

What are the values and benefits of outsourcing?

1. Tap into additional expertise in marketing strategy and implementation, as well as design.

An in-house team may not have developed the skills you need. Outsourcing to an experienced team that integrates seamlessly into your infrastructure will infuse your organization with new energies and ideas. You'll introduce fresh and innovative marketing and sales approaches to your customers and business partners.

2. Get an outside perspective on your business. Sometimes you can get too close to your business and not see your marketing strategies, programs, or materials from your audience's perspective. Even though you may know your business inside and out by living and breathing it each day, your perspective is still one-sided. To market successfully to your current audience – and capture new markets – you need to step out of your shoes and into your audiences'. You need to BECOME your customer. Having a group on the "outside" supporting your needs helps to give you the customers' perspective, not just your company's.

3. Minimize the impact of marketing staff reductions. You need to continue with projects, but your resources are limited. Don't give up! By outsourcing, you can find qualified, experienced resources that can come in and support your marketing needs so that the effort, money, and energy you've already invested don't go to waste.

4. Draw on outside experience with "what works and doesn't work" scenarios. Whether it's planning, copywriting, or design, the right outsource team will have had experience with a variety of different marketing and communication strategies, techniques, and tools. You can rely on their lessons over the years to find the correct solution for your business challenge.

5. Maintain the momentum with critical projects – they'll never fall to the wayside, drop down the priority list, or become forgotten. With the way the economy is today, people change jobs – or are hit with lay-offs – in the middle of projects. When those people leave the company, they will most likely take the project assets with them (in the form of knowledge). When you outsource your marketing relationships, you have one centralized team as your partner, and your knowledge assets remain protected and archived for future use.

6. Hire only whenever and wherever you need resources. Hiring full-time staff can be very costly when you add up wages, insurance coverage, office equipment and supply needs, training costs, etc. Finding an outsourcing partner allows you the flexibility to bring on talented, knowledgeable experts exactly when and where you need them. And you don't have to manage or train the entire team – the 'outsource' firm does that while you focus on the daily needs of running your own business and generating revenue!

So, how do you find the outsourcing partner that strategically fits your specific business needs, objectives, culture and expectations?

Step 1:

The first step is to determine what exactly you need. Evaluate your current staff and take note of specific skills and experience in marketing and communications. If there are select staff members who possess such skills, review their current role on the team to determine if they can take on other responsibilities without overwhelming them or placing them on unfamiliar grounds.

Here are some questions to ask when evaluating your current internal team.

- What were their previous jobs and roles in other companies prior to being employed with you? (You may be surprised to find out what hidden skills and passions your associates have that can be used to support your objectives and needs)
- Do they have a formal education in marketing and/or communications?
- Who typically offers innovative ideas for marketing the company and selling your product and/or service offering? Who helps you to think proactively?

- For those that may possess marketing and/or communication skills:
 - What is their current role in the company and how much time do they spend on key tasks based on their present responsibilities?
 - Do they have 'extra' time to dedicate to the marketing endeavor?
 - Are they even interested in pursuing this opportunity?
 - Does their current role relate in anyway to marketing and communications activities for the department and/or entire company?
 - Do you have any design experience (Web or print)?
- What writing skills do they possess? If they do a lot of writing for the company in the form of collateral, proposals, RFPs, internal communications, etc., evaluate those pieces to see what quality and communication skills they have. You may have a 'word wizard' in your midst!

By investigating these areas, you will quickly be able to see what skills you have in-house and what will potentially need to be brought in from an outside partner relationship.

Step 2:

The outcome of this step will result in providing a clear understanding of what key marketing and communication roles need to be outsourced and what the qualifications of such an outsource partner will be most needed in the immediate term. Some basic questions to ask potential partners are:

- How long have you been in business?
- What corporate and agency specific experience does your team possess?
- How many 'active' clients do you currently working with?
- Do you have client references that I can call upon to ask about their relationship with you?
- Do you have specific experience in my industry? If so, what is it?
- What results have you produced for your clients? Do you have case studies that outline what you did, how you did it and what the results were?
- What is your account management process? How do you ensure quality throughout the process and how do you engage your clients in the project step-by-step?
- What is the average annual client budget you deal with?
- How many people will be working on my account and what are their specific roles? What value do you feel they bring to the growth of my business?
- Do you offer strategy planning as well as tactical and implementation services? If strategy, what have you done specifically and can I see some samples of plans and programs you have created?
- How do you measure the success of your agency/firm?
- How are you different (and similar) to others in your industry? What value can you bring to my company short- and long-term that others cannot?
- What services do you offer and conduct in-house – and – which ones do you outsource to service partners? (Many firms/agencies will claim to 'do it all'; however, beware of this statement. Most of them truly do not. When specific expertise or talents are needed and are not available in-house, they too find value in outsourcing to their partner network. This is a

good thing and should be freely shared with clients when asked.)

- What is your pricing structure – project based, monthly retainer, hourly rates by service, blended fee, etc.
- What do you offer for return on investment planning, measuring and tracking?

Remember, outsourcing should be viewed as a value as well as a time and budget saver if researched and managed correctly. Why slow down or stop your marketing and communication efforts all together when times get challenging. Look for new and innovative ways like outsourcing to accomplish your goals and keep the momentum necessary to ensure your future survival.