

Predicting the future is easier than you think

While marketers might focus their decision on choosing a new agency based on an agencies' past performance, this could well be only half of what needs to be assessed when selecting a new agency. So says Johanna McDowell, MD of the Independent Agency Search & Selection company (IAS), "Look to the future and ask the key questions," she suggests.



Choosing an agency

First and foremost when appointing an agency to represent a brand a marketer always takes into account the agency's location, size, lack of conflicting business and the team's capabilities. But most marketers might never think to look at an agency's business focus for the future.

"A marketer will always, by nature, focus on the future. This same application should happen during an agency selection process. In our experience asking the agency what their vision is for the future will help a marketer understand how an agency really thinks," says McDowell.

Establish how the agency views their business. "By understanding where they see advertising, digital and media is heading in the near and distant future, a marketer will obtain a good understanding of how they would be able to add real value," advises McDowell.

Growth, is it important?

Find out if the agency is planning to grow - "Are they hiring? If they are hiring it is usually a sign that they are planning to grow and you, as marketer and prospective client of the agency, can see in what areas they expect growth by the expertise they are hiring", recommends McDowell.

"Ask them what they are presently working on and what has worked for them in the past - you are not asking for trade secrets - it's about finding out their real-time enthusiasm, creative style and confidence."

When it comes to establishing how they tackle problems present them with a hypothetical problem and ask how they propose to solve the issue. This will give you an idea of how they would tackle future problems," says McDowell.

Work out how thought leaders think

One of the great things about investigating future thought is to establish who the real thought leaders are. It's easy, just look at the agency and the staff's Twitter feeds, blogs, their Facebook pages and ask where current thought leadership is coming from. McDowell believes these answers help to determine if the agency fits in with your business ethic.

When you meet the agency for the first time or if you are examining written credentials look for what they describe as their 'big picture' - is the big picture an evolving multi-channel, multi-screen experience or is it just traditional media. How would this fit into your requirements? Good chemistry is critical to any successful relationship.

Take a walk

Finally, one of the most important evaluations you can do is visit the agency. Walk around and look at how groups are positioned for idea exchange and collaboration - is the vibe happy and relaxed? Is it too formal? It is these teams that will be executing your work if you choose them.

McDowell concludes, "One of the cornerstones of our agency selection process is the chemistry session between client

and agency, often the first time they all meet. A walk around the agency is an obligatory part of this chemistry session. It is a window into the agency's world and its future."

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