

Be an Informed Client

To get your money's worth from your advertising/marketing/PR firm, it's important that you understand the following.

Advertising Involves More Than Just Graphics

We acknowledge that graphics the most visible part of your advertising, but marketing as a discipline involves much, much more: research, strategizing, budget planning, media buying & placement, campaign creation, sales analysis, public relations and all the related products. So, don't call a full-service ad agency or marketing firm if all you want is a logo; call a graphic artist. But keep in mind that most graphic artists aren't versed in other disciplines under the marketing umbrella, such as media negotiation.

It Starts With Research

What are your business goals? Your target demographics? Your competitive landscape? Empower yourself and your agency by knowing these things. If you don't know, they can help you.

...and It Starts with a Budget

Regardless of the amount, it's important that you set aside a monthly budget earmarked for marketing your business. All successful planning and decision-making depends on your agency knowing how much they have to work with on your behalf to buy media and produce creative products. They know how best to spend your available funds (whatever that amount may be), and they won't permit you to make bad decisions that can cost you.

Of course, the healthier your marketing/PR/advertising budget is, the more effective your marketing will be... but, again, *only if you spend advertising dollars wisely*. Because agencies work with media vendors and media figures all day, *everyday*, they can best direct you. Their professional knowledge of the market is well worth their retainer or service charge.

Choose An Agency With Care

An informed client is one who knows how to approach a potential agency with the right questions. Who are the agency's clients? What are the principals' professional backgrounds? What services are offered? Is this mainly a graphic shop? A web developer? A media broker? A PR firm? A multi-media shop? A sales consulting firm? Find out basic information in advance from the agency's website before you meet for the first time. Determine if your personalities mesh, peruse the agency's portfolio, and be attentive during their presentation. Once you are satisfied that you are in the right place with the right people, allow them to do their job.

Don't Assume "Out-of-Town" Means Better

An insecure client may automatically think anyone set up for business in his own market couldn't be all that savvy, so he takes his business out-of-town, usually to some metropolitan area where they charge more (a lot more!), often for products and services that are inferior. Because everyone knows that if you pay *more* for something, it must be worth more. Right? Wrong. So, so wrong.

Don't Try to Do the Agency's Job

You chose an agency based on your interview with its principals, its history of success, its client or vendor references, its reputation in the marketplace, its creative portfolio, and other factors. If you are satisfied they know what they're doing, let them do the job you are paying them to do. A good agency will treat you as a partner when it comes to making design or other marketing decisions, but they won't let you dictate a bad decision. It's a reflection on them, too. A product whose impact is watered down by too much client input is not something to be proud of.

Differentiate Your Business

In the initial meeting, clients often say they want "cutting edge" differentiation, but often when it comes down to it, you opt for the standard graphic look and communications that characterize every other business in your industry. Keep in mind that you're not trying to meet the standard with your advertising messages...you are trying to raise it. Suspend your innate fears of being "different," and let the agency professionals guide you.

Last Minute Requests Are Usually Expensive

When you ask an agency to "stop, drop, and roll" to get a project out, most likely it will cost you more, because planning and balancing the workload is important. Disrupting that line-up is a decision most departments don't take lightly because it may mean putting more employees on the job working after-hours to get the work out.

Here's what most agencies will tell you if you press them on a project:

"Choose only two points of service below, because no one entity can truthfully deliver all three":

Circle two:

- You want the highest quality
- You want it immediately
- You want it at the cheapest price

