



Ask the experts? Please do! As consumers, we're all wannabe marketers

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Being in the strategic marketing arena for more than 25 years, it still somewhat surprises me when clients and their colleagues assume they know more about the field than my fellow marketing professionals or I do. But, what I've come to realize is marketing is probably the only critical business function that everyone thinks they're qualified to oversee. Consider this: How often does someone tell his or her CFO how best to enter an accumulated depreciation entry; or instruct an engineer how best to regulate liquid flow? Simply put, it's my experience that marketing is "faked" a whole lot easier than knowledge of finance, engineering, etc.

And why is that? Because as consumers, we're all wannabe marketers. Each and every day we're bombarded with television and radio commercials, flashy print ads, direct mail, and web banners and pop-ups. We know what we like—and what we don't like. And, more often than not, we're eager to share our perspective—and try to convince others that our feelings are not just valid, but spot on.

Perhaps a more compelling reality about today's marketing culture has been unearthed by the digital age and social media, in particular. Corporate Facebook and Twitter pages, as well as YouTube accounts, encourage everyone in the company to join in and promote the brand. So whether you're the admin or the auditor, you're invited (and sometimes expected) to market your company's core values and capabilities.

Of course there are cases where a client has largely ignored marketing logic and has succeeded, the most obvious (and rare I might add) being Apple's Steve Jobs. I think most would agree that in many ways he was not just the consummate marketer, but the consummate consumer as well, and one who defied conventional wisdom. His opinion about a marketing staple, focus groups? In a 1985 interview, Jobs said, "We built (the Mac) for ourselves. We were the group of people who were going to judge whether it was great or not. We weren't going to go out and do market research." Twelve years later he said, "A lot of times people don't know what they want until you show it to them."

But most of us aren't Steve Jobs. And that's why successful client/agency relationships are so critical to a company's marketing strategy. But all worthwhile relationships require both parties to put in the work. I believe there can be some pre-emptive measures that, to an extent, lessen non-productive "marketing wannabe" situations, and they start with a better defined understanding of the agency/client roles, including:

- * Realistic approach: As the agency, I recognize that my clients won't accept all of my recommendations, just as all of my recommendations won't produce the desired results. However, because I have devoted my entire career to this field, and have the experience that goes along with it, I expect my clients to utilize my expertise to their company's advantage.

* Knowledge sharing: An agency that is not industry-specific (e.g., pharmaceutical) must consistently work hard to be an expert in the client's field. But the client also needs to understand that it's their job to continually share marketing information with the agency. Why is that? Because it stands to reason that the client will have a keener understanding of its customers simply because they speak with them daily, and they monitor their competition regularly as well. The bottom line is this: More knowledge shared with the agency equals better understanding of the market which equals stronger results to the bottom line.

* Communication: It's critical that clients communicate marketing goals to their employees so that their team has an understanding of not just what direction/strategies are being implemented, but why. Likewise, it's the agency's responsibility to conduct regular client meetings that detail what's being done and what's been achieved, and whether or not it's time to change course. If results are not communicated frequently, the agency is not properly championing its abilities and value to the client.

At the end of the day, a winning agency/client relationship comes down to one thing: collaboration. The agency is not always right, but the agency's value to the client is that it focuses solely on marketing and the latest trends, and that it has the client's success in mind always. There is room for opinion, but it's up to the agency to demonstrate a level of expertise and a track record of success that makes these opinions less frequent.

And, yes, I would like to know what you think. Email me your comments at q@qgroup ltd.com
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