

6 Tips to Get Great Work from Your Marketing Agency

Introduction

The agencies, digital firms, and external vendors you hire to provide marketing services to your business exist for one reason—to do work you can't do in-house.

If you have the right partners, you likely view all marketing expenses as an investment in the growth of your business. They do 'X' work to get 'Y' outcomes that make 'Z' impact. But that's not the full measure of your marketing partnerships. Beyond simple math, the level of care and sweat equity you invest into your agency-client relationships is also essential to maximizing your return.

As a Senior Vice President of Client Services at a full-service marketing agency, I'm guided by a desire to make an impact for our clients. I spend most of my time chasing insights, shaping strategy, curating new marketing ideas, and nurturing relationships.

Through firsthand experience, I know that an agency-client relationship can be woefully flawed or a whopping success. No matter what, outcomes can always be influenced through effort and a confident guiding hand.

I have boiled down my experiences, victories, and failures into six practical tips that can help steer your partnership from good to great, so you can maximize what you get from your agency partners.

6 Tips

- 1. Build their knowledge**
- 2. Give them access**
- 3. Plan to perform**
- 4. Input equals output**
- 5. Reject limitations**
- 6. Feedback is fuel**

Tip 1

Build their knowledge



If you've received work from your agency partner that feels thin or lacks "heart," their knowledge base could be to blame.

I'm not talking about industry knowledge; I'm talking about the true depth of your business and connectivity to who you are.

Agencies pride themselves on being fast learners, but building a knowledge base takes time and effort. More time spent together will provide greater clarity, reduce learning curves, and yield better work in fewer rounds in the long run.

Beyond building their knowledge, you must also build the relationship. Spend time together on the road (I call this "windshield time"), over a meal, or at a conference, all with the benefit of better work.

You must also allow and encourage agency staff to have relationships with people across all departments. Some of the best ideas I bring to marketers are inspired by my time with sales and product staff. Permit them to do so, and you'll see results.

How to make this happen:

Give your agency partner access to product demos, samples, manufacturing, company history, internal events, industry insights, primary/secondary research, competitive intel, and to company staff beyond the marketing team.

Tip 2

Give them access



If you want to shorten your agency's learning curve on a product or elevate their work, give them an all-access pass to your business.

Combining your agency's marketing acumen with other departments' front-line intelligence will give them the right balance of efficiency and relevance without relinquishing control.

The best agencies focus on achievement and access to your business helps to maximize the impact they can make for you. Don't just give them an assignment; provide them with a goal. You create the vision; the agency brings it to life.

Integrating the agency into your business and highlighting their mission to others is also crucial. Our agency partner is doing 'A,' helping to solve for 'B,' and guiding us toward 'C.' This helps set expectations that your agency is a partner and an extension of the marketing team.

How to make this possible:

Allow your agency to join your internal sessions to present work, brainstorm ideas, and learn about new products. Share all key documents related to insights, sales, and products. And make sure to hold routine sessions with key leaders to learn about their focus and point of view.

Tip 3

Plan to perform



Launching a new product? Working to differentiate your brand? Trying to drive demand?

The natural default is to start thinking about the creative messaging, design styling, or media mix. But what's the business strategy? Key objectives? What's a successful outcome?

Be sure that the macro is crystal clear before you go micro.

Once you've defined the big picture, detail a marketing plan. The plan can be a Word doc, a PowerPoint deck, or any other content medium you prefer.

You're a marketer, so I'll skip the content on what should be in a good marcom plan. This tip is a reminder that detailed planning is essential if you want top-performance outcomes from your agency partner.

Planning enables your agency to tailor strategy, shape thinking, dedicate resources, and prioritize accordingly.

How you make this possible:

No matter the project's size or scope, create a marcom plan. Be clear and specific about your goals so your marketing agency knows what you want to achieve.

Or, to summarize that even better, "Begin with the end in mind." – Dr. Stephen R. Covey

Tip 4

Input equals output



This may be the most important tip when it comes to shaping actual marketing work and it requires the shortest explanation. If the work you are getting back often "misses the mark" or is "not quite right," your input is likely to blame.

Or, if it takes too long over too many rounds to get it right, check your input.

Clear input reduces stress, improves project efficiency, and helps guarantee a higher quality of work. Much of this comes down to poorly communicated expectations in the input too. Define what you want. Inspect what you expect.

How you make this possible:

Take the time to be thorough. Send input in writing, review it verbally, and confirm that all stakeholders are aligned.

Here's a good framework for the input: summarize the ask, deliverables, objectives, creative/strategic direction, audiences, timeline, specs/mandatories, background, and reference information.

Tip 5

Reject limitations



You work with an agency partner to accomplish things you can't do alone. So, let them help you realize what's possible. Encourage them to call out your biases and illuminate blind spots.

Acknowledge that you might have self-imposed limitations to greater success—a goal that can't be beaten, a challenge that cannot be overcome, or a barrier you can't move past.

It's your agency partner's job—not through the power of hope or manifestation, but through action—to help you reject limitations and embrace possibilities. Let your agency “take the wheel” to drive you to a worthy destination; for example, impressing your C-suite or perhaps issuing a return punch to a cocky competitor.

Get out there and be optimistic about doing all that can be accomplished together. And why is optimism essential? Not only is it contagious, but it also just feels better.

How you make this possible:

First, open the door and welcome this kind of dialogue with your partner. Make rejecting limitations and pushing boundaries a part of your collaborative ethos. Remember, marketing is all about experimentation. And, don't forget to have some fun along the way.

Tip 6

Feedback is fuel



If you have the right agency partner, they'll be obsessed with your success. So, let them know what they're doing well and where they're not quite hitting the mark. While the truth may sting, there's no better motivation to make the necessary repairs and renovations.

Sharing feedback is the only way to improve your satisfaction with the relationship and drive continuous improvement. Feedback needs to come from all levels of the organization too. The collective marketing team, sales, product, leadership, etc.

Give your marketing agency direct feedback on how their work is perceived by the company and what kind of impact it's having in the market.

You must also solicit feedback on your own contributions to the partnership. This should include your personal contributions and that of the collective team. What is the team doing to enable a great working dynamic? And what are they doing that is prohibiting the best performance possible?

How you make this possible:

Share your point of view on how your partner is doing and ask for feedback on your crew, too. Think about the overall experience, working dynamic/team collaboration, work product quality, what can be improved, and what is going great. Make feedback routine and required. And do so in all possible ways: quarterly business reviews, performance evaluations, and recurring questions that open the door for collaborative dialogue—e.g., “How are we doing as a team?”



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Brady is a marketing expert with experience in 11 major industries serving countless clients of all sizes, from billion-dollar market leaders to scrappy start-ups. Leading client services for FARM, he inspires everyone to do their best work. Guided by a burning desire to make an impact, he spends most of his time chasing insights, shaping strategy, and curating new marketing ideas. He knows that enduring value comes with routinely accomplishing what our clients ask of us. And his favorite question to ask clients? “How can we help?”

If you need help elevating your agency partnership or getting your team to have better agency-client collaboration, drop me an email at bmcfadden@farmbuffalo.com.

