

OPTIMISING THE AGENCY RELATIONSHIP: the marketer's guide



5 MINUTE READ

The challenges on marketers working in healthcare and pharma have never been greater, including pressure on budgets and increasingly nuanced value propositions. Continuously improving how you work with your agency is one way to make sure you deliver, in spite of the tough climate. Here are our top pointers on how to reinvigorate the relationship with your agency team, so they're not just existing, they're excelling.

Ask yourself...	Points to consider
Did you brief your agency thoroughly?	<p>Try to reframe how you think about time spent on the brief. The more care you take up front, the more likely the output will meet your expectations.</p> <p>Could you brief face-to-face or over Skype? And could your agency input into the brief? Even if it's just for bigger campaigns, collaborating with your agency to write the brief could deliver some great results. Worth a try?</p>
Do you invite them to your brand planning meetings? <i>You can only expect them to understand your brand if they're involved.</i>	<p>When you put meetings and events in <i>your</i> diary, get into the habit of thinking about whether it would be useful for your agency to attend, just as you would other members of your (internal) team.</p> <p>If you're concerned there's no room in your budget for their time, be honest, invite them as a learning experience and if they're invested in the relationship, they'll come anyway or reach a compromise.</p>
Are your timelines reasonable? And did you deliver on your deadlines?	<p>If key milestones have moved, the staff they had on standby for your project may not be available to jump back onto it immediately. When you suspect you won't meet a project milestone, warn your agency ahead of time. If they know the phase of a project is 'at risk' they may be able to build in a safety net or extra resource so it doesn't jeopardise the final deadline.</p> <p>If you're recruiting for a new agency, ask about this at the pitch stage – find out what processes they have in place to deal with the unexpected.</p>
With creative work, do you review it thoroughly at the first round (copy stage) or glance over it quickly then wait until you have the artwork before reviewing it in-depth and making changes/involving other reviewers?	<p>The more detailed feedback you give earlier on, the more straightforward (and quicker) the process. Plus, more time on the first proof is budget friendly too – making changes to a Word document is so much quicker than getting a designer to make changes to artwork.</p> <p>When you're busy, it's easy to put off doing a 'proper check', but too much feedback received too late in the game might mean the agency can't deliver on time or budget.</p>

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When things change and you receive new 'intel', do you let the agency know promptly?	Forwarding on information takes no time at all and may avoid the agency wasting hours and becoming disheartened if you have to change direction.
Do you let your agency feed back honestly, or are you defensive when they point out mistakes at your end? ('Who's paying who?' approach.)	<p>Appreciate how difficult it is for agencies to highlight issues caused by you or your team and hear them out. After all their motive is to work better together. Be honest – could they have a point?</p> <p>If you can't/won't change what you do (next time), could you change how they feel about it to keep them engaged? Even just listening to their concerns may alter the relationship for the better.</p>
Do you share statistics/intelligence about your brand/market?	Whether it's inviting them to a meeting or forwarding on a presentation they might find useful, being generous with information may pay dividends. The feeling of being part of your team will generate bags of goodwill that you'll be thankful for when you're next up against it.
Does the agency have your congress plan/key dates?	<p>Knowing your movements is a huge help to your agency because they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - know when you're going to be busy - can build in longer lead times - understand why certain deadlines are in place and re-prioritise accordingly - can keep non-urgent matters off your desk - can reserve extra resource to help deliver time-bound work in time for events.
Did you give them a brand induction and explain the ways you work/processes at your company? <i>They should also do this in return.</i>	Establishing the rules of engagement early on will keep friction to a minimum as you both know where you stand and the agency can mirror your company processes and culture to embed themselves within your team and oil the wheels of agency–client collaboration.
<p>Were you clear on the agency's service parameters before they started the project?</p> <p><i>e.g. how many sets of revisions quotes include, what happens if hours exceed the budget, is travel included in their costs or yours?</i></p>	<p>If this was covered in their proposal (verbal or written) or the T&Cs you agreed to, reacquaint yourself with this. If you still agree, you can avoid any nasty surprises on your next project.</p> <p>If you disagree (teams can't always reach a consensus on creative work with only two sets of revisions), be honest and negotiate a bespoke service level agreement so you don't feel short changed in future.</p>

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