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## What to Look For in an Ad Agency

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Once you've decided that you need an advertising agency, use this checklist as a guideline for selecting the best possible one for your needs and goals.

1. **Be certain that the ad agency realizes that advertising is only a small portion of marketing.** The agency must demonstrate that it knows there are many other marketing weapons and that it is capable of using (or directing the use of) all the appropriate ones in your potential marketing arsenal. Guerrilla businesses deserve guerrilla advertising agencies. Don't settle for less.
2. **Ascertain that your account will be considered special and deserving of the agency's top talent.** Be sure that you meet and talk to the people who will actually be doing your advertising - creative, media, research, the whole works. See what else the creative people have created. Ask about the results. Avoid agency figureheads and get to know the troops who will be serving on your front line. Is the chemistry right between you? Don't underestimate the immense power of good chemistry.
3. **Be sure that your agency understands your company's objectives and considers them reasonable.** This understanding will be reflected in the marketing and advertising strategy that the agency creates for you. If it's missing, look elsewhere.
4. **Check to see that the people who will be working on your account have the right credentials, experience, and attitude.** See if they are good listeners. If they haven't worked on a business just like yours, don't worry. Just make sure that they understand the critical relationship between profitability and creativity. If it doesn't help you earn profits, it's not creative.
5. **Be positive that the people you will work with have a knowledge of your business, an interest in your business, and a knowledge of the competitive situation.** If they've done their homework by the time they present to you, they'll have these things. If not, you're not interested.
6. **Look at the ads and other marketing materials they have created:** theme lines, logos, signs, telemarketing scripts, brochures, videos, catalogs, newsletters, Web sites, direct mail letters, postcards, posters, and even postcard mailers.
7. **The best advertising agencies have grown from the growth of their clients and those clients' ever-increasing marketing investments.** That is a better benchmark than growth coming from new clients. Such agencies are hard to find. But the search will be worth your time.

When selecting an advertising agency, ask people from the agency to make a presentation to you, but don't ask them to spend a lot of money doing so. Listen to their words, hoping they will talk more about you than about themselves. Be aware of the emphasis they place on the importance of a strategy, for that strategy is crucial to you. See if they know how advertising fits into the overall marketing mix. Be wary if they speak only of advertising and nothing about marketing.

You must do everything in your power to know the difference between clever advertising and effective advertising. Be careful if the agency relies too much on the use of humor, for humor is often the enemy of effective advertising. Advertising gains power through repetition, but humor becomes weaker with repetition. If you're marketing candy or chewing gum, humor may help. But if you're marketing high-priced offerings, humor rarely leads to beautiful profit-and-loss statements.

Be sure that your advertising agency understands the crucial necessity for follow-up, that they are abreast of the growth of online marketing, and that they are up-to-date but not too far in advance of society.

Be especially aware of advertising the agency has created that has run for a long time. That's a sure sign that it is successful. Be sure that the creative people are willing to experiment and test, to create materials that are timeless. Watch out if they create "vampire" advertising - the kind where cleverness, jokes, and special effects draw attention away from your offering.

The key to great advertising is to forget the advertising and be certain that the product or service is the star. Great advertising agencies produce advertising that creates a desire to buy. It is not supposed to make people say, "What wonderful advertising!" Instead, it is supposed to make people say, "I want that product."

Advertising creativity comes from knowledge. The more knowledge the agency's people possess, the more creative they can be. That means a powerful agency asks questions, listens to answers, engages in tireless research, and never stops learning.

Can your advertising agency help you engage in fusion marketing arrangements with others - where you combine marketing efforts to reach more people, but save money because you are sharing the cost? A top agency is able to use technology to the utmost but not rely too much on it. Its advertising begins with your offering and the reason you are in business in the first place - not with a snappy jingle or dazzling graphic approach.

Today it takes more effort than ever to break through the blizzard of advertising, much of which is simply copying other advertising that has won awards. Select an agency that is aware of this situation and knows what to do about it. Your success depends on your ability to select just that kind of agency.

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