



8 Things You Should Know When Hiring A New Interactive Agency

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Lately, hiring an interactive agency has become a complex and confusing enterprise. As the internet grows and more companies appear on the scene, assessing the qualifications of an agency is becoming more and more difficult. The barrage of marketing speak, technobabble, and nearly identical sales pitches involved with identifying the agency who will really work for you, makes the decision process even more difficult. Emerging technologies, new service applications, new tracking and measurement platforms, the development of social media and easier access to information have all contributed to a deluge of both niche offerings and startup players all vying for your project with promises of incredible results and ROI. So where to begin?

- 1) The worst place to start is from scratch. Search engines are not incredibly discriminating. Just as you wouldn't look for a spouse through a Google search, you shouldn't use one to look for an agency, either. Sure, it's not totally the same as finding a life-partner, but the length of the relationship could still be a long one. Get references from people you trust. Ask about the agencies they use and what they like and don't like about them. Look at your fiercest competitors and see which agencies they use. Scrutinize.
- 2) Don't assume you know the exact solution to your problem. Just as you wouldn't disregard your gastroenterologist's referral to a nutritionist, don't be indifferent to an agency willing to re-diagnose and give angles you've never even thought of. Experienced marketing agencies should ask difficult questions, be able to use their expertise to figure out what's ailing you, and offer a number of creative solutions.
- 3) Listen to the type of questions they ask you. Are they tactical questions, or are they strategic questions? The tactical questions tend to focus on specific product or service offerings, while strategic questions are more related to your business goals and objectives. Agencies that ask a lot of tactical questions tend to lack marketing know-how and will eventually run out of steam when it comes time to innovate or build your business over the long-term. Be wary of agencies who tout their value proposition around a short-term solution, niche application or key piece of technology; that's a vendor, not an agency. Stay away from these vendors as their engagement may be inexpensive at the outset, but you might find that their short-term solution may cost you much more over time.
- 4) When meeting with an agency, ask to meet the principals of the company. Ask them if they use third-party agencies or vendors to execute any of their projects. Do they foresee the need for any of these partners for your project? If so, who would they be working with and is it possible to meet them too. Don't leave out visiting their studio which will give you a feel for the culture and attitude of the agency and the people who will ultimately be working for you.
- 5) What type of clients do they currently serve? A more diverse and varied roster of clients is actually better for your business as agencies gain a more varied insight and tool set to handle issues and create opportunities. Ones that work in predominantly one vertical tend to be limited in how they approach problems
- 6) Ask for three case studies and have them demonstrate what they did for the client and what results the program produced. Look for hard metrics and make sure the results were in line with what was requested by the client.
- 7) Find out how long they retain their clients. A good agency should be able to retain their customers for 2-5 years. If they don't, ask them why not.
- 8) Remember that hiring an agency goes both ways. Asking them to do all the heavy lifting when they're doing a proposal limits their ability to present you with a viable solution. Provide the agency with all the information they ask for, and don't treat the proposal development phase as a test or sphinx's challenge. It helps no one.

About the Author:

Warren Zenna is a Business Development Professional with over 12 years experience in consultative sales of interactive marketing services to Fortune 500 corporations. Past clients include: Sony, General Motors, Unilever, Diageo, McDonald's Corp, Philip Morris, Mack Trucks, Ricoh Corporation, Canon Corp, Procter & Gamble, Microsoft, SAP, Oracle, Deloitte, Accenture, KPMG and GE.

Plexipixel is an award-winning full-service interactive agency on the forefront of interactive technology with Adobe Flash, Microsoft Silverlight, and web technology expertise. We create highly successful "unexpectedly sticky brand play" solutions including websites, applications, animations, casual and advergames, and marketing demos for some of the world's biggest consumer and entertainment companies.

Plexipixel has been a Microsoft vendor for 8 years. We're a Preferred Microsoft Vendor on the MSVP Site Management and Online Design and User Experience lists and one of sixteen vendors approved for Integrated Media.

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