

## How to Hire a Great Marketing Consultant

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**W**ith so many to choose from, the process of hiring the right Marketing Consultant for your company can be daunting. Don't get overwhelmed. Here are eleven great questions to ask yourself that will help you select the marketing consultant that's just right for you.

### **1. How well does he or she write?**

Writing is the single greatest talent any good marketer must possess. At Metronome Marketing we call it "finding the voice." A good marketer must be able to apply multiple styles of writing to multiple types of pieces, equally well. Something as simple as a letter, for example, must sound completely different if it's a direct mail piece, a client communication or a thank you note. Ask to see a variety of writing samples. Do they all sound the same, or do different styles come through? No matter how complex the subject matter, the messages should be easily understood. Can he or she get the point across in a short concise way, or does the copy seem to go on forever? Chances are if a marketer can demonstrate competence in a wide variety of writing styles, he or she will be able to find the right voice to suit your needs.

### **2. Does he or she offer full-service capabilities, and is there an integrated approach?**

A full-service marketer integrates a variety of components into the marketing mix. A common misconception is "I don't need marketing, I just need an ad" In the marketing world there is no such thing as just an ad or just a brochure. To explain why, let's use print advertising as an example. You may need just one stand-alone ad. What are the elements of a good ad? First, it should have a style that is consistent with your corporate identity. It also must reflect your brand. Is this ad part of a promotional campaign? If so there may be other brochures, materials or media with which it must be consistent. After that we have to decide, what is the purpose of the ad? Is it to build awareness or illicit a response? If it's a response-driven ad, what is the call-to-action? Does it drive people to your Web site, generate phone calls or contain a coupon? No matter what the call-to-action is, you need to put systems in place to support it. That may require phone scripts, call centers, Web-design, or point-of-sale displays. When you start to think about the whole marketing mix, there is really no such thing as a stand alone ad. We could go through

the same type analysis for a brochure. Marketing overlaps many different disciplines. Does your marketer provide all of these services? If not, how will you manage them?

A good marketing consultant can work in many different environments including, advertising, PR, Web development, graphic design, print media, broadcast media, event marketing, direct mail, telemarketing and market research. He or she can design a plan that combines many of these efficiently and effectively to suit your budget and your objectives. Beware of specialty marketers who only handle direct mail, or e-commerce, for example. Unless you carefully manage their activities to incorporate their program into the rest of your marketing mix you will end up with a hodge-podge of one-offs that don't support each other or make any sense when looked at as a whole. This can waste valuable resources.

### **3. Is your marketer an industry specialist or a generalist?**

Some clients prefer to hire a marketer who specializes in their specific industry. This is fine if you want the same approach as everyone else in your industry. If you are looking for a new approach or to associate yourself with new contacts consider a generalist. To some extent marketing is like medicine. Get a specialist if you have a specific need, but get a generalist if you want good overall care. Although helpful, a good marketer does not need to have experience in your specific industry to be effective.

### **4. What contacts does he or she have?**

It is very important to find out who your marketer knows. In which organizations is he or she involved? What other clients does she have? Will your association with this individual or company give you access to people that may help your business? Is he or she willing to make introductions to people who might help you grow your business? Additionally, try to talk to business associates and other people they know. Can you determine a consensus about his or her reputation? Is the reputation one that instills confidence and respect?

### **5. Does your marketer have good references?**

You wouldn't hire an employee without speaking to other companies for whom he or she worked. The same applies to a good marketer. Ask to speak to other clients he or she works with. Find out if these clients feel their needs are being met. Does the marketer meet specific deadlines? Has he or she

stayed within the allotted budget? Do they feel they received value for the work that was done?

### **6. Do you trust him or her completely?**

Only hire someone you trust completely. Honesty is the core of a good marketing relationship. You must tell this person everything about your business. That includes the good, the bad and the ugly. He or she can't help you if you don't adopt a full-disclosure policy from the very beginning. This rule is even more important if you are working with a full-service consultant that offers PR. When it hits the fan, and hopefully it never does, you must not be afraid of the truth. Your marketer is your advocate. You must tell all and allow her to put the spin on it. If you don't, it will come out some other way, and you will end up looking worse in the public eye for withholding the truth. Even the most unthinkable disaster can be dealt with if you follow your mission and trust your expert. Just look at the difference between how the Exxon Valdez disaster and the Tylenol tampering disaster were handled. Johnson & Johnson followed their mission of making safe products that help people, and created a new method of package safety that has become the industry standard. Good advice begins with trust in your marketer.

### **7. How effective is your marketer?**

The most common criticism of marketing is that it's too much fluff. A good marketer knows that it's not just about creating beautiful prose and artistic designs. It's about being effective. A marketer should be able to share with you concrete results that other clients have had.

At the same time, you can't expect a marketer to have a crystal ball. Market research can be just as vital to your success as the marketing itself. When preparing your budget put some money in for pilot programs and measuring results. It may be necessary to test different techniques to find what works best for you. Don't get frustrated. Trust your marketer's experience, take his or her advice and be willing to try new things. Too many clients hold themselves back with self limiting attitudes. "Because we've never done it that way before" is not always a valid reason.

### **8. Does his or her work fit with your design style?**

Ask to see samples of his or her work. Concern yourself most with samples that reflect the medium you will most often use. Remember, a marketer's work is a reflection of what his or her clients wanted as much as it is a reflection of his or her own taste. As with writing, unless you see exactly what you like, simply look for a wide variety of samples that reflect an ability to adapt to the needs of different clients. Look at your marketer's own marketing materials to get a sense of his or her true style.

### **9. Does his or her image and presentation style fit your culture?**

Your marketer is a reflection of you. She will be contacting companies, forming relationships and negotiating deals on your behalf. Does she project an image with which you are comfortable? Does her

style and manner command respect? She will be working closely with your employees. Will she gain their trust and respect? Consider the culture of your organization, your customers and your vendors and hire someone who can handle it with grace and ease.

### **10. What kind of marketer do you need?**

There are two kinds of marketers in this world. The first is the Numbers Crunchers. They hold MBAs from Stanford and Harvard and live in windowless offices staring at computer screens concerned only with the world of numbers and metrics. They can project the complete life-cycle of a product based on the upward slope of the sales graph during the initial launch. If you are in the consumer products industry, or a competitive environment that tracks market share to the "enth" percentage point, you want one of these brilliant people on your side. The second type of marketer is the Communicators. They analyze what business you are in and what your objectives are and craft messages, create materials and build campaigns to magically make the mail pour in, the hits rush to your Web site and the phone ring off the hook. These people walk freely among us speaking plain English. If you are in a business that requires a sales call, a phone call or something to be read before someone buys, you want one of these brilliant people on your side.

### **11. What are the typical billing options?**

Before you choose a marketer, consider the kind of billing relationship you wish to create. Many will work on a project basis in which the objectives and time frame are clearly agreed upon beforehand. Generally a 50% deposit is required up-front, with the balance due upon completion of the work. The second type of billing is a monthly retainer. The retainer is typically paid at the beginning of the month for a contracted period of 6-months to a year. There is generally an hourly fee associated with the contract which is based upon an average number of hours per month. The advantage to a retainer is that it gives the client a reasonable budget forecast. You also know that your marketer will have time on reserve to handle your fluctuating workload. Since marketing doesn't happen overnight, it's a good idea to begin a relationship with the attitude that you are committed to see it through for a few months at the very least.

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