

If you're looking for an agency?

This brief overview, based on Wesley Day's 55+ years of service, covers the nuts and bolts of finding the right agency for your company.

Chapters:

- What Does an Agency Do Anyway?
- Do I Really Need an Agency?
- If I Need an Agency, How Do I Pick One?
- Am I Working With the Right Agency?
- How Do I Get the Most From My Agency?

Communications Horror Stories -- Visit At Your Own Risk

- In Too Deep
- Married to the Status Quo

What Does an Agency Do Anyway?

The long answer is: ad agencies provide clients with effective written, visual, and electronic communications. To create advertising, agencies offer services in copywriting, graphic design, video production, illustration, multimedia production, public relations, media buying, direct mail, and other creative services.

Agencies also offer marketing assistance through their account services departments. Account executives (AEs) will help you analyze current markets, identify and define new markets, and help you reach those groups. AEs will help conduct research studies for products, names, and logos. AEs can also analyze buying trends as well as demographic and psychographic information.

The short answer is: agencies develop compelling messages and deliver them effectively to their intended audiences.

Do I Really Need an Agency?

Not every business needs an ad agency, that's for sure. That's not to say that we wouldn't like to see more companies use agencies, but an honest evaluation of your communication needs and goals will indicate if you need an agency or not.

Ask yourself the following kinds of questions to determine your company's communication effectiveness:

- Do your marketing strategies achieve their goals?
- Are you effectively reaching the people who use your product?
- Do your in-house communication projects meet your professional expectations and marketing goals?

- Are you sometimes overwhelmed by the enormity and complexity of your communication tasks?
- Are your other duties getting done?

If any of these questions made you pause, you may want to consider using an agency or switching to a new agency. In short, if you are not satisfied with your current communications program, start looking for an agency.

If I Need an Agency, How Do I Pick One?

Talk to suppliers and colleagues, or consult the Yellow Pages for your first list. Then spend some time with the agencies and find one with which you feel comfortable. Wesley Day has found the following criteria to be most important for long-term relationships.

1. Reputation.

Talk to a prospective agency's clients and suppliers. Seek the advice of friends and colleagues. These folks don't have any reason to be anything other than honest about the agency in question. Plus, you can learn what to expect what to expect from working with the agency.

2. Stability.

Find out how long the agency's been around and find out what their client retention rate is. Not only is a long retention rate a sign of stellar service, but it indicates an agency's willingness and ability to learn your product and market. (Wesley Day's retention rate for clients is four times the industry average.)

Find out their employee retention rate. Clients typically don't like to be bounced around from one AE to another. Creative messages must remain consistent. And frankly, a high turnover rate speaks reams about an agency's top brass. (Wesley Day's retention rate for employees is six times the industry average.)

Am I Working With The Right Agency?

Compare your results with your goals. Have you achieved your goals? For example, is your company name better known than it was before you started with an agency? Has your agency introduced new and innovative ways to sell your service? If your goals are being met (or better yet -- exceeded), then that's a good sign.

Examine your relationship with the AE. Has the AE taken the time to establish a good working relationship? Can you trust this person? Has the person hustled to learn your industry?

Good communication is key to building and maintaining a good relationship. You must feel comfortable with the AE and know that the agency is doing its best to fulfill your company's needs. If you trust your agency, feel good about the job they're doing for you,

and can support your intuition with results, then you must be working with the right agency.

How Do I Get The Most From My Agency?

Well, there's a couple of ways to do this.

First, you could threaten to take your business elsewhere.

Or, you can be up front and honest with them. Although many AEs are very good at figuring out what you expect from their agency, they cannot read minds. State your goals and objectives clearly. Tell the AE what has and hasn't worked in the past. Be forthright and share as much as possible. You, your company, the AE, and the creative department at the agency will benefit in the end.

Be open to creative meetings. This gives the creative department a good feel for the kinds of ideas which best represent the interests of your company. Plus, your input can be invaluable during conceptual meetings.

Finally, share any reservations, doubts, or dislikes you have towards an ad. It is YOUR COMPANY on the line. Besides, this helps the agency establish a more accurate direction and message for your company.

Agencies will do quite a bit for you -- if you just let them.

In Too Deep

At first, being the Director of Communications seemed like a good idea. Hal simply had to write a few press releases, take care of the cafeteria bulletin board, write the monthly newsletter, and purchase the "giveaways" that were handed out at conventions.

Then the company's product caught on and grew like wildfire. Suddenly, Hal was writing more and more press releases. Corporate brochures needed to be more sophisticated to reflect the company's growing reputation. Hal found himself developing a magazine ad and placed it in magazines he liked. Hal conceptualized a show booth kiosk and had an in-house engineer design it. In just a few short months, Hal's duties changed drastically.

Hal met with media reps -- who told him that their media singularly reached his target market (a market he hadn't even really identified) and that he was overspending on other media. Hal bought airtime based on who he liked and how much they charged per spot.

In his free time, Hal created a simple Web site. However he hasn't had time to update it in nearly three years.

Finally, Hal and the executives of his company realized that they were spending more and more on a variety of dissimilar messages in a variety of media without any

appreciable difference in sales. They sensed that their disjointed communications strategy was to blame, but they weren't sure where to start fixing it.

Married To The Status Quo

After 18 years of directing the communications for Tastytech, Inc., Sarah knew the ins and outs of her job -- identifying the targets, knowing when to run certain campaigns and through which media, calling the appropriate people from her stable of excellent suppliers. In all honesty, 18 years ago, Sarah single-handedly made Tastytech a household (albeit regional) name by relying on her keen intuition and ability to "see the big picture."

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, however, the industry had changed over the past five years. Older markets weren't being replaced by younger consumers. Similar, yet different products, were luring away her audience (much like flavored teas and fruit drinks did to soda pops). Convenience foods were losing ground to "traditionally" prepared meals -- as a cultural movement towards traditional values gained steam.

Moreover, the communications industry was changing. New and different kinds of media appeared on the market -- the Internet, 'zines, a plethora of new cable networks, developments in CD technology, and in-store closed circuit systems just to name a few.

And over the past five years, staff members and cold-calling agencies would throw ideas past her. Although she entertained some of them (e.g., new package designs, redesign of her show booth), most of them she dismissed outright with, "Well, this has worked before, so I think we should stick with it," or "Can you justify the change statistically?"

No one ever disputed Sarah's achievements, but some wondered, "Where was Tastytech heading?"

[Return to top](#)