Top 6 Things to Think About When Choosing a Digital Agency

A Digital Marketing Agency Selection Guide
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Choosing a marketing or creative agency is a major business decision that can have exceptional positive results if done well, or costly negative repercussions if you make the wrong choice. If you’re in a position to choose a new agency, this Marketing Agency Selection Guide is a great place to start for some general advice on how to conduct your selection process. While no means exhaustive, these simple tips will help you make a better decision in finding a long-term partner who can help you achieve your business goals.

1. REVIEW THE AGENCY’S PORTFOLIO

- **Strategic Solutions**
  When reviewing portfolio examples, look for the evidence of the agency’s ability to tie design and strategic solutions to business problems.

- **Case Studies**
  Ideally the agency will present case studies that demonstrate an understanding of your industry or a parallel. A good case study uses hard number to demonstrate that the solution was effective.

- **Consistent Style**
  While variety would seem to demonstrate adaptability, many of the best agencies are known for a specific design style, which is likely to indicate a cohesive team and refined approach.

2. GET TO KNOW THE AGENCY

- **Conversation Intent**
  In your initial meeting, did the agency ask deep, probing questions about your business objectives or did they spend most of the time talking about themselves and how they can help you? An experienced, strategic agency will try to get a good understanding of your business before proposing solutions.
• **Determine a Personality Fit**  
A strong agency relationship is based on partnership. Because these are people you will likely spend a lot of time interacting with, like any relationship it’s a good idea to ensure there is a good fit with your personal style before jumping in.

• **Determine a Budget Fit**  
Come into the conversation with a clear budget in mind and ask the agency if it is something they can work with. Fishing around for pricing is likely to waste your time, and the agency’s.

• **Get a Sense of their Working Environment**  
If possible, try to arrange a meeting in the agency’s space. Getting to see their work environment will tell you a lot about how they operate.

### 3. ASSESS THE AGENCY’S SERVICE OFFERING

• **Agency History**  
Get a sense of the agency’s history and how they evolved to their current form. Many traditional agencies have rebranded themselves as “digital” in order to win new business, while others have essentially grown up in an Internet-enabled world, making them better suited to digital marketing engagements.

• **Agency Model**  
Get a clear picture of the different roles and titles within the agency and how they work together in the context of a client engagement. A credible digital agency will understand the importance of content, interface and analytics in attracting traffic and optimizing experiences. Ask detailed questions about the backgrounds of key account people and ensure they have experience in designing and managing technology-driven programs.

• **Core Competency**  
Smaller agencies will usually have a core competency that reflects the expertise of the founder, whether it be design, technology or social media. While it is not necessary for an agency to perform all tasks in-house, make sure core competencies are aligned with the objective you are hiring the agency to achieve.
4. UNDERSTAND THE AGENCY’S PROCESS

• Process Detail
  Does the agency have a clearly articulated process or do they tend to talk more in terms of general phases? Technology-based projects in particular require detailed project plans and thorough quality assurance.

• Project Management
  Does the Agency have dedicated project managers or does someone with another title handle project management? Having a person dedicated to managing and planning projects is especially important for ongoing programs, such as content marketing.

• Expectations
  Did the agency clearly outline what was expected of both sides? Many agencies will promise to meet any request or deadline in order to win work but in reality, many delays are caused by a client’s inability to make decisions or provide necessary materials in a timely fashion. The agency should point out that timelines are contingent upon participation by both parties.

5. TALK TO FORMER CLIENTS

• Ask for References
  Just as you would ask for references when hiring a new employee, ask your agency if you can speak to some of their former or current clients. Pick the clients that you would like to talk to from their portfolio.

• Questions to Ask
  Inquire about the effectiveness of their process as well as how happy they were with the final outcomes. Have they or will they continue to work with the agency? If not, why not?

6. ASSESS THE AGENCY’S PROPOSAL

• Alignment with Business Objectives
  Does the proposal outline how the scope of work is designed to address a specific business objective or problem? The proposal should show that the agency has a good understanding of your company’s place in the industry, as well as your strengths, challenges and opportunities. The proposal should demonstrate that the agency has an understanding of the difference between strategy and tactics.
• Document Clarity
  Does the document have a logical structure and does it answer any obvious questions or concerns a potential client might have? Pricing should be included and there should be a clear relationship between the statement of work and the cost. Spelling mistakes and typos may be indicative of a lack of resources, or poor attention to detail.

• Design
  Does it seem like the agency has invested some time and effort in the visual presentation of the document? If you are hiring an agency for its design capabilities, their expertise should be evident in the proposal itself.

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