

THINK ABOUT THE IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS IN YOUR LIFE—YOUR SPOUSE, YOUR PARENTS, AND YOUR FRIENDS. WHAT ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR MARKETING PARTNER? TO GARNER THE MOST FROM YOUR MARKETING DOLLARS, IT MAKES SENSE TO TREAT YOUR MARKETING PARTNER WITH THE SAME EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE YOU USE TO HANDLE OTHER LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS.

Keeping the *Marketing Spark Alive*

BY BRIANNE CARARSWELL

"MARKETING COMPANIES ARE creative organizations and should be treated as such," says Nicole Baxter, director of marketing at JFK Medical Center in Atlantis, Florida. "The partnership you have with your advertising agency or publishing company is different

from the relationship you have with your accountant or CFO. Because the creative minds responsible for developing your strategic advertising campaigns rely on feedback, it's important to offer direction and encouragement to get great work."

THE SEARCH FOR YOUR PERFECT MATCH

While the excitement of the unknown can be a rush, it's a real risk to select a marketing company with no idea of its creative style, previous work, or company stability. Before you can find your ideal advertising

agency or publication company, it pays to do some research.

"One of the most important things to do when choosing a marketing company is to look at the company's Web site and get a feel for who they really are," says Baxter. "This initial research will help you eliminate

VS11P7 | order your reprints TODAY | see reply card for information |



marketing groups that will not mesh well with your organization and find companies that could potentially make great partners.”

After you have narrowed your search, identify other hospitals and healthcare organizations that currently work with the marketing company of interest. Your associates in healthcare marketing may be able to offer some useful information on the kind of partnership they have with the company.

“While it’s easy for an agency to present their best game face in an initial meeting,” says Baxter, “the clients they are already working with will be able to give you a 360 degree look at how they are to work with creatively and on a day-to-day basis.”

FINDING A GOOD BALANCE

One of the main components to a lasting marriage is finding a mate who has different strengths that can balance out your weaknesses. The same goes for the union between healthcare organization and marketing company.

“Don’t fall into the trap of picking a marketing agency that shares your strengths,” says Baxter. “In order to get the most from the company, be sure to pick a marketing partner that complements you by shoring up your areas of weakness.”

Picking a company that provides a good equilibrium to your organization is important. However, it’s equally important

to know the responsibilities you should and should not relinquish to the agency.

While you should give your agency a single point of contact, clear objectives and direction, and real budgets, you shouldn’t offer your agency strategic control, an all-inclusive monthly fee, or contracts with no “out” clauses.

“The most important thing to remember when it comes to your partnership is everything the marketing agency does reflects on you as a healthcare marketer,” says Baxter. “If you give up total strategic control and the CEO of your hospital isn’t pleased with how a particular campaign went, chances are your supervisor will still point the finger at you.”

ACCURATELY (BE HONEST) TO EVALUATE THE RESULTS

Now that you’re in a committed marketing relationship, it’s important to be honest when you communicate. Here are some tips for giving your agency the feedback they need to get the results you want:

- Say what doesn’t work and why.
- Don’t make it personal.
- Keep an open mind, but stand firm if necessary.

By keeping in mind that your relationship with your marketing company isn’t that different from the other important relationships in your life, you will ensure that your organization receives a premium product from your marketing partner. *

“More and more hospitals are turning to advertising agencies to supplement their own marketing efforts. The benefits of outside agencies are two-fold—they offer a higher level of expertise in the marketing field, as well as a different set of eyes on the same healthcare picture you are viewing as a hospital marketer.”

—Jason Brown, president of Brown Parker DeMarinis Advertising
in Delray Beach, Florida



9

THE GOLDEN RULES

Building a strong relationship with your marketing partner takes a little more work than simply paying the bills. During the 2008 Society for Healthcare Strategy and Market Development (SHSMD) Conference, Nicole Baxter, director of marketing at JFK Medical Center in Atlantis, Florida, and Jason Brown, president of Brown Parker DeManis Advertising in Delray Beach, Florida presented the nine guidelines to follow in order to build a successful partnership with your marketing company.

- 1. Agencies are emotional organizations. Treat them accordingly.** Since employees of marketing agencies are stimulated creatively, nothing constructive will come from bashing their work. Instead of telling an advertising agency that you hate their ad campaign, discuss why the campaign doesn't work and what can be done to change it to meet the needs of your organization.
- 2. Saying "thank you" or forwarding positive feedback results in better work.** Giving praise to the creative minds that work behind the scenes to provide your company with quality marketing materials will go a long way.
- 3. Agencies love clients that love their style.** It's crucial to choose a marketing company with a style that works for your organization. While marketing ideas or directions may change, a company's style is usually consistent.
- 4. Let the agency hear the decision maker's feedback firsthand.** By allowing your marketing company to receive feedback from the CEO or the higher-ups in the company, you can help ensure that their views are addressed.
- 5. Do your best to trust your agency.** This is the most important component of the client/agency relationship. While it's important to be clear about what you want from your agency, you must relinquish some control and trust the company's creative judgment.
- 6. Try to ensure you are a profitable account for the agency.** Make sure that if your organization expects top-quality work, you pay the agency accordingly. While money allocated for marketing can be tight, you don't want to constantly be asking your agency to provide additional work at no cost.
- 7. Build a relationship with agency management.** If a problem arises, it's good to have an established relationship with the managers of the agency. This way, you can go directly to them with your concern, and they can act as a gatekeeper in solving the issue.
- 8. Meet your financial obligations.** If you neglect to pay your bills in a timely manner, you may automatically fall to the bottom of the pile of your agency's to-do list.
- 9. Offer a testimonial for the company.** Nothing goes further with a marketing company than to offer to be a testimonial of your partnership. Once you have become a spokesperson for the agency, they will work even harder to ensure your happiness with the relationship.