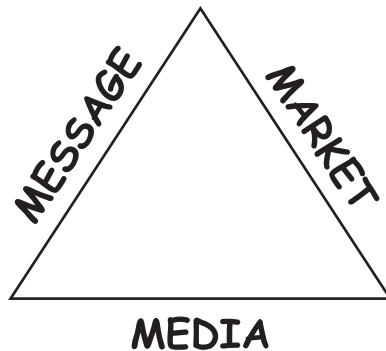


## Hiring and Firing the Experts



The typical businessperson will face a whole array of experts eager to help him or her—for a price. These notably include advertising agencies and marketing consultants. I have owned an ad agency, I am a marketing consultant, and I'm going to tell you that you've gotta watch out for us!

My friend and colleague Bill Brooks defines “consultant” as somebody who knows 357 sexual positions but can't get a date for Friday night. It's not an unfair characterization.

## You Are the Expert

My very best word of caution is this: remember that you are the number one expert in your business. Nobody has the feel for it that you do. And you must never let a hired gun talk you into doing something that feels totally wrong to you. Trust your instincts.

Also, I suggest using experts to do a better job of what you could do if you had to. I think you need to know enough about advertising, marketing, and promotion to do your own before you turn it over to other experts. This way, you can tell good from bad and right from wrong.

It frightens me when a client delegates 100 percent of his marketing decisions to me or some other outsider. I prefer working as a collaborator by matching my marketing expertise with his unequalled understanding of his own business.

### ULTIMATE MARKETING SIN #5 Abdicating Control

If a consultant gets huffy about explaining his reasoning and rationale for his suggestions and his work—shoot him. (Or, at the very least, fire him.) You have a right to pass judgment on his reasoning.

## How to Hire an Advertising or Marketing Pro

Before you hire an expert, determine that the person's expert status comes from experience, not theory. I am constantly amused by the consulting firms and ad agencies that employ people directly from college—I'd never, ever, hire such a person. There is a night-and-day difference between solving marketing problems in the classroom and in the real world; there is a red-and-green difference between creating an ad in six weeks in the classroom and figuring out how to fix a headline in six minutes under the

deadly deadlines of real life. The big-name firms who hire wet-behind-the-ears MBAs do their clients a grave disservice.

I suggest you hire experts with real-world experience: somebody with bruises and battle scars, who started out at the broom-in-hand level and clawed his way up. Determine whether or not he knows how to sell.

Incidentally, I happen to be one of the highest fee, highest paid direct-response copywriters in America (based on copywriters' fees published in the industry directory "Who's Charging What"), and I know most of the top pros. And I know a little secret nearly all of us share. We have some kind of direct, face-to-face, nose-to-nose, toes-to-toes selling experience. Vacuum cleaners, water filters, encyclopedias, pool cleaners, insurance, something. We know how to sell and transfer that to the different marketing media we work in. I advise great caution in letting anyone work with you or for you on your advertising and marketing who lacks such experience.

Let me tell you a little secret about a lot of ad agencies: they hire outside consultants to help them prepare presentations to new clients because, without help, they can't even sell their own services!

Determine whether or not your expert has successful *direct*-marketing experience. That means that, through print or broadcast, he has managed to get people to go to the phone or mailbox and exchange their hard-earned bucks for his products. Any goof can create good institutional (image) advertising. This is no-brainer stuff. Worse, nobody can measure whether it's good or bad. I'd like to hear Goodyear's story of *exactly* how much revenue is produced as a result of the blimp.

Ad agencies love institutional advertising. They hate direct response.

Most ad agencies like to get paid by fees and a percentage of all the money the client spends buying media. Good direct-marketing pros like to get paid based on the sales or results of the campaigns they create. That tells you a lot.

Determine whether or not the marketing professional you're thinking of hiring has some experience with a business, product, or service similar to yours. I turn down clients with businesses I have no feel for and experience with, and I call that integrity. In the rare cases where I deal with a business that is totally foreign to me, I freely disclose that to the client and I appropriately discount my compensation. I call that integrity, too.

## **Warning Signs of Experts to Avoid Like the Plague**

Not long ago, I was brought in to try to fix an infomercial that had been badly botched by its producers and had proven to be a gold-plated flop. Sitting in the editing facility, I was grumbling and ranting and raving, wondering out loud how anybody could louse up a production so bad.

The editing engineer said, "Let me answer that. The producer told me he thought this project was a loser and his objective was to use the client's money to his own best advantage, to get a few clips that would make his portfolio look good."

Every time I go into an agency with a wall full of awards, I wonder whether they're working for their clients or the award committees. It is worth mentioning that a lot of the advertising that wins awards performs poorly. Agencies that win awards often lose the clients involved in the award-winning campaigns.

Some of the most productive, profitable advertising and marketing in the history of the planet could never qualify for any of the awards. Much of the best marketing gets its results in an ugly way. There may even be a formulaic relationship of awards to profitable results for clients. If there is, it'd be: the fewer awards, the better the clients' results.

Along these same lines, an aversion to long copy and a love of "white space" is a dead-bang giveaway of an inept expert.

I was once having lunch with a client of mine and with a guy who was trying to sell my client on joining a new advertising co-op. The co-op guy spent ten minutes criticizing my client's current ad, telling him it was

too cluttered, had much too much copy, and so on. When he finally shut up, my client innocently responded: “Well, maybe you’re right. It only pulls an eight-times return on investment. How much better do you think your group will do?”

The poor guy almost needed the Heimlich maneuver.

Take a look at the work being done by the pro you’re thinking about hiring and see how closely it conforms to the principles presented in my book *The Ultimate Sales Letter*. If your pro’s copywriting methods differ greatly from those described in my book—run! That may sound arrogant, maybe even closed-minded, but that’s just the way it is.

Now here’s the big danger signal: refusal or reluctance to provide a number of satisfied, successful clients you can call and talk to. Certainly there are instances in which confidentiality precludes a consultant from revealing clients. That does exist. But it is the exception, not the norm. Any ad agency or marketing pro worth his salt should be able to provide a number of good references and, when checked out, those references should be thrilled with the work of the consultant. Anything less than this is simply unacceptable. Get and check references.