

MOBILIZING EXTERNAL SUPPORT

Benefit from the skills and expertise of knowledgeable outsiders. These can be advertising agencies, graphic design studios, communication firms or consultants. Use the ideas in this section to help you find the right agency and get the very best from them.

Find the right agency

The Right Agency

- Check the web
- Ask people from the agency scene
- Ask colleagues and managers
- Consult your external network
- Ask agencies for references
- Check the references
- Invite selected agencies to a pitch

The example gives you some tips for identifying the appropriate agency or consultant.

Always seek personal recommendations. Beware of agencies with too few clients as well as those with too many. Keep in mind that you are basically buying the expertise of one or two individuals. Inquire about their hands-on experience with similar projects. The high prestige of any agency is of no value to you on its own.

Make sure that the agency is strong both in the creative and project management aspects. Some agencies bubble over with creative ideas, but cannot deliver on time, to specification or within budget. Others manage the nuts and bolts, but lack imagination and original ideas. You need to establish whether your agency has good track records on both the creative and the practical aspects. Ask for specific examples.

Prepare your people for the pitch

The Agency Pitch



Select agencies carefully

Send identical briefings

Coordinate schedules of various decision makers and agencies

Lock-in commitment for the event

To find the appropriate agency, select several competing agencies, brief them and invite them to present a sales pitch. During their presentations, all agencies will claim to be the very best. They will claim to have special expertise in the field. They will promise that their top people will work on the project and will be responsive to your comments.

Remember that the agency's presentation should be only a small part of your decision-making process. I have known cases where a presenter from the agency gave an excellent presentation,

but never showed up again during the subsequent project.

When you plan the pitch, lock in a commitment from all stakeholders to attend. Out-of-town people should arrive the evening prior to the event to avoid the painful fiasco of one brand team leader who missed the pitch she had organized due to cancelled flights. Top people from management and from four agencies showed up. She was the only person missing – not a good career move.

Identify an expert guide

A Knowledgeable Guide



Wise Counsellor

An external advisor can offer you independent personal guidance and support

Experts need expert advice

Find an external mentor who can give you independent advice on how to manage the project (and also your career). He or she can add a new dimension and suggest creative ideas that neither you nor your agency may have thought of. An experienced outside consultant or a retired colleague or boss can assume this role – and help you to focus on your professional well-being, too.

Some advertising agencies have only one solution to fit all your problems: More advertising. In many cases this is neither appropriate nor financially feasible. An independent expert can add a fresh perspective and help you find the activities that promise a better return on your time and money spent.

Remember: even experts need expert advice.

Get the most from your agency

Working with the Agency

START

Divide into subprojects

Update your briefing

Ask for drafts

Locate the creative people and get them into your team right from the start

Once you decide which agency you want to work with, sign a contract that allows you to terminate the agreement easily. Split the project into several smaller subprojects and pay them on the basis of each completed subproject. You can then commission the subsequent subproject once you are happy with the previous one.

Update your briefing. State again what messages to convey (brand promise), how to express them, the branding guidelines to observe, and so on. Do not assume anything. Ask the agency to

explain their understanding of what you have told them ('re-briefing'). Listen carefully. You may be surprised. Continue your discussion until you feel that they have a precise understanding of what you want.

Stay in contact with the agency and ask for concepts and preliminary versions of the campaign to see if the agency is on the right path.

Identify the creative people who actually do the work (some agencies hide them) and invite them to a few team meetings, right from the start of the project.

Make your objectives clear

Clarifying the Objectives

Do excellent advertising for an excellent product

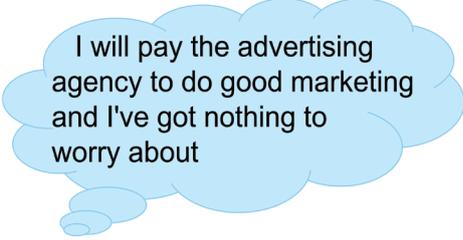
You are **not** in fine art, but here to help me generate sales

Make your objectives very clear. Their job is to do excellent advertising for an excellent product. However, they will add value only if they help you generate sales. Their work needs to increase the revenue of your product.

If the agency can do it with tasteful graphics, elaborate design or award-winning creative art work, that's fine. If a simple, straightforward, no-nonsense approach is more likely to increase revenue for your product, then use the latter.

Beware the 'full service offer'

The Full Service Illusion



I will pay the advertising agency to do good marketing and I've got nothing to worry about

Marketer's Dream

Some agencies will tell you that they can handle the entire project for you. They assign an account manager to act as liaison between you and the various units of the agency. Rather than coordinating the efforts of a writer, artist, photographer, and other specialists yourself, the account manager will do it all for you. The first drawback of this approach is budgetary. You are paying someone else just to manage the project. The second is that lines of communication quickly become complex. Your instructions to the account manager are sometimes

miscommunicated to the specialists within the agency.

A second option is to work directly with freelance professionals who handle specific sub-projects for you. Some very creative people do not fit in well at larger agencies. When you work with these independent agents, you gain control and save money, but you will spend more time managing the project yourself.

No matter which option you choose, be aware that you cannot buy good marketing. You can buy individual services or advice, but ultimately you have to assemble the overall marketing puzzle yourself. That is a process you cannot outsource.