
IS IT TIME TO FIRE YOUR MARKETING COMPANY?

Let's take the quiz...

There are **15** points of review one should look at, with a cynical and cranky demeanor, as to whether your marketing company is helping or hurting you. Yes, marketing companies can actually harm your school, paving the way to losing you market share. That's nasty.

1. Does your marketing company claim expertise in things they know little about?

- Are they EDU specific?
- Do they have a constant turnover of “account managers?”
- Are you dealing with seasoned experts or largely recent, green college graduates?
- Are the people doing the “real work” junior staff or offshore contractors?
- Does staff receive regular training and mentoring?

Assignment: Ask your Account Rep about obscure industry items. If they fail to answer, run away!

2. Are you paying the marketing company a percentage of your ad spend?

- Are you constantly enduring surcharges?

Percentage deals inspire agencies to spend more of ‘your’ money. Best practice is to work for a negotiated flat fee with a guarantee attached.

3. Are they really just a front for outsources services?

- Can you reach more than one person?
- Can you get simple website / technical tweaks turned around in a timely manner?

Best Practice: Your marketing company needs to hire the subject experts full time. If not, run away!

4. Do you own your Adwords account?

- If you can't login to view / evaluate your own Adwords account, that's a problem. If you can't access your own Google Analytics, that's a problem. Should you part ways, you lose a huge asset.

Best Practice: As a school owner, you 'must' own your Google accounts, all URLs for all your websites, social media account...everything... Why? They are hugely valuable, worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. If they won't turn over the accounts to you, insist they do so, then run away!

5. Do you own everything?

- Is every service pitched and packaged as an upsell? (i.e. Do you want a side of SEO with your paid search?)
- Is every phone call requiring a "buying decision"?
- Do they require a lengthy contract?
- Are their reports padded with impressive-sounding, but meaningless stats such as impressions, page views, etc.?

Best Practice: focus on the bottom line numbers that guide real decision making.

6. Does your marketing company claim a big 'home run' idea and set up expectations of perfection?

- There are simply too many external variables to make definitive promises on how a campaign will shape over time and whether a big idea will work or not.

Best Practice: Your marketing company should be a big laboratory, constantly split-testing ideas, copy, design elements, traffic pools, etc. A good company will get you to 80% of best practice After that, it's all about testing. If your marketing company is lazy, then get on that Jet Plane and fly away!

7. Do they never contact you, so you don't have access to subject experts?

Best Practice: There should be a Conversion Team Leader who is accountable for results. The CTL leads subject experts in testing, getting stuff done. If you can't get a hold of subject experts assigned to your workflows, if a 'suit' is a choke point for you, get a new plan Stan...

8. Do they innovate?

- When was the last time your agency came to you with legitimate insights?
- In your gut, do you trust them to tell the truth, even if it the truth might make them look bad?
- Can they demonstrate legitimate innovation and thought-leadership?

Best Practice: You deserve to have people constantly testing insights with an eye to improving lead flow out of your existing budget. Dedication to conversion rate best practices beats just buying crappy pools of media or third party leads.

9. Are they accountable? Do they guarantee their work?

Best Practice: Ask your marketing company if they guarantee their work. If they say no, run like hell!

10. Do your reports come in an excel spread sheet?

Please...in today's data-driven world, if an agency is sending you a compiled spreadsheet with your "clicks and engagements" - you've got a problem.

11. Can they justify efforts / spends in Social Media with cold, hard numbers and "legitimate leads"?

*Social media is only one branding tactic, yet it seems to be put on a pedestal as a cure-all. If your marketing company has one solution as a cure-all, that would mean they are selling you their **stuff**, rather than fulfilling a need.*

12. Are they in pursuit of the truth on your behalf?

- Does your marketing company have your back?
- Do their self-interests drive their activities?

Your marketing company should always have your back.

13. Does your marketing company claim they can do everything at a high level?

- Often this is not true...

Best Practice: Give your marketing company permission to partner with specialists if need be to maximize your ROI.

14. Does your marketing company use your hard-earned brand to generate leads for you, then charge you for the privilege to do so?

- Will they work with competing schools in the same market?
- Do they make the majority of their money aggregating leads?

If a lead gen company uses the name of your business to generate leads for you—charging you a fee to do so—then turns around and resells said leads to your competitors, that's a bit daft, is it not? Well it happens all the time in the third-party lead generation industry. Type your school's name into several search engines and see if others are using your hard-earned brand to line their pockets...ugh.

15. Does your marketing company encourage ways for you to become a world class institution?

*The most powerful of the four P's of marketing is **Product**. It is tough to market a mediocre offering and your marketing company needs to say so: that is pursuit of the truth at its best. If you have a world-class offering, you can reduce marketing costs, become more ethical in your communication, admissions reps can advise instead of manipulating, and employers will line up to hire your grads. That is the strategic answer we must pursue together.*

At day's end, this isn't about ratting out marketing companies. You may have an excellent relationship that is worth keeping. Remember, you do have the right, given you are paying the bills, to expect your marketing company to operate on all cylinders. This little checklist will give you a leg up.