



Getting the Best from Your Agency

If you've read our newsletters up until this issue, you have a basic understanding of how to set your marketing budget and choose your agency. Now it's time to establish the kind of working relationship that will enable you to get the best from your agency.

For your company's marketing campaigns to be successful, a collaboration between you and your agency is essential. Here are some tips to ensure a productive working relationship.

A. Understand Agency Roles

Just as basketball team players have defined positions on the court, in a client-agency relationship the agency staff members each have a distinctive role to play. Agency roles you'll interact with may include:

The Account Coordinator – As your primary contact, the account coordinator is the liaison between you and the rest of the agency team. Usually a savvy strategist, they help frame your marketing and business goals for the creative team members to ensure your objectives are met.

The Creative Director – The creative director shapes the aesthetics and voice of your campaign. They work closely with graphic designers, copywriters, and other creative team members to co-create the words and images that interlace to produce a specific tone and message for each project.

B. Know Your Role: Product and Company Advocate

Your job as the client in the client-agency relationship can be challenging, but offers great opportunity for collaboration. Successful marketing campaigns require a high level of teamwork between individuals from two separate companies and projects are typically creative in nature, which requires team members to put their ideas out there for possible subjective criticism. These things could create tension, but when handled well, will yield exciting and rewarding results.

Because your company is paying for the work that is being done and you are responsible within your company for the bottom-line results, you might feel as if you need to hold the reins tightly to steer the creative work in the safest direction. Resist the impulse. In a world oversaturated with marketing messages, it is the unique, fresh idea that gets noticed, not the safe standby. You might be a talented hotelier, a successful entrepreneur or a seasoned marketing MBA, but how many innovative, integrated marketing campaigns have you launched? If your agency was selected properly, their expertise should be the backbone that you rely on.

To achieve maximum return on your marketing investment, your role in the successful client-agency relationship is that of product and company advocate. More than anyone else, you know your company, product, markets and customers intimately. Your main job is to select a great agency; educate your agency team members on your company, product and specific goals; and then step aside to let them do their jobs, providing support as needed.

It may be difficult at first to relinquish creative control to your handpicked specialists, but as you work together and build respect for one another you'll see the benefit of trusting the creative direction of agency staff. The resulting communications will reflect well on your company – and on you. Look to the market leaders for inspiration. For example, Hewlett-Packard may be one of the world's largest IT companies, but HP trusted an outside agency to create their highly successful "The computer is personal again" campaign featuring celebrities such as snowboarder Shaun White and singer/designer Gwen Stefani. They understood that national marketing campaigns were not an in-house core competency.

The ultimate goal shared by you and your agency team members should be winning each campaign as measured by benefits such as brand awareness, marketing objectives and increased profits for your company.

C. Take the Five Steps to Top Agency Performance

To reap the best bottom-line results from the agency you've chosen, remember these points:

1. Structure your partnership for success

- Establish clear performance objectives at the onset of your working relationship and at the start of any new project so all team members understand them and results can be measured objectively.
- Allow enough time and allocate a large enough budget for quality work to be generated. Great creative is not quick and it is not cheap. If you are in a rush or under-budgeted, quality will be sacrificed.
- Limit client-side decision makers to a maximum of three people, with one or two preferable. Nothing kills creativity faster than compromise – as the saying goes, a three-humped camel is a horse designed by committee.
- Always keep the specific roles of each team member in mind and allow each member the opportunity to excel.

2. Provide essential knowledge

- At the start of your relationship, provide your agency with an in-depth education on your industry, product, customers and company culture.
- Introduce the agency team to key people in your company (such as your general manager or your architect) whom they can access as resources to produce higher quality work for you. Provide contact information.
- Share research, product strengths and weaknesses, and other proprietary knowledge. These pieces of information allow the agency to better understand your challenges and opportunities.
- Be candid about your timeline and budget so your agency can more effectively allocate resources. Reluctance to share your budget for fear it will all be spent is understandable, but withholding such information will severely limit strategic planning.
- Bring the agency into your new projects as soon as possible for maximum effectiveness.

3. Communicate, communicate, communicate

- As with any relationship, communication is key. Honesty and trust are essential in a client-agency relationship.
- Remember to communicate your company's marketing needs, not your perceived solutions; tell them what the problem is, not how to fix it. Your agency has the expertise to reach the right audience, choose the right medium, develop the right message, convey the right look, and craft the right story.
- Communicate your priorities, worries, ideas, and expectations, and be receptive to the same from your agency partners.
- Demonstrate mutual respect by praising great ideas. If an idea does not seem right for your company or product, diplomatically explain why. If it just isn't your personal cup of tea, remember the intended audience is your customer, not you.

4. Keep the larger picture of your company's success in mind

- By focusing on the greater good – marketing success for your company – it will be easier to cultivate respect and trust. Leave emotion and ownership issues at the door. The marketing solutions belong to your company, not you. Similarly, the creatives at your agency need to design campaigns for your customers, not for industry award shows.
- People work hardest for clients and colleagues who treat others well. Be that client and you will be richly rewarded; it is human nature.

5. Evaluate progress regularly

- At the wrap of every campaign or communication, evaluate it with hard measures of success such as sales, and soft measures of success such as customer knowledge.
- Don't allow problems or disappointments to roil; address them right away. Consider these exchanges as mid-course corrections.

If you follow these suggestions, you will find success in your marketing campaigns – and even enjoy the process and the agency relationships you'll build. Good luck!

Fresh Creative is a communications and design firm that specializes in real estate development and hospitality properties. We use strategic process and experience to develop comprehensive solutions that create distinctive impressions.

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For more information about Fresh Creative and how we can help you, please contact Sam Berens: sam@visitfreshcreative.com or call 850.244.5549

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Branding Part One