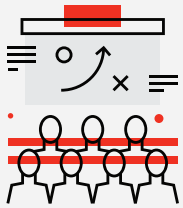


7 Questions to Ask When Vetting an Outsourced Marketing Firm

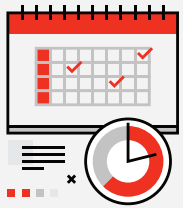
Chris Ciunci, Managing Partner, TribalVision

Under the right circumstances, outsourcing your marketing can be one of the smartest decisions you'll make with your business strategy. Whether you are looking to compliment your existing team's efforts or are fully outsourcing your marketing efforts, hiring a team of marketing experts can be a powerful solution. A reputable outsourced marketing firm can bring a depth of expertise and library of lead generation deliverables that an internal hire will be unable to match. Before jumping in, however, you'll need to be equipped with the right questions to ask the firms you are vetting so that you finish with a winner versus a lemon. With that said, we have come up with seven key questions to ask during the dating process that will greatly increase your chances of long-term outsourced marketing success versus ending up with a firm that crashes and burns after an agreement is signed.



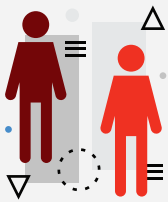
1. How will we be communicating?

If you plan on allowing someone else to spearhead your marketing efforts and speak on behalf of your brand, it's imperative to be kept in the loop. How transparent are they going to be with you when it comes to their efforts? Do they intend on checking in with progress updates once a day, once a week, once a month? Will it be via phone, email, Skype or in person meetings? Is there a clear process that's been built around this communication or is it casual? In our experience, casual is not good and you will end up having to chase vs. being led. You should also ask what project management tools and platforms the firm is using to collaborate with your team. Are they using Google Drive or Basecamp to file share and collaborate with your team or are they randomly sending you files via email? While you should not micromanage your newfound marketing team, it's crucial to expect a structured communication process that supports a healthy transfer of ideas and feedback. Without this, they will feel like a vendor you are chasing versus a partner that blends well with your internal team



2. How do you plan on quantifying our marketing efforts?

In today's digital world, marketing firms have access to the dashboards, tracking tools and analytics software necessary to fully measure all of your marketing spend. In our experience, many firms, however, are hesitant to track and measure their efforts. Why put yourself on the hot seat with measuring marketing ROI if the client is not demanding full transparency of all deployed marketing initiatives? Some questions you should ask include the tracking tools they will be using, how they will be presenting the results of their efforts (a basic Word document vs. built out Excel spreadsheet vs. a high end dashboard software) and what key performance indicators (KPIs) they will be consistently measuring and reporting on. Some examples of KPIs include: Cost per Lead, Cost per Acquisition, and Return on Ad Spend. To be sure they're diligently measuring the tactics they implement, consider requesting a list of measurement tools that their team is currently utilizing for their existing clients, which tools they plan to use for your campaign, as well as which metrics will be used in the reports they present to you.



3. How much turnover is there on a typical team?

A high employee turnover rate from the team dedicated to your account can cripple your growth initiatives and stop any momentum you might have enjoyed. Imagine spending six months bringing your outsourced marketing team up to speed on the nuances of your industry and growth efforts and then having to start over with a new team member replacing the person that left. In the marketing world, this reality happens far too often. While there are no guarantees of someone staying with you for the long term – whether it's an internal hire or a member of your outsourced marketing team – you should proactively ask what the firm's employee retention rate is. Make sure to be specific by asking how many employees have left the company in the past 12 months and what the average duration of each employee is at the firm. You should also ask what they are doing to ensure they have engaged, happy and productive employees. Is it a marketing sweat shop environment or are the firm leaders actively investing in their team? Most importantly, who wants to work with a company whose team is not passionate about what they do? I doubt they will be doing their best work for you and going the extra mile to ensure your marketing objectives are being met.



4. What are you doing to grow your own company?

While it's paramount to fully understand what your outsourced firm will be doing to grow your organization, make sure they're effectively growing their own company first. If the outsourced marketing firm you're trusting to drive leads and grow your company isn't growing their own business, then how can you expect sufficient results? That's like hiring a health coach who isn't in shape. Questions you should ask include; "How are you driving leads, what marketing channels are you leveraging, what are your top performing channels, and are you using the same channels and tactics you're recommending to our own firm? The final kicker question should be "How much are you spending on marketing for your own efforts?" If the answer is "very little", then you should be suspect. How can they justify you spending money on marketing if they aren't seeing value in doing it for themselves? Perhaps they feel like it won't drive results? Bottom line: make sure to work with a marketing firm that's walking the walk.



5. What training is your team receiving to stay current?

In addition to company growth, discover whether or not the firm's employees are experiencing growth themselves. With the marketing landscape evolving at lightning speed, marketers need to stay ahead of the curve and on top of the modern tools, tactics, and technologies that are evolving and sprouting up everywhere. A mastery of digital tactics that was sufficient last year now might be dated and not nearly as effective. Given this reality, you need to make sure the marketing firm you are partnering with is providing their team with the cutting edge training necessary to stay current and fresh. If regular training isn't offered to their employees, is it realistic to expect modern concepts to be brought to you as you move forward with your relationship? Just remember that if your hired marketers aren't progressing, your marketing won't either.



6. What is your track record of driving results?

A way to quickly cut to the chase when being sold by an outsourced marketing firm's salesperson on the benefits of working together is to ask a simple question: "What results have you driven for clients you've worked with in the past?" If the answer is stumbling, defensive or not quantifiable, I would hit the pause button and look elsewhere. You need to also make sure that the answer is very specific and not generalized. For example, rather than the reply being, "Why yes of course we drive results and we have many happy clients who love our work", it should instead be packed with specific examples of driving top line growth. A good answer could be, "Over the past 3 years, we have driven double digit annual revenue growth with 75% of our clients. We also have dozens of client video testimonials speaking to our impact, multiple 5-star Google reviews of our work and a Results section of our website that highlights the lead generation and revenue growth we have achieved for our clients over the years." Also note that if they can't highlight 3rd party verification of their claims, I'd be wary. Lastly, ask for a few references of existing clients so you can hear directly from the horse's mouth versus having to trust a salesperson who is eager to close a deal.



7. Who will be dedicated to my account?

While you might have fallen in love with the initial sales person who sold you, he/she is most likely not going to be leading your marketing efforts once an agreement is signed. Before signing an agreement, you should ask for the bios of the team assigned to your organization and request a phone call or in-person meet and greet to make sure that there is a personality fit and also a level of competency that you were promised. You should also ask who your day-to-day point person will be and who will be performing most of the work. Oftentimes, both roles are delegated to a lower level team member who is not equipped with the experience nor expertise needed to drive your marketing efforts.



About TribalVision

As an outsourced marketing department for hire, TribalVision's mission is to help companies grow. This is achieved by combining intelligent strategy with tactical execution in a hands-on, results-driven manner. TribalVision utilizes its clients' marketing budgets as efficiently and intelligently as possible – ensuring that each dollar spent maximizes awareness and generates new business. TribalVision's unique marketing model is designed to fully align interests with client outcomes – guaranteeing an objective, client-first partnership. This is demonstrated in the firm's fee-based compensation structure, "roll up your sleeves" mindset, metrics-driven approach, and role as a trusted marketing resource tasked to help navigate organizations to higher grounds. To learn more about TribalVision, visit www.TribalVision.com.