

HOW TO FIRE YOUR MARKETING AGENCY

(without disrupting your business)

THE CHECKLIST



Advertising and marketing agencies serve a specific purpose - to elevate the overall position of your company. Agencies can help increase brand awareness, drive new customers, and can even create innovative and highly effective customer retention programs. When these agency relationships are healthy, they can be highly profitable but when they sour, the time comes to fire your marketing agency and find new talent.

The sad truth is the [average client-agency relationship lasts only just over three years](#), and

many agencies are under immense pressure to change the focus and structure of their businesses because their [clients are bringing marketing in-house](#).

Just because your marketing agency is under pressure to adapt doesn't mean that your business should suffer. If you are starting to feel that the relationship with your agency isn't working for you or your company anymore, here's how to know if it's smart to make a change.

THE TELL-TALE SIGNS IT'S TIME TO EVALUATE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

There are strong warning signs it's time to cut your agency loose. Here are just a few of the signs.



The agency is getting sloppy.

You've had meetings with the agency management about overall progress and your numbers and business aren't improving as a result of your marketing activities. You may have noticed a growing pattern of slipping deadlines, overpromising and underdelivering, silly mistakes or typos, or observed similar work product delivered to their other clients.

The agency isn't meeting or pushes back against measuring success.

Every business has ups and downs, and most have seasonality, but if your agency is consistently missing their numbers and trying to cover their misses with small "wins" and vanity metrics, this is a problem. Your business depends on the results your agency provides. If they can't deliver or dodge lousy news, this is a bad sign.

The agency continues to push for increased budgets.

In some instances, increasing your budget is a solid recommendation from an agency. However, there are other ways to optimize your marketing budget instead of defaulting to the "more cash" position. You rely on the agency to develop creative solutions to monetary constraints while still solving a business problem.

The agency isn't interested in learning about your customers.

The agency hasn't done research on your customers - or they haven't updated or deepened their customer research over time. If the agency isn't providing you with insight into your customers or their behavior either from their initial findings or continued analysis, this may be a red flag. If they don't care about your customers and how they place value in your product, they can't create the emotional connections required to increase your conversion rates or garner the right customer's attention with their campaigns.

The agency is hiding data and results.

If your ad agency is using proprietary software to measure the results of their efforts you should always have access to this data. If you don't have access to your data or if your requests for an update are pushed off to the end of the reporting cycle, this may be a problem. It's not always possible to provide you with an in-depth accounting of your most recent campaign, but your account manager should be able to give you general trending information at any point during the reporting cycle.

The agency makes a recommendation that feels ethically questionable.

It may be your account manager either doesn't know better, or they simply don't care, but you should always closely examine suggestions that flirt with or [violate known legal boundaries](#). If you receive recommendations that get close to mimicking or violating

competitors intellectual property or intentionally creates customer confusion, you need to take a hard look at the relationship with your agency.

Your agency lacks foundational knowledge about your company.

If your agency hasn't taken the time and made the investment into understanding the unique features and nuances of your business or even if they continue to ask questions about your product line - information that's readily available on your website, you'd be right to question their dedication to anything except billable time. Account managers change, it's a fact of agency life, but if your agency can't manage the knowledge transfer to a new employee, they're creating more work for you and eroding the overall value they provide.

“IT’S NOT YOU, IT’S ME.” PERFORM AN INTERNAL DOUBLE-CHECK.

Before you throw down a termination notice you'll want to ask some soul-searching questions.



Have you set crystal clear expectations or is there some (a lot) of room for improvement?

Understanding the scope of deliverables and deadlines is vitally important to keep your projects moving forward. If you aren't clear in expressing what you expect to receive and when you expect to receive it, there's no way an agency can succeed.

No one can meet an unspoken expectation. Make sure you're clear. [unspoken expectations quote]

Does the agency have access to the tools they need to succeed?

If an agency doesn't have access to the internal tools and data you use to measure success, it's difficult to hold them accountable for something like lead quality and volume when they can't view your data or if they don't have at least view-only access to your back-end systems.

Are you giving the agency tasks or are you talking about problems they can help solve?

Creative and innovative agencies perform best when they have room to run and develop creative solutions to your most pressing business problems. If you're just looking for an extra set of hands to execute against a project you've probably over-hired and should look at getting a specialized freelancer to help you. If you're looking for creative solutions you need to give the agency room to research and brainstorm.

Every agency also has a specialty (look at their website or case studies to determine where their specialty lies). Asking an agency that specializes in Facebook ads to develop a [strategy for multi-channel conversion optimization](#) is asking for problems they're not equipped to solve.

Did the agency have the budget they needed?

Pushing for more affordable solutions is entirely within your rights as a client, as long as you're also willing to adjust your expectations for deliverables. A Porsche and a Volkswagen will still get you where you want to go but one will get you there faster and in style.

When it comes to marketing, you get what you pay for.

HOW TO FIRE YOUR MARKETING AGENCY - A CHECKLIST FOR YOUR TRANSITION

Transitioning from one marketing vendor to another can be tricky and land you in court if you don't plan ahead.*



✓ Review the terms of your contract.

Whether your agency runs on a retainer, project, or time and materials-based agreement will usually impact how easy it is to get out of your contract gracefully. Review cancellation and transition policies in your countersigned documentation.

✓ Review any additional legal documents.

Make sure you have copies of all signed and countersigned documents including NDA's, non-competes, contractor agreements, etc. Understand what the agency can say, not say, and whom they can solicit when your working relationship ends.

✓ **Talk to your legal counsel about your desired plan of action.**

Make sure your attorney reviews the documentation to avoid any issues. Discuss how and when you'd like to sever the relationship and let your attorney tell you what assets and copyrights the agency should provide (don't make assumptions about this issue). Make sure you get a list of everything you're contractually entitled to receive.

✓ **Write the termination letter.**

Then let your attorney review it. Better yet, have your attorney write it, they're less likely to inject any emotion or hard feelings into the document. Don't send it yet, there are a few other steps you need to take.

✓ **Start an internal asset audit.**

Discreetly. People on your team may have questions about strange requests, and if they're friends or socialize with people in the agency, it may make the transition messy. Make a list of current assets and outstanding or not yet transferred assets before you give your notice to the agency.

✓ **Review agency tools and all software access.**

You'll want to ensure the agency doesn't have continued access to data, software, and systems after the termination date and that you understand and have the opportunity to purchase licenses to any tools or software your agency uses on your behalf to ensure continuity of data and service.

✓ **Start looking for replacements.**

Be subtle about this. The advertising agency world is small, and people employed by agencies know each other well and talk (yes, they talk about you, too). You don't want your current agency to react poorly to rumors and speculation before you give notice and have at least, narrowed down a [replacement agency or consultant](#).

✓ **Hire a consultant or agency to perform an audit.**

A marketing audit of your existing work will provide you with a different perspective and allows you to understand where gaps and big opportunities exist ([audits are a great way to](#)

[audition a prospective agency replacement](#) - be prepared to pay for a marketing audit that provides any actionable information).

✓ **Draft an internal transition plan and timeline.**

It seems like overkill but the more organized you can be going into this situation, the less disruption your company will experience with an agency switch.

✓ **Issue the termination notice and implement your transition plan.**

It's never a fun meeting but always considered good form to have a face-to-face meeting (even video chat) and issue the notice.

From large full-service agencies to small independent boutiques, many great agencies are doing high-quality and high-impact work for their clients. The point of this post isn't to disparage agencies at all but to provide you with a framework to help make a tough decision.

Once you make the call to fire your marketing agency and start the search for a replacement, take a look at the [Definitive Guide to Hiring an Outside Marketing Vendor](#). The guide will help you determine the type of marketing help that will be most beneficial to your company and offers a list of interview questions to help you identify a marketing partner who will "gel" with you, your company, and your team and help you meet and beat your goals.

The advice contained in this article does not and should not supersede the advice from your attorney and legal counsel. Follow their advice to help keep you out of court and make sure the transition is as smooth as possible.