

10 STEPS TO FIND THE RIGHT AD AGENCY

Whether you are considering leaving a current agency relationship or seeking one for the first time there are a few core considerations before you reach out to find your perfect partner.

1.) **KNOW THYSELF!**

Here is a series of questions that might help you get a grip on just the kind of relationship you are looking for:

Will your new agency interface with members of your in-house staff?

Collaboration with existing staff members is key to making your agency relationship work.

What is the marketing hierarchy currently inside your business? We have seen client marketing models that are lean and efficient and others who are understaffed and under resourced.

Do you already have clean and clear marketing goals and objectives set for the next 1 – 3 years?

Are you sensing a need to change your marketing culture and significantly move the needle of your marketing and advertising performance or are your needs to generally maintain the status quo?

What was the exact moment that led you to realize that a change is needed?

Can you describe in general terms what your dream agency would look like?

2.) **AVOID SPECIALIZED AGENCIES**

Some agencies find themselves extremely vertical in client mix. They have grown because their true competence lies in knowing the comforting terms and practices of a given field. Their growth has relied upon referrals inside a key industry and attaching themselves to in-house marketing personnel that transfers to other accounts inside their field. Often however their work, while comfortable for

the marketing decision makers, lacks critical understanding of the unique end consumers and struggles to develop breakthrough strategy and creative for an individual organization in the vertical category. Clients find themselves trading comfort for peak performance.

3.) REAL STRATEGIC PLANNING AND DEPLOYMENT

You deserve real strategic planning and deployment. Over the course of three decades in the industry, I can tell you that over half of the professionals in the trade can't give a competent elocution of the nature of strategy. It might appear on their pitch pieces but they don't understand it all and they certainly can't execute what they can't define. I was recently assisting a client evaluate agencies and watched as three out of the four invited agencies answered somewhere between mumbles and indignant mumbo jumbo. Will they develop a strategy with you or is your company in a place that you expect them to deploy your already agreed upon strategy?

4.) IN-HOUSE CAPABILITIES

Assess the agency's in-house capabilities. Decide before the process begins what the acceptable level of delegation to other companies is for your business. I don't care how long they have been "using this trusted source" results aren't as good over time with the chronic use of outsourcing. If the agency outsources much work it is really code for "unwilling or under resourced to do our job." Outsourcing is a great way for agencies to act big and competent while not actually being such. It does so at the cost of your messaging. It just doesn't work as well as being integrated into a team.

5.) TO RFP OR NOT TO RFP.

There are few agencies who don't gnash their teeth when an RFP comes over the bow. Sure, they act excited and sure they will respond in kind. They might even try some creative approach to stand out from the din. But every agency responds with half a heart because the vast majority of RFPs ask the wrong questions and are examined in the cold environment of a desk upon a medium that will seldom be used for your marketing. Don't fall for the RFP approach because it seems fair and reasonable. If you must use an RFP do so in order to understand the why and the way the company approaches their job.

Driving into the why can help reveal the culture inside the agency. Remember they will become part of your culture...do you want to bring their culture into yours? Note that their culture shouldn't necessarily match yours but it must be a positive contributor to yours.

6.) MONEY MATTERS TO A DEGREE.

In today's competitive market pricing for quality work is generally inside a close range. Those under this range most often should be eliminated. Bargain shops are seldom a real bargain. Cost shouldn't be a driver. Agencies will find a way to service you at a profit and that often results in slower response times and less talented teams being assigned your work. Ask them instead how your current systems can effectively operate more efficiently. Remember you have a fresh set of eyes viewing not only your company but your processes. In the early stage they are trying to understand just how honest you want them to be with you. Inviting them to improve your processes early on is an invitation toward honesty and openness.

7.) THE DIRTY SECRET

The dirty secret of agency work is that they can keep you longer and profit more from you if they simply give you what you want. Decide early on if you want an agency to make your company better based on what they know or someone to administer your ideas. Without a doubt the very best business changing ideas ever created have never seen the light of day. They were developed correctly and prepared effectively through research and strategic process only to be killed by the client who said, "I just don't like it." This is typically followed by a second approach weeks later that makes the client happy, results in a celebration dinner for all and the next morning the agency understands that it is a client who pays the bills and doesn't understand what sound strategy and creative is all about. It is a lesson that they only need to be taught once. You will now receive work that resonates with you, but not with your target audience. A few years down the road you will be looking for another agency that can help you drive the numbers more effectively, when all the while you had the right team all the time, you simply didn't let them do their job the way they knew it should be done.

8.) LOOK OUT FOR THE THOUSAND DAY CYCLE.

The average length of agency relationship is right around three years. More important than just about any other indication of a healthy agency is the length of time their current clients have been with them. As important is understanding why past clients are no longer on the roster. There are good reasons why agency relationships change. Buyouts, personal relationships that fray, stale ideas (which are most the result of poor processes), agencies that haven't continue to grow and track emerging media are all a normal part the churn of agency and clients. However, agencies that continue to provide quality campaigns have an extensive range of clients that they have served for a decade or two or more.

9.) THE CREATIVE SHOOTOUT

Don't even think of having agencies compete for your business through a creative shootout. That's an idea best left for television and movie plots. It not only seldom happens but it is extremely poor process. One cutter variable might be (with just a bit of tongue in cheek) to put out a call for a creative shootout and eliminate any agency that accepts the challenge. Your assessment should not measure one good idea but rather how they approach, create and deliver those ideas. The idea of a shootout will attract the desperate and eliminate the thoughtful.

10.) DIGITAL MARKETING SAVVY

Look for digital marketing savvy while valuing messaging and excellence across all media. As much as the headlines and pitch-makers may indicate otherwise, we are in a digital transition, absorbing digital marketing into the spectrum of marketing messaging. We are not in a place of digital solitude. Digital only approaches and the agencies that cater to such are limiting the tools your messages may need for proper deployment. At the same time agencies without a robust digital team lack a complete approach as well. There are plenty of both such agencies out there vying for your business. Look instead for a complete approach without limits.