

What Your Agency Wants You To Know

They don't work on "spec."

Choose your creative agency based on its recommendations, their track record of success, an interview with you (do you *like* these people?), their print portfolio, creative samples and other products. There is very little chance that they will do a creative project for you in the hopes that you'll like it and buy it. And they don't ever want to be in the position of having to compete with other agencies to see who comes up with the coolest idea for you. It just doesn't work that way. Undertaking any project takes time and money. If you're willing to pay for speculative work, that's another matter.

Don't employ an ad agency, a PR firm, or a marketing group if all you want is a logo or an ad layout.

Certainly creative graphics are important to a business's visual image, but that's just one small component of your comprehensive marketing plan. Why pay agency prices for logo or layout work when there are many excellent graphic designers eager to take on your project? By the same token, a graphic designer can't be expected to undertake marketing tasks like PR and media planning that don't fall within his/her expertise.

Don't micromanage your agency.

It's a matter of trust. If the ad agency you have hired is one you've carefully chosen based on a comprehensive interview, the quality of its creative portfolio, strong client and vendor references, and other criteria you have set, it's important that you allow them to do the job they are apparently qualified to do. Micromanaging and second-guessing your agency will most assuredly result in a diluted product – a product whose look your agency will appear to be wholly responsible for.

Take your agency's advice.

Why pay an agency and then do your own thing? Keep in mind that an agency does what they do nearly every single day. In the best cases, it begins with a carefully-honed plan. Occasionally, they are surprised to open the daily paper and see a client's ad that's a wincingly-bad patchwork of art pieces from previous ads they've developed for you – an ad that was not even in the original plan.

Don't take advantage.

You wouldn't print a photo taken by a professional without crediting the photographer, and you shouldn't do this with your advertising products, either. As a matter of fact, unless you have purchased or negotiated rights for usage, it's illegal. This applies to both creative print and broadcast products. One reason for this is that if an agency cannot control the quality of how the advertising product they've originally created looks or sounds, it's a reflection on the agency's quality.

Be responsive.

An agency can't work for you effectively if they can't reach you, at least sometimes. Most agencies view their role as an essential part of your corporate team; they want to be pro-active on your behalf and save you time, and therefore, money. But, they can't create for you in a void. They need your input and your vision. Your go-ahead. Your final approval. And because much of what they do on your behalf is deadline-sensitive, it's paramount that you respond promptly.

Be decisive.

"I'm not sure what I want...but I'll know it when I see it," says the client who doesn't realize that without a general starting point in terms of tone or image, their agency will have no idea how to begin creating for them. And the best way to waste precious advertising dollars is to send your agency out on a "prospecting trip" of creation that results in endless layouts or other products in the hopes that you'll like one of them. And don't expect perfection on the first draft when you have failed to communicate any idea of what you may want.

Don't ask your agency to "Stop, drop & roll."

An agency's creative work is carefully scheduled, with numerous deadlines taken into account. When you ask your agency to stop working on other clients' projects because you've allowed a deadline to slip up on you, it usually means overtime for everyone involved. And that may cost you...sometimes double the standard price.

Don't assume you have to go out-of-town.

This is the #1 gripe of local agencies. Taking your advertising dollars out-of-market is an insult to the entire community. If you assume that going to a bigger market (and paying a whole lot more) for talent and marketing expertise is the smart thing to do, shame on you! I'll let you in on a little secret: sometimes the "big city" agencies call on us who know this market best.