



Who Needs Marketing?

Determining the role of a marketing firm in your business

Some of you may wonder what a marketing firm can do for your business. Simply put, a marketing company will provide the services needed to help grow your business.

But as the saying goes, “there are many different ways to skin a cat.” So let me define the various types of businesses that can provide this type of services. These include:

- traditional ad agencies (which provide general advertising services and media placement),
- design firms (that specialize in creating your print materials),
- web development organizations (that can design, host and provide SEO for your site),
- freelancers/consultants (who may either specialize in a specific service such as copywriting or may broker services on your behalf) and
- full-service marketing firms.

Because a full-service marketing firm is the most comprehensive, I’ll review some of the most common benefits they can bring to your business:

1. Create a strategic marketing plan that supports your overall corporate goals.
2. Write copy and provide graphic design for print materials and advertising.
3. Handle photography needs, audio and video production.
4. Place media in appropriate advertising vehicles to help reach your target audience.
5. Develop your website, from initial plan to SEO (Search Engine Optimization).
6. Prepare needed POP (Point of Purchase) and trade show signage; as well as the supporting distribution materials.
7. Serve as a resource / sounding board when your business is developing strategies for growth.

Above and beyond all the benefits listed above, a marketing firm can provide expertise and resources that may not be available to your organization. You may have employees that are doing double duty as sales people and marketing professionals, though they may not have a background in marketing. Having a firm dedicated to marketing your business means you can

get back to doing what it takes to run and grow your business. In addition, marketing firms have established relationships with suppliers in the industry, such as printers, media reps, and freelance professionals, and can capitalize on those relationships to benefit your organization both in the quality of the marketing and, in some cases, a cost savings as well.

This begs the question: How would a corporate decision-maker choose the right marketing firm for their business?

Size matters. If you're a mega corporation, you'd be wise to choose a large agency that has experience working through the corporate channels that are a natural part of big business. If, however, you're a growing firm, then a moderate sized agency would probably provide you with the most hands-on attention.

The right stuff. Similarly, you want a company that offers the services you need. In many cases, the right agency will become your one-stop shop for all things creative. And marketing. And new media. And general business. The right firm will grow with you.

A love connection. That might be putting it a little too strongly, but you do need to be compatible with your marketing firm's personality, approach and culture. This will ensure a more smooth relationship as you both work toward the same goal – growing YOUR business.

So now that you have the criteria, where do you go from here? Following are some tips to help you in the search for that perfect marketing partner:

Ask around. Talk to same-sized organizations that have marketing firms to get recommendations. You may start hearing the same names over and over, and will at least be able to establish some generalities based on their comments and reviews. Organization such as the Public Relations Association and Peoria Ad Club can also be beneficial as well.

Request a proposal. You can blindly call a few firms and ask what they can do for you, but the best way to articulate what you need is to put it in writing. Take the time to give prospective firms some background on your business, where you are and where you want to be. Including a timeline or budget is helpful as well. Not only will this give the marketing firm an idea of what to expect, but it may give you a little more insight into your own goals as well. In turn, the firm applicants should provide you with a proposal reiterating your goals and how they (in general terms) can help you achieve them.

Get down to business. Narrow down your choices and meet with each one. Include in the meeting any individuals who will be working closely with the firm as well. Evaluate not only what they bring to the table as far as their own plans, but how they respond to your ideas and how well you interact with each other. The relationship with your marketing firm should be a partnership, not a dictatorship.

No matter what kind of marketing firm you end up hiring, make sure that their values and objectives mirror your own. You'll have fewer surprises down the road, and will be able to form a relationship that, over time, can take you both to new heights in the years to come.