

Athina Mallis • 7 days ago

How to choose the best marketing agency

The media and digital marketing agency landscape is saturated with choice, and it can be overwhelming to find the best marketing partner to suit your business needs. Leading global marketing consultant, CEO and Founder of Trinity P3 Consulting Darren Woolley, [speaks with Target Market host Athina Mallis](#) unpacks the complex agency ecosystem and reveals some key tips on finding the right agency 'fit' to add demonstrable value to your marketing mix.



How do you think agencies can reassure clients they're not going to overcharge and underdeliver?

It really has been a tough year for marketing and advertising agencies. I'm not sure clients are unnecessarily sceptical about the value as they're under a huge amount of pressure. To justify their marketing budget, you have to remember that almost every company's feeling cash poor at the moment. What they question is, are they getting value from the money they're spending with their agencies? This is driving a lot of the pitches that we're seeing at the moment is going to market and seeing if someone can do it for less.

The counterpoint to this for agencies is to start to focus on growth and performance. They are open to considering getting paid for the result that you deliver, rather than just the cost of the services you provide. We've been talking about this for a long time, especially in a world where consumers are going more online and ecommerce is rampant today, so agencies should be willing to put their money where their mouth is.

What do you think it takes for agencies to build a better trusting relationship with clients - especially when clients come to you with 'loads of baggage'?

We often find that clients that have been burnt by agencies have usually gone into the relationship without their eyes wide open. Agencies don't naturally go around trying to burn their clients, it's such a short term strategy.

What often happens here is the clients haven't been willing to be really clear with the agency what their expectations are. If you don't set those expectations upfront then you're



agency, that their expectations aren't just unrealistic expectations spinning their wheels going to get them because no one is a mind reader.

What I'd say to clients is that, first of all, if you're engaging with a new agency, sit down and have regular, honest conversations about what your expectations are. If you're an agency, be willing to sit down and ask the client, what it is that they need from you, and how are they going to measure your performance against their expectations? Because we often go into these relationships thinking it'll just work itself out.

Are you seeing a trend of large organisations turning to small boutique firms? Does size really matter?

This is a really interesting phenomenon that we noticed before the pandemic, which is even being more accelerated during the pandemic. I have to say that size doesn't matter. The idea that elephants only sleep with elephants is no longer the case.

It's really about finding the right agency for the job. Now, global clients will often go with global agencies, because they believe that they want one throat to choke globally, but it doesn't actually work out that way.

The really smart clients are starting to work out that cherry-picking the best people in the market is a much better way to go because you're going to get a dedicated team, independence, have more control about the way they meet a client's needs than a lot of the network agencies who have this hierarchy that they have to answer to.

To answer the question, no size doesn't matter. But clients need to start thinking about what it is that I need, and who in the market is going to be the best person to fulfill that?

Global clients wanting to enter the APAC market, what are the key things they should look for when engaging with an agency in the region?

First of all, the idea of entering the APAC market is quite a misnomer. I would say APAC having worked in this region for 30 years, this is the most diversified region in the world compared to Europe or Latin America, APAC is such a diverse market.

What they need to think about is, first of all, their entry strategy, are they going to try and take on multiple markets, are they going to go and have a beachhead and expand from that? Whatever your strategy is you need to think about what the right agency is, for your needs to fulfill that strategy, not your short-term needs, but your long-term needs. Who's the agency that's going to be able to grow with you as you grow into the market.

I'll give you a good example of that, often American clients will think APAC is either Singapore or China. They forget that the vast majority of APAC is Indonesia. It's hundreds of millions of people and a totally different culture to Thailand, and totally different from Malaysia. To understand the APAC region, you need agencies that can actually understand and have experience working with each of those markets and all of those different cultures and languages.

What's a commonly held belief in marketing that you passionately disagree with?

There are so many commonly held beliefs that are just so wrong. Experience and data will often show how wrong they are. But one that particularly annoys me is when people keep talking about this practice. In regards to strategy, there is no one strategy that ever will suit every company, every brand, every market. You need to think about the complexity and have the best practice methodologies to come up with the right strategies for each market.

This idea that it's a global world, even with the strongest global brand, every market is going to have nuances and differences that you need to embrace. What I'd say to people is embrace complexity, stop trying to simplify it or dumb it down. Because the fact of the matter is, the world is complex. But that's one of the great things about it.

What should marketing agencies stop doing and what should marketing agencies start doing?

What you should stop doing is mindlessly pitching for business. Now, pitching is such a hit-and-miss way of winning business, it's far better to build a relationship before you get to the pitch. It's far better to prove your credentials to a client to work on a project and build the relationship, build the trust and prove your capabilities over time rather than just winging it in a pitch. The average pitch will start out with say six agencies and get down to three, but

there's only going to be one winner. That means there are five losers in any pitch, so stop playing those numbers and try to go for the one way you're the winner every time.

Agencies should be more confident in having conversations with the clients about what it is they really need. It won't necessarily be the core things that you offer. But sit and listen, rather than be pitching yourself to them all the time or pitching the services you offer.

Start to have those moments or create those moments in the relationship where you really get down to what it is that you're challenged with and how we can help you. That may not be offering more services, but it could be connecting your clients with other people that you know, that can solve their problems. This really deepens relationships.

Tune into the full podcast episode [here](#).

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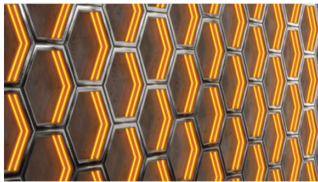
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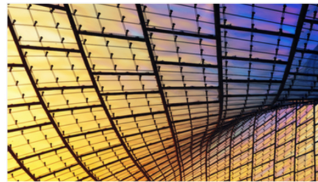
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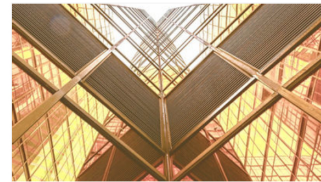
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