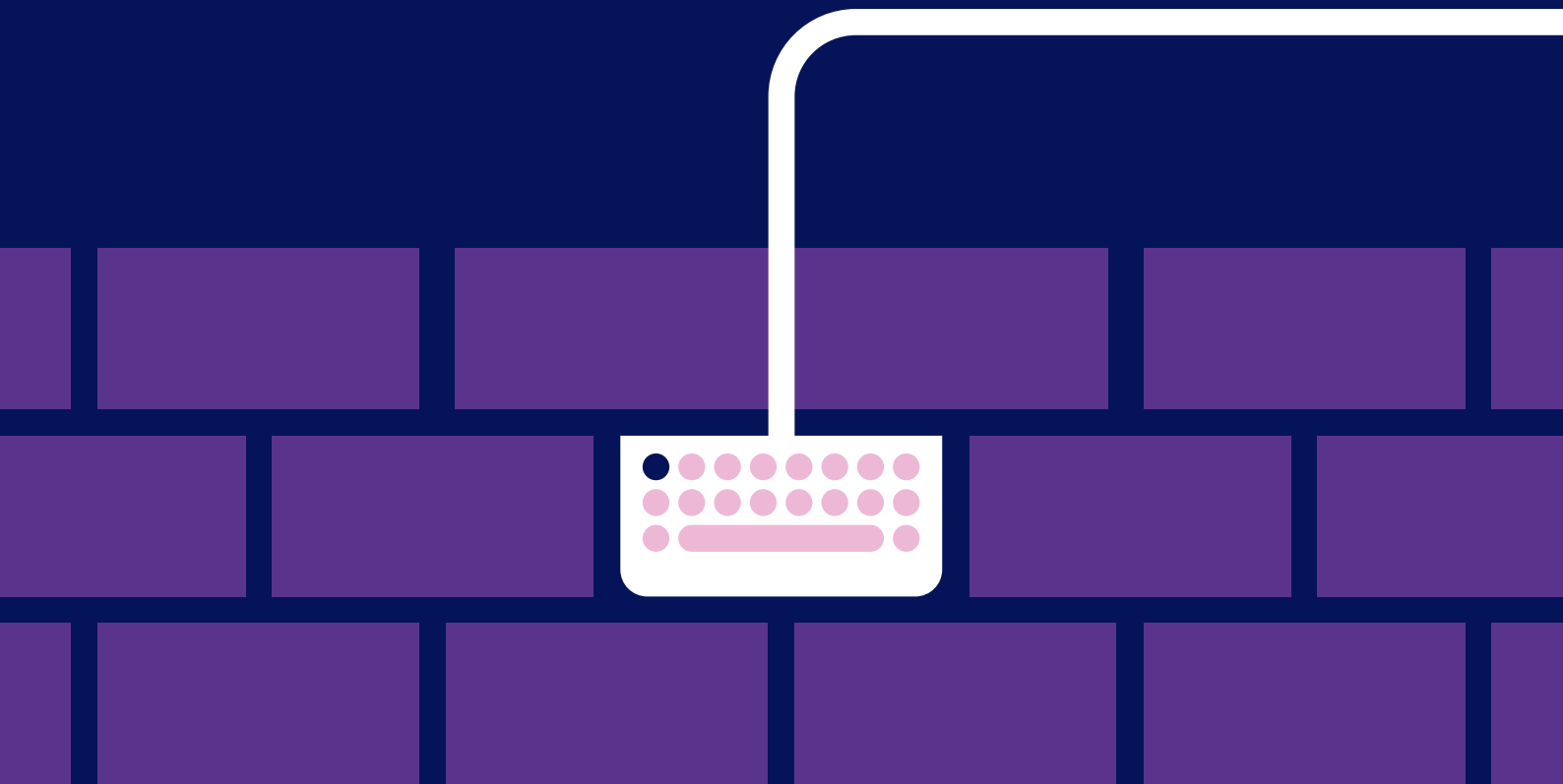
Does the agency have an open door and an easy way of communicating? Are you clear on your main point of contact? Your time is valuable.

You won't want to know every twist and turn but you need clarity on how budget and project updates will be shared for review and feedback. And no question is stupid.

We put value on transparency and a no-ego approach to feedback. Both client and agency ultimately want the same thing — a project that leaves both parties satisfied, delivered on time and budget.

Five questions to think about

1. Are the project deliverables easy to follow?
2. How should feedback be shared or challenged?
3. When and how should you check-in on progress?
4. How will you navigate changes in personnel?
5. How flexible are they?



5. Diversity and inclusion

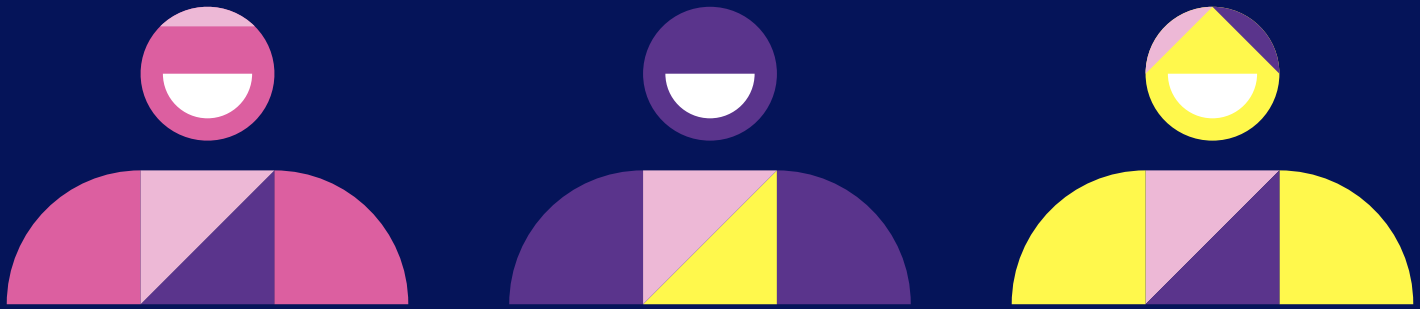
Bigger impact through diversity.

Will the team bring the diverse experiences, abilities, and viewpoints it takes to build brands that are inclusive and meaningful?

More diverse design teams create work that makes a bigger impact. Almost 7 in 10 clients say that diversity is important when choosing and working with design consultancies, according to Up in the Light / Design Business Association.

Five questions to think about

1. Does the team bring a diversity of ideas and people?
2. Will they help us take an honest snapshot of where we are?
3. Will they help us convert commitment into action?
4. Are recommendations rooted in research?
5. How do we monitor progress?



6. Noise and signal

Your ear to the ground.

Time pressures mean you've barely got time for the day job and business as usual. You'd need another whole lifetime to attend all the webinars you're invited to, attend events and listen to podcasts.

Then there's the scrolling. You constantly see stories in your feeds and inboxes about trends, market development and best practice. A good agency partner picks up the signal from the noise for you.

Big brand experience

As we discussed in a **recent guide**, the principles of creating a stand out brand that wins hearts and minds and makes customers want to stay — apply to all brands — no matter the size. You may lack the size and scale of businesses with heritage, awareness and deeper pockets that dominate your category. But there are lessons on disruptive brand building from the big brands that can be applied to your business.

Industry benchmarking

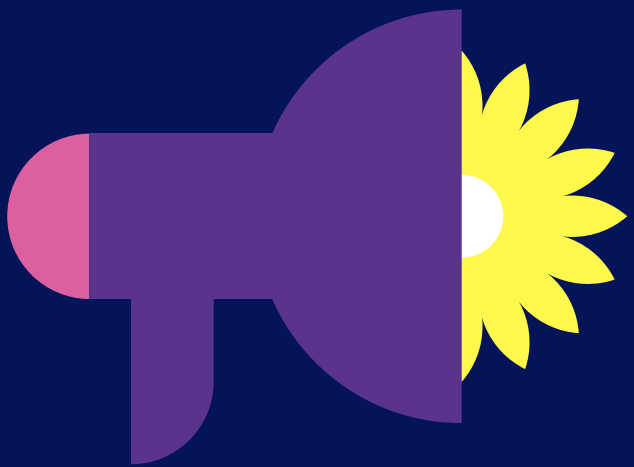
You can learn as much from other brands failures, as from their successes. We use industry benchmarking to identify who's innovating, how they are making gains and where they are connecting with their audiences. We also scout ahead to identify common traps or pitfalls and put plans in place to avoid them.

Your eyes and ears

What trends do you need to know about, and what can you forget about?

Five questions to think about

1. Will the agency team bring a fresh perspective?
2. How do we plan 12 to 18 months out?
3. How do we set new design standards?
4. How are ideas shared and tested?
5. How is risk mitigated?



7. Service offering

Patchwork design creates patchwork experiences.

Why consider a full service agency? If you build your brand through a patchwork of design agencies then the risk is your brand and client experience becomes patchwork.

Customers don't just want a shiny website or logo. They want a meaningful experience that makes their lives better. They want brand consistency whether they're on your website completing an order or standing in your store. And that's why we're full-service.

We've gone full circle here. Strategy and creative need to align, We work with you on every element of brand development — from design to videos to photography and everything in between.

We have a broad network of world-class creative talent who can (and do) help us deliver specific parts of a project. We put together an enviable team of specialists to deliver the project to completion, with full accountability. You'll find that a small agile team will be driven to do good work that solves problems at fair value.

Five questions to think about

1. Can they deliver everything we're asking of them?
2. Is their network robust enough to support our needs?
3. How are project phases divided?
4. Who has ultimate brand guardianship over the project?
5. How closely does each service align internally?

So... where do you go from here?

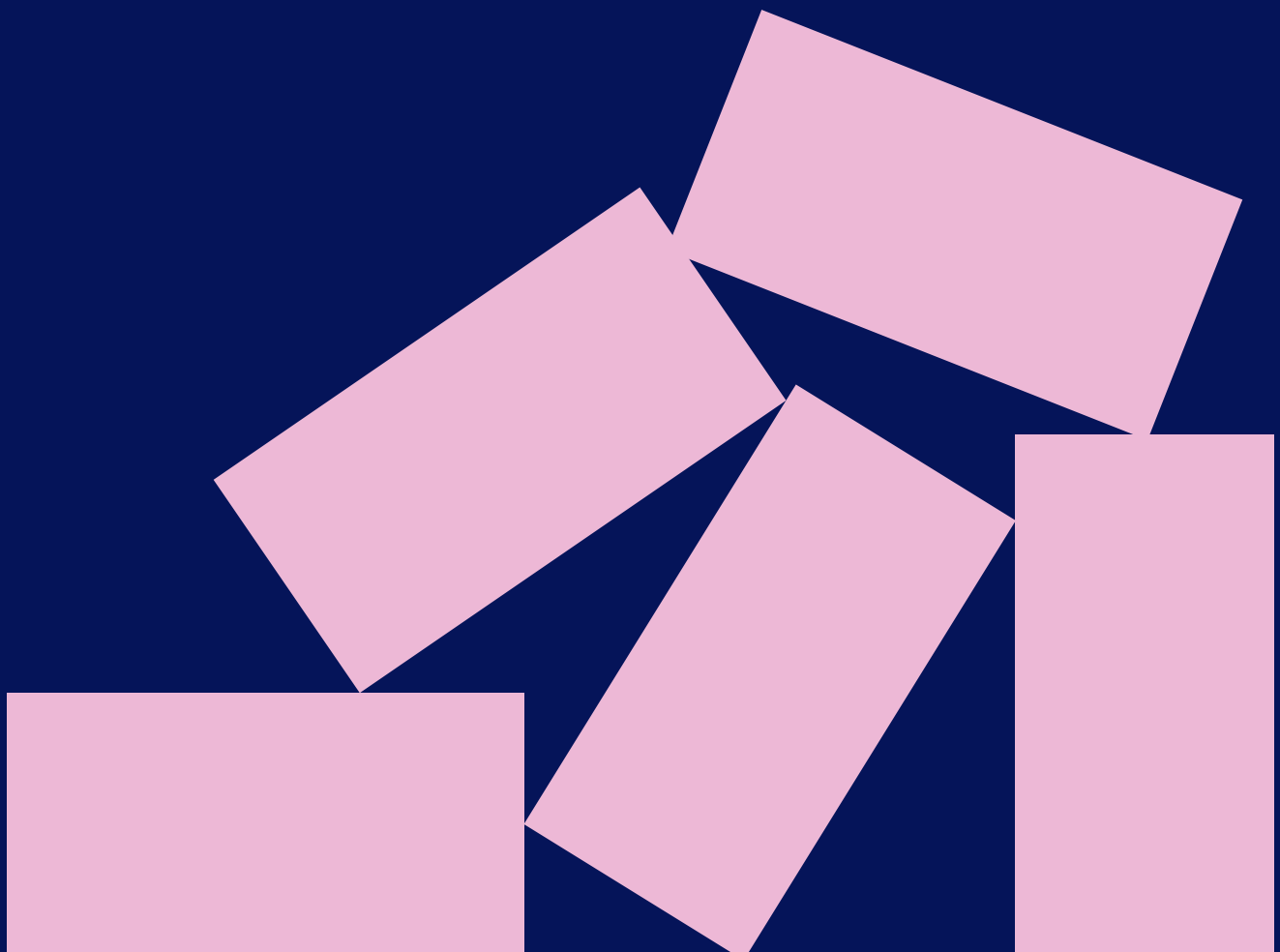
Brand building can be a painful process without proper advice and guidance. And it's very hard to find good people that really 'get it'.

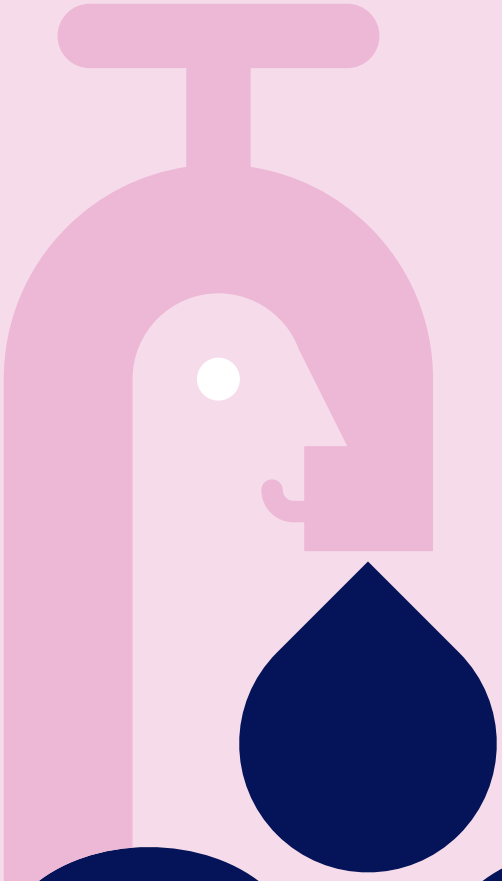
We do. We built LBD Studio to do things differently.

No cookie-cutter creative that your customers or clients barely notice. We work with marketing and comms leads to build brands and experiences that are creatively unique, strategically sound and technically robust.

We could carry on and tell you how brilliant we are. But we're on your journey. Not ours. Let's schedule some time together.

Let's get building!





LBD Studio

We are an award-winning design agency based in Edinburgh, UK. Our work connects business strategy with award-winning creative storytelling to build confidence throughout your brand.

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www.lbd.studio

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