



# WHY HIRE A MARKETING AGENCY?

Chances are you have seen a one-man band at a street fair or circus. It's fascinating to watch these musicians who play numerous instruments simultaneously using their hands, feet, limbs, and various mechanical devices—it also seems impossible. Yet, many business owners and/or marketing managers tell us that when it comes to marketing efforts, they often feel like one of these performers, trying to master many tasks at the same time, but without the same finesse! You might be blowing on the harmonica, playing the accordion, and keeping beat with the drum attached to your leg, but are you really making beautiful music? The problem is that your job *should* be conducting the orchestra, making sure all the players know their parts and are working together harmoniously. If that's not happening, it might be time to consider the help of an outside agency.

## Do I Really Need Help?

It can be hard for many entrepreneurs and type-A managers to admit that they need some assistance when it comes to marketing. But hey, if your background is in engineering, manufacturing processes, or, say, finance, then marketing is not



your expertise. It may not even be your "thing." This lack of know-how and interest can certainly have a negative effect on your marketing efforts. Meanwhile, an agency not only has the necessary skills, but we actually get excited about things such as click-to-conversion rates, SEO, and content marketing! So, why not let us put that passion to work for your business?

Even if you're a marketing guru, you may not have the staff you need to properly execute a marketing plan. In past articles, we've discussed the importance of having an overall marketing strategy, but having a strategy and putting (and keeping) it in motion are two different things. Trust us, we understand that even the best

intentions can get put on the back burner while you handle the day-to-day crises that demand your attention. Stop to ask yourself these questions: Are we missing key elements of our marketing plan because we don't have the time or staff? Are we focusing on one or two marketing tasks at the expense of other important parts of the overall plan? Are we trying to do it all and getting average results, instead of putting priority on what really works for us and getting excellent results? An agency's job is to focus on your marketing plan; it's our top priority, not an afterthought.

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## Signs That It's Time to Hire a Marketing Agency

**Sales are stagnant.** Sure, sluggish sales can be the result of many things, including the market, your sales team, prices, and competition. But, oftentimes the culprit is lackluster marketing. Think about it: customers will not knock on your door if they don't know who you are, what you are selling, why your product or service is a benefit to them, or how you are different from your competitors. Great marketing effectively answers those questions. If your salespeople are complaining there are no good leads, that's a sure sign that marketing needs work.

**The plan is not being executed.** Marketing requires a solid strategy, along with the time, energy, and staff to get it done. You may not have the budget for a dedicated marketing team or the required expertise, but an agency is a cost-effective solution.

**Your marketing results are hit or miss.** If you're not sure what is working and what is not (e.g., what is driving an increase or decrease in traffic to your website?), or you're having difficulty tracking ROI, an outside agency can help.

Source: "8 Telltale Signs It's Time to Hire a Marketing Agency," by Alisa Meredith, HubSpot Blog, April 24, 2014.



## The Benefits of Hiring an Agency

One of the biggest obstacles to hiring an agency is the assumption that it will be too expensive. On the contrary, when compared to the total costs of hiring and training the necessary staff—plus the often steep learning curves involved—hiring an agency can be much more cost effective. In fact, hiring an agency offers a number of value propositions, including:

- **Time Savings:** Agencies can generally execute marketing activities quicker and with greater efficiency than businesses can complete in-house. The reason is simple: these tasks are at the core of what we do all day, every day, while they tend to be at the peripheral of focus for most businesses.
- **Cost Savings:** This may seem counterintuitive, but hiring an agency can actually reduce costs due to the above-mentioned efficiencies. Also, if you don't have the budget to hire a team, agency fees are considerably less than increasing staff and providing ongoing training on new technology. In addition, an agency provides the ability to track marketing expenses and budget more effectively, due to the fact that you receive billable hours for each activity. This can be difficult to do with in-house staff.
- **Expertise:** The expertise offered by a team of marketing professionals at an agency can be exponentially greater than that of a small in-house marketing staff. Agencies provide cross-functional marketing skills and industry-leading creative and strategic perspectives—something most in-house marketing teams cannot deliver, especially for small to midsize marketers. You get more specialists for less cost!
- **Resources and Technologies:** As we've discussed in previous articles, marketing has changed dramatically over the years and continues to evolve rapidly. Let's face it, trying to keep up with these changes is a lot like herding cats! Agencies generally try to stay at the forefront of current marketing trends and technologies, which means that you can also stay current (no cats involved). Perhaps the most important benefit in this area involves analytics. Agencies specialize in demonstrating ROI to clients, so they know the best ways to monitor and assess the results of their efforts. We're talking about measuring website traffic analytics, SEO value, social media effectiveness, client conversions through KPIs, overall market share and brand effectiveness, among other important elements. With an agency, you not only get access to the latest technology, but the means to prove what works and what doesn't.



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- **Vendor Maintenance and Economies of Scale:** Agencies offer value to clients through relationships with vendors. Because we have preexisting relationships, we don't have to hunt down vendors for specific projects. Agencies have a list of resources and know whom to call, which saves time. In addition, we typically get better pricing because we send a larger volume of work through these vendors. Agencies also understand the lingo and material options. For instance, what paper stock would you select to make your catalog say "luxury" to your clients? All those pesky details, such as proofing and production processes (e.g., how to prep your files to ensure that your final product prints as it should or that the banner for your next trade show does not become a pixelated mess), are ours to manage.
- **A New Perspective:** In our opinion, this can be the most important, but also the most intangible, benefit of hiring an agency. The phrase "you can't see the forest for the trees" is really true. Your emotional connection to your company and your brand can distort the lens through which you see your marketing efforts. Bringing in a third-party opinion—one that is also invested in helping you succeed—can help shine a light on issues and uncover opportunities for improvement. Some of these opinions could be painful to hear (as our CEO always says, "It's like telling people that their baby is ugly), and your employees may not have the courage to offer them up. Of course, if you don't already have a strategy in place, hiring an agency is a perfect place to start!



## Do You Have a Digital Marketing Expert on Staff?

According to a 2014 report by Advertising Age, digital advertising/marketing accounted for 35.3% of U.S. agency revenue, up 13.8% from the previous year, and is expected to continue to increase. While agencies specialize in this rapidly growing and evolving area of expertise, most companies do not have in-house staff dedicated to digital marketing efforts.

## How to Choose An Agency

Now that you understand the benefits of working with a marketing agency, how do you go about choosing one? Before starting your search, you need to ask yourself a few important questions. First, "How willing am I to listen and try new things?" This is important because an agency can only be effective if the client is willing to be open-minded, listen to ideas and suggestions, and is prepared to try fresh concepts (within reason, of course). If you're not, working with an agency may be counterproductive. Second, "What is my communication style?" Do you like to meet often, face-to-face, or mostly through email? Do you like to come to meetings with ideas or let the agency take the lead? Will you be in charge of providing information and approvals, or will there be a staff member to do that? It's important to make sure you let an agency know how you prefer to communicate, because two-way communication is critical for a successful partnership. Third, "What are my expectations (i.e., How much education do I want from an agency? What are my short- and long-term goals? etc.) And finally, what is my budget? Once you have a clear idea about these key issues, you can begin looking for a marketing partner. Some aspects to consider include:

- **Reputation:** Take a look at the agency's reputation, especially within your industry or the marketing medium with which you are most concerned. For instance, does this agency work mostly with B2B companies within the manufacturing sector? Have they had success with automated marketing (if this is an area with which you need particular help)? Read client testimonials or rely on word of mouth. (Note: If an agency is relatively new, this doesn't mean it shouldn't be considered. They may not have had time to earn a good reputation, but you can still get a feel for their professionalism, enthusiasm, and dedication by reading content on their website, perusing their client list, and, of course, meeting with them in person.)



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- **Processes:** You can tell a lot about a company, including a marketing agency, by looking at their business processes or systems. In other words, how do they accomplish their goals? Do they have a clear system for branding or SEO? Are their processes efficient, consistent, and aimed at providing value for their clients?
- **Personality:** More than anything, a client/agency relationship is just that, a relationship. Your personalities should mesh. Do they “get” you and what you are trying to accomplish? Did you learn something new about your company or brand from their “pitch”? Is their focus on the needs of your customers?

When working with a marketing agency, it's important to remember that success is a collaborative process. It involves constant two-way communication, compromise, and buy-in from all departments. To ensure that deadlines are met and communication is efficient, it's best to assign a dedicated staffer to work directly with the agency. Also, don't be afraid of change; good marketing plans often morph over time to take advantage of new opportunities and head off competitive challenges. When you find that perfect marketing partnership, you can quit your tiresome job as a one-man (or woman) band and take your rightful position as maestro, leading your orchestra in a marketing symphony—and taking your business to whole new levels of success.



## Sources:

The Marketing Experts at Spry Ideas

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“10 Reasons to Hire An Agency,” by Nadar Ashway, Marketingthingy.com, 2015.

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