10 tips for better client-agency relationships

By Tiffany Turkington-Palmer   18 Oct 2022

Call it "chemistry", or "electricity", or "trust". What's undeniable is that a good relationship between an agency and a client is the only way to build value and do great work together.

Source: © Fauxels pexels A good relationship between an agency and a client is the only way to build value and do great work together

Therefore it is heartening to see that many organisations regard their relationships with their agencies as ever more important; indeed, we're seeing our client relationships being measured more and more, in some kind of way.

Over the past 17 years I have experienced the good, the bad and the ugly – and the fabulous – in client relationships and come to clearly grasp what it takes to get the best out of an agency and client working together.

Top 10 tips

Here is a list of my top 10 guidelines and processes for a winning relationship with your agency.

1. **Build relationships:** Great work is done in partnership, and great partnership stems from understanding each other's businesses – how they work and what's important to them – and knowing each other as people. Also, be honest about your realities, your truths, because you will receive the best service if you trust your agency with them. This extends to bouquets and brickbats: give both compliments and criticisms when they are merited and required.

2. **Be clear on remuneration:** Both clients and their agencies have budgets. Scope work and decide on deliverables clearly and upfront, to avoid scope creep, and under- or over-delivery, that fouls up budgets. Track budgets regularly, no matter how big or small they are, and include this information in status meetings. And understand budgets and specific line items – you need to know exactly what you're paying for. Most importantly, be very clear about payment terms.

3. **Be clear on objectives:** This may seem obvious but know exactly what you want to achieve with your agency, which is there to solve your problems. But be realistic, too: it takes time, application, trust and a spirit of partnership to build a great brand and deliver excellence. We recommend using SMART objectives (these are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound), and agreeing on them upfront.

4. **Work out clear, quality briefs:** Make your briefs clear and include relevant information. This cuts out time wastage and endless questions. Your agency should be able to write the brief with you, or (with the right information) write it for you. Whether briefs are written or verbal, provide clear guidelines.

5. **No two clients are the same, and no two agencies are either:** How well do you know your agency and the people who work there? Do you know what makes them get up in the morning, or do you know little beyond their names? Both clients and agencies are unique. It's important that we recognise our differences and find ways to make our relationships work best.

6. **Set specific tracking, reporting and review dates:** Every project, no matter how big or small, should be tracked. If your agency isn't keeping you up to speed, specify how often you want status updates. Interim reviews can reduce project time. Agree on dates together, including making time for you to properly review work

7. **Remain flexible and agile:** Stick to deadlines but be open to challenges and change. On the one hand, creativity isn't linear and doesn't have "true answers"; on the other, technical work involves much testing and troubleshooting, which may lead to the revisiting of objectives and implementation plans.

8. **Have the key decision-makers involved upfront:** Sometimes an agency's key client contact is not the person who makes the decisions, and sometimes these two people have differing views on the work to be done. Involving the decision-maker from the start will ensure that your project is a success. Ascertain upfront who those people are and engage with them.

9. **Retainers versus project fees:** I have seen a big shift on the remuneration front, from retainers towards project-based work. Retainers work if you agree on very clear deliverables and objectives with your agency, and they can cut out a lot of hassle. Projects need to be similarly managed, but they involve much more admin. I find that a mix of the two is often a good alternative.

10. **Provide feedback:** Relationships – and the quality of work – can only improve if you provide your agency with regular, constructive feedback. It's easy to do work that everyone loves or hates, but your agency needs to grasp precisely why something's awesome or not in order to do things better.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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