

As we approach the end of another business year, it's an excellent time to look back at your year and see how you did, where you may be able to improve and maybe be a tad more innovative in your approach to success. After all, who doesn't want to improve or be more innovative, right? But sometimes I'm reminded of that great cartoon meme where two cavemen are pushing a cart with square wheels. Another caveman walks up to them with a round wheel and says "I can help," and the two cavemen reply, "No thanks, we're too busy."

This mindset, of course is dangerous in business but sadly, quite common. We are so busy doing what we do we fail oftentimes to take a step back and see areas of opportunity and improvement. It's the basics and yet the bane of virtually every business development officer who genuinely can look at a prospect and say, we can help! Yet the business simply doesn't invest the time in seeing if a given solution would actually improve the business. So, to that end, here are five very simple signs that a marketing agency would be of benefit to your organization, because we do believe every business – regardless of size - should at the very least have some type of marketing agency representation and support to either augment or be your marketing team.

1. You don't really do a lot of marketing.

This is a very good indicator that you're either spending too much money on internal staff salaries, or you have folks that likely shouldn't be doing "marketing" doing "marketing" – such as the business development person, administrative assistant, HR or worse – you. If you average out most agency fees at between \$50 - \$150/hour (fees vary) it's pretty simple to gauge how much time is actually being invested in actual marketing activities. Knowing that the average salary of ENTRY LEVEL marketing professionals is about \$35,000/annually plus benefits, for most businesses, particularly small ones, agency is simply significantly less expensive while also gaining far more experience and expertise than an in house, entry level professional. So, if your marketing is pretty basic, you just need a few things here and there (perhaps some website updates, some social media work, a press release here and there, some presentations developed, maybe a few ads) agency is likely a far more fiscally sound choice, and most certainly, you'll get more experience. An agency professional can also assist you in laying out a proactive plan, so instead of knee jerk or reactive work, you can actually endeavor toward the achievement of core business goals.

2. Your marketing staff seems constantly overwhelmed.

So, on the other side of the coin of the business that does mainly basic marketing activity, the flip side is the internal team that is so busy all the time they are struggling simply to maintain a tactical work flow. And, when large projects come in that need to be completed, an already overwhelmed staff is no longer even treading water. Constantly working late (or overtime) or the overly demanding boss frowning on folks that actually have a life, is the top reason most in house marketing professionals stay at their job for less than 12 months (actually, research shows the average in house person in marketing changes/leaves/gets fired every nine months – that's bad). And, if you have a team that is constantly working and a fever pace, there's no time to actually step back and look at ways to improve or update or be strategic – it's simply get it done and move on to the next task. The big fallacy is that in house teams should be able to do everything, and that having an agency is just another expense. Not true. A good agency is simply there to assist when the work just becomes too much. You need to be on a monthly retainer – call an agency when you need some help on a project or contact basis. Most are happy to help. Use them when you need them, and don't when you don't.



3. You've been doing the same old same old, and is there anything else out there?

Well, of course there is! A sure fire sign that you need an agency is when you feel you're not getting fresh ideas or concepts. Or, your internal team seems to be doing okay, but are generally just pushing the rock up the hill and doing it again tomorrow and the next day. You have good programs. You have good people, but you may just need to interject some fresh ideas or look at some strategically and tactically superior ways to go about something – after all, you stopped using your fax machine didn't you? And, that VCR has been replaced, right? Just like old technology in your everyday life, there are constantly new things available to marketers to allow them to perform their job more efficiently or do something differently. Good agencies know these tools, work with them and know what would and what probably would not work for your specific business or business challenge. And, look at it this way, an agency doesn't "sell" solutions so if a given piece of software may work better, the agency can be objective in sharing that – rather than the software salesperson. That objectivity and the ability to put the right pieces together is a tremendous advantage, and you'd be amazed at how an internal team can be energized by some fresh thinking or a new campaign.

4. Your internal marketing team constantly turns over.

This is and has been a big challenge for business. As mentioned, research shows the average in house marketing professional will work for your company for about nine months – then leave for a number of reasons. Often times, the hiring company simply doesn't know what it needs when hiring a marketing professional. More times than not, the internal hire discovers the reality of the gig to not quite be what they signed on for. With a good agency (that understands your needs and your business) you have a genuine partner that is objectively there working toward your success (admit it, you can't say that about every in house hire) and can put together the perfect pieces of the agency for the

constantly varying needs of the marketing of a business. Why would you hire a social media professional when this person will likely only work (or should work) on your social media for a couple hours/week. So, pretty soon, the social media specialist is planning events, writing power point presentations, doing new business – oops, you lost another one. Hire what you need, and use what you need when you need it.

5. And the number one sign? Your numbers are down.

It's most obvious, yet all too often ignored aspect of marketing. You did benchmark all your important KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) from the previous year and have been reviewing KPI performance each month and each quarter right? And from that review, tweaking and revising work, right? If you look at the myriad of analytics (which you should review with your marketing team at least monthly) look at the trends. Are you media placements going up? Web and social media traffic? Sales numbers and trial establishment? Whatever is critical to the performance of your business, it must be measured and managed. After all, how can you manage something you can't measure? But gee, my marketing team is so nice and fun, and we did bagel Tuesday yesterday. That's great, and personality and culture is important, but you have to look at numbers, too. If things are not trending or going the way you wish, it is time to bring in a professional (that understands your type of industry or business) and have them do a quick review. In most instances, I can spot from a mile away areas of opportunity and improvement. How many in house folks will say to you: "Boss, I'm just not doing a very good job for you but I don't actually know what I'm doing or how I can improve." That would be none, so it is critical for you and the health of your business to be able to rely upon folks that can objectively advise and provide not only counsel but direction. If you haven't work with any agency ever, or in the past two or three years, do yourself a favor and bring one in to at least take a look under the hood. Just like you when you see a doctor or dentist, a little preventative care goes a long way.

