



REAL CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS DELIVER REAL RESULTS

Everyone talks about the importance of “good” client relationships, the key factors that influence them and their impact on the bottom line. But a “good” relationship isn’t enough. The best client relationships are real relationships—built over time on a solid foundation of shared values and honest communication.

IT’S A PROCESS TO DEVELOP A REAL RELATIONSHIP

For many clients, an agency relationship is a new experience and takes time to develop. It starts with a solid foundation of openness and honesty. It’s critical to clearly outline and discuss agency processes and procedures to ensure that both the account service team and the client understand these processes and the role they will play in the relationship. There is also a degree of education that must take place for a new client as it relates to the creative development process and the amount of time involved in what the agency does. An agency may present only one concept to a client, but behind that one concept there are several weeks of work, including research, brainstorming, developing and designing ideas and copywriting. Having processes in place and adhering to these processes ensures that communication between the client and the agency is clear and that expectations are managed (and exceeded) along the way.

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NURTURING THE RELATIONSHIP

There are many factors that influence the evolution of a relationship that results in a partnership. As with any relationship, listening and responding to a client builds trust, but in a true partnership there must be

more than mutual trust and respect. An agency partner is expected to deliver real results based on sound strategy, rooted in the following:

Planning—An annual strategic review of the account and a solid strategic plan are essential for the agency to be proactive and not reactive, and to enable the most efficient use of the budget.

Measure, Monitor, Adjust—In addition to annual planning, it is important to conduct quarterly reviews to identify what is working and what is not working and to define the next quarterly objectives that are strategically aligned with the plan.

Collaboration—Collaborate at every opportunity and realize that while the client may not understand everything an agency does, the client knows things about his or her business that the agency doesn’t. Regularly scheduled, in-person meetings will cement a good working relationship with the client as well as uncover needs and challenges.

Be a Strategic Asset—Become a consultative organization to the client, thinking strategically to keep educating and continuing to stay attuned to new trends, insights and technologies, ensuring that the client is constantly informed and aware.

Communication—It should go without saying, but communicate with and listen to your client. Be sure to use the client’s language. Ultimately, if the client thinks you are driving the process and things are progressing, the client will feel comfortable and the relationship will be smooth. Communicate clearly, and explain the rationale behind the choices being presented. If the client understands why decisions are being made, he or she can buy in and explain them to the stakeholders. This type of empowerment creates a strong bond between the client and the agency.

CLIENTS ARE REAL PEOPLE, TOO

Often, our clients have more than just their marketing duties on their plates, so their days and priorities may not always align with the agency's priorities. It is important for the agency to know and understand the pressures that clients are under, be accommodating yet realistic, and manage deadlines and expectations efficiently. And sometimes, clients just need an acknowledgement that they are real people, too.

DELIVERING REAL RESULTS

Results come in many forms—increased brand awareness, improving sales and profits or customer satisfaction. It is the agency's role to understand, and sometimes help the client define, the desired results—and in turn, create relevant programs. An agency can design great creative, build an impactful website or pitch a compelling PR story, but if the agency doesn't develop programs based on sound strategy executed through quality processes with measurable objectives, then it isn't delivering real results. And real relationships deliver real results.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ali Lego is Director of Client Services for Cohn Marketing in Denver, Colorado. She has more than 12 years of integrated marketing and communication experience and has executed national marketing promotions, developed corporate communications strategies and served as a spokeswoman for Fortune 500 companies, small businesses and nonprofit organizations. To learn more about Cohn Marketing and its integrated services, please visit CohnMarketing.com. You can also follow Cohn Marketing at twitter.com/cohnmarketing, become a fan on Facebook or view our profile on LinkedIn.