

# What Happens When a Brief Has No Drawings

Most projects do not arrive with technical drawings. They arrive as conversations, references, AI renders and descriptions of a problem. This is what we do with them.

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*The clients who send us a clean CAD file and a detailed specification sheet are in the minority. Most arrive with something looser: a photograph of a competitor's display, a conversation that happened in a meeting, an AI-generated image, or a deadline and a vague description of what needs to exist by it.*

This is not a problem. It is, in fact, how some of our best projects have started. But it does require a different kind of first conversation, and it helps to understand what that conversation needs to cover.

## What "no drawings" actually looks like

A brief without drawings can take several forms. Sometimes it is genuinely early-stage thinking: a client has a concept but has not yet committed enough to the idea to produce any artwork. Sometimes a design exists in someone's head and has not been translated into anything shareable yet. Sometimes an AI tool has generated a compelling visual that a brand team wants to build, but nobody knows how.

And sometimes the brief is simply: we need something that does this, by this date, and we trust you to figure out what it should look like.

All of these are workable starting points. What they have in common is that the early conversation carries more weight than usual. The information we gather at the start determines how accurately we can quote, how confidently we can commit to a timeline, and how closely the finished piece matches what the client had in mind.

*"The brief that arrives without drawings is not an incomplete brief. It is a different kind of brief, and it requires a different kind of first question."*

## The questions that matter

When a project arrives without drawings, we start by asking about use rather than form. What does the thing need to do? Where will it live? Who will interact with it, and how? What is it standing next to, and does it need to complement or contrast with that context? What finish standard is required, and is it being photographed, filmed, or seen in person?

These questions do not require drawings to answer. They require the client to have thought carefully about the brief, which they almost always have. The drawings, when we produce them, are the output of this conversation rather than the input to it.

We also ask about constraints early, because constraints are what make the design process efficient. Budget range, timeline, whether the piece needs to be portable, whether it will be used once or repeatedly, whether it needs to comply with any venue regulations. A display unit for a Harrods pop-up has different requirements from a prop for a one-day campaign shoot. Getting this clear at the start means we are not reworking proposals halfway through a development process.

### WORKING WITH AI-GENERATED REFERENCES

A growing proportion of briefs now arrive with an AI-generated image as the primary reference. These images can communicate aesthetic direction, scale and mood with real clarity, and we treat them seriously as design inputs. What they cannot communicate is structure, material behaviour or constructability.

When we receive an AI render, our first job is to interpret what the visual intent actually requires in three dimensions. Some elements translate directly. Others need to be reengineered to exist in physical reality without losing the quality that made the image compelling in the first place. We tell clients honestly which is which, and we do not make changes to the design intent without explaining why.

### FROM THE STUDIO

If you are bringing us a brief without drawings, the most useful thing you can do before our first conversation is think about three things: what the piece needs to do, what it needs to look like, and what happens if it is not ready on time. Everything else we can work out together.

## How we develop form from a description

Once we have a clear picture of intent, we move into a development phase that typically combines sketching, CAD modelling and sometimes a quick physical mock-up before any final decisions are made. The pace and depth of this phase depends on the complexity of the project and the time available.

For simpler builds, we will often produce a CAD model directly from the brief description and send it for approval before anything is cut. For more complex or higher-stakes projects, we might produce a rough appearance model in foam or card first, so the client can check scale and proportion in the room or context where the piece will live.

This iterative approach costs more time at the front end but saves significantly more at the fabrication stage. Changes to a CAD file cost very little. Changes to a piece that is halfway through production cost considerably more, and sometimes the piece has to be rebuilt.

## What this means for your brief

If you are commissioning physical production work and you do not yet have drawings, the most useful thing you can do before picking up the phone is spend ten minutes thinking about what the piece needs to do rather than what it needs to look like. Describe the job it is performing, the environment it is working in, and the people it is working for. That information is worth more than a half-developed sketch.

We have built retail installations, museum exhibits, film props, packaging prototypes and architectural models from briefs that began with little more than a conversation. In every case, the project worked because the client had a clear sense of what success looked like, even if they could not yet draw it.

That is enough. Send us what you have, and we will take it from there.

### GET IN TOUCH

Studio Sowow works with brands, agencies, design studios, film and TV productions and museums. To discuss a project, visit [studiosowow.com/contact](https://studiosowow.com/contact) or email [hello@sowowltd.com](mailto:hello@sowowltd.com)