FARMER STUDIO — RESOURCE

How to Budget for a Creative Project

What creative projects actually cost, why the numbers surprise people, and how to structure a budget that gets the outcome you're paying for.

BUSINESS STRATEGY GUIDE

How to Budget for a Creative Project

The most common source of disappointment in creative projects is not poor quality work — it's a mismatch between what a budget can realistically buy and what the client expected it to buy. This guide is designed to close that gap.

Understanding what things cost, and why, changes the conversation before a project starts. It helps you ask better questions, evaluate proposals more accurately, and make decisions about scope that reflect your actual priorities.

Why Creative Work Costs What It Does

Creative professionals sell expertise and time. Both are finite.

The time required to do something well is rarely visible from the outside. A logo that looks simple took years of skill development to execute simply — "simple" in design is typically more expensive than "complicated," not less. A website that loads quickly and converts well required architectural decisions that a cheaper alternative skipped.

The expertise component is even harder to see. An experienced brand designer has pattern-matched across hundreds of projects and knows what works for your type of business in a way that someone at the start of their career doesn't. You're paying for that accumulated judgement, not just the hours on the brief.

Typical Budget Ranges (UK, 2024)

These are approximate ranges reflecting professional quality work from established practitioners. Significantly lower prices exist; they typically reflect lower experience, offshore production, or template-based work rather than custom development.

Brand Identity

SCOPE	RANGE
Logo only (freelancer)	£500 – £1,500
Logo + basic brand guidelines	£1,500 – £4,000
Full brand identity (logo, guidelines, assets)	£4,000 – £15,000
Full brand identity (agency, established business)	£10,000 – £50,000+

What you get for more: more thorough discovery and strategy work, more design concepts, more refined execution, more comprehensive deliverables, more senior creative time.

Website Design and Development

SCOPE	RANGE
Template-based site (Squarespace/Wix)	£500 – £2,000
Custom design, CMS build (small business)	£3,000 – £8,000
Custom design and development (full)	£8,000 – £25,000
Complex platform / e-commerce	£15,000 – £100,000+

What drives cost: number of pages, custom functionality (booking, e-commerce, integrations), content migration, ongoing maintenance, accessibility requirements.

Photography

SCOPE	RANGE
Half-day brand photography session	£400 – £900
Full-day brand photography session	£800 – £1,800
Commercial product photography (per day)	£800 – £2,000

Licensing for commercial use	Varies — always ask

Video Production

SCOPE	RANGE
Short social media content (1–3 clips)	£500 – £1,500
Brand/about film (1–3 minutes)	£2,000 – £8,000
Event documentation (half day)	£800 – £2,500
Documentary or long-form production	£10,000 – £100,000+

Copywriting

SCOPE	RANGE
Website copy (5–7 pages)	£800 – £3,000
Brand messaging and tone of voice	£1,500 – £5,000
Monthly content retainer	£500 – £2,000/month

How to Allocate a Creative Budget

If you have a fixed total to spend on a brand or launch project, allocate roughly as follows:

Strategy and discovery (10–15%): Rushing this is the most common false economy. Poor strategy produces expensive creative rework.

Core creative work (50–60%): Design, development, photography, or video — whichever is central to your project.

Content (15–20%): Copy, photography, and other content is frequently underbudgeted. A beautifully designed website with placeholder copy performs poorly.

Contingency (10–15%): Something always changes. Scope creep, revision cycles, or an unexpected requirement will absorb a contingency that wasn't there.

How to Evaluate a Proposal

When you receive a quote, the number is only part of the information:

What is included in the scope? Ask specifically. "Website design and development" can mean very different things depending on who's quoting.

What is excluded? Hosting, domain, stock photography, copywriting, ongoing maintenance — are any of these assumptions?

How many revision rounds are included? One is typically not enough for brand identity work. Three is standard.

Who will actually do the work? An agency quote may imply senior team time but deliver junior execution. Ask directly.

What happens if scope changes? The answer reveals how the relationship will work when reality diverges from the brief.

The False Economy Problem

The cheapest quote is often the most expensive project.

A website built for £800 that needs to be rebuilt in 18 months because it doesn't convert, can't be updated, or breaks when the platform auto-updates has cost more in total than a £5,000 site that works for five years.

A brand identity produced for £200 from a logo marketplace looks generic because it is generic — and a business that looks generic is competing on price, which is rarely the competition it wants.

This is not an argument for spending more than you can afford. It's an argument for scoping correctly at the budget you have. A narrower scope delivered well outperforms a comprehensive scope delivered poorly every time.

When You Don't Have Enough Budget

The honest options:

Reduce scope. Not a worse version of everything — a complete, well-executed version of less. A great logo without guidelines beats a mediocre full brand identity. A five-page website built properly beats a twenty-page site built cheaply.

Phase the project. Brand identity now, website later when budget is available. Phase 1 produces something useful; Phase 2 extends it.

Reconsider the timeline. If you need six months to build the budget for the right approach, that is often better than commissioning the wrong approach immediately.

Find the right supplier for your stage. Early-stage businesses don't need agency pricing — a talented independent designer at the beginning of their career can produce excellent work at lower cost, with the trade-off of less experience and a more intensive collaboration.