

Problems in Time Management? Problems Start With The Account Management Staff.

When your account management personnel attend the AE BootCamp, they answer a simple questionnaire intended to get them thinking about their jobs, who they report to, and what they need to learn.

The three biggest topics they want to explore are time management, keeping clients on deadline, and working with agency staff to stay within budget and delivery status.

Of course, there are other topics too, but these dominate the list demonstrating what they think is important.

They are stunned by my opinion on why these three conditions exist. I tell them, it is because it is their fault. Basically, they do a lousy job of gathering information, preparing materials and completing marketing and creative briefs properly.

I get a little testy with them, because they are not doing their jobs fully, yet they expect everyone else to do their job well, meet deadlines and stay in budget parameters.

I have come to realize that agencies are more than slipshod about training young account execs and holding more experienced AE's to at the least, minimum standards.

Over the years, we have to admit that agencies have focused more on their creative products and less on the marketing strategy. We have spent the last several years trying to tell ourselves and others that we are now ready to become marketing partners with our clients. The inconsistency is evident in our continuing requirement to complete a Creative Brief (focus on creative strategy) without doing a Marketing Brief first.

One of the biggest gripes agency search consultants have with agencies is that the marketing strategy and creative strategy are not linked. They tell us that the creative strategy does not support the marketing strategy.

Anyway you look at it the marketing strategy and Marketing Brief have to come first.

We must do a better job of training our account staff to complete a Marketing Brief. If they do not know the answers to the questions, how do they expect the creative staff to provide appropriate and effective solutions? They can't. So, we get that disconnection between the two strategies, and we waste staff time getting back on target, or worse, not having a second chance to get it right.

So, when we talk with AE's about their concern for time management, we start with properly preparing the "input" via the Marketing Brief for the staff.

As a matter of fact, I tell the AE's straight out that if they did their work completely and correctly the first time, it would save everyone time, and improve staff moral and relationships.

Of course, clients cause problems with time management. Their schedules change and we are not necessarily in the information loop. They may be our main focus, but we are not theirs. If we're going to make the most out of our time, everyday AE's need to stay involved with their clients. They need to become part of their everyday because of what the AE knows as a valuable resource. The sooner the AE gets into the loop, the longer the lead time to catch changes, be advised of delays and a myriad of other time-wasting problems.

At the top of the heap is the Marketing Brief.

Before every job is put into the system, the AE must be able to write the answers to these few questions.

1. What is the client's problem that needs to be solved?
2. What is their ultimate objective (a specific number, like units sold, increase in market share points, etc?)?
3. What is the need the client's customers have that the client's product/service fulfills?
4. What are the benefits (not features or advantages) that the buy is looking to receive? (Rank them if more than one)
5. What is the buying process the buyer goes through in making the decision to purchase?
6. What are the advantages the client's product/ service provide that the competition does not?
7. What are the advantages the competitors' product/service offer that the client's does not?
8. Who is the primary buyer? Who is the user?
9. Where do the buyer and/or the user come into contact with the product/service?

These are just a few of the questions that should be included in your marketing briefs. I say briefs, because these can be customized for specific types of clients and types of buyer/users.

Be honest with yourself. How much time would your agency save from the beginning to the end of the projects if you had this information? How fast would the creative department come up to speed? How may fewer false starts would you have internally and with the client?

It may seem a little rough, but I do tell AE's their problem starts with them getting their ducks all in a row before handing the work off to others.

I wish I could measure all the wasted time in agencies caused by false starts.

One of the tips I give them is to prepare an agenda for client and staff meetings. Keeping the focus on a specific list of topics saves time.

Does better time management start with AE's?

Probably not. It starts with you and proper training of your staff on procedures that keep false starts to a minimum and keep all parties focused on what needs to be done.

Basic? You bet, but are you really that good at it? I rest my case. _