



Mastering Agency Relationships

The many hats marketers must wear to turn agencies into valuable resources and effective collaborators.

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Every year, I attend an event organized by the Association of National Advertisers titled “Masters of Marketing.” At 3,000+ attendees strong, the conference draws top talent from major brands, agencies, and a vast ecosystem of vendors that enable marketing as a discipline. The standard definition of “Mastery” implies both breadth and depth of knowledge. The marketing profession has always taken much pride in continuously advancing thought-leadership across a wide range of marketing responsibilities.

Every year, talented Chief Marketing Officers reveal their recipes for success to an audience eager to learn best practices. Although the name of the event – Masters of Marketing – is without a doubt aimed at building pride in our profession, the concept of “Mastery” intrigued me in the context of how clients and agencies come together to create outstanding work that propels brands forward. It occurred to me that marketers – not just marketing leaders – who work daily with agencies are aspiring to improve and “master” these critical skills. The following is a list of core responsibilities marketers must take on when working with agencies, followed by a definition of what mastery means for each.

Here is a list of the most common “actions” marketers take:



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Marketers must not only fulfill these important responsibilities but refine them to perfection if they are to realize the full benefits of these activities. Let’s take a closer look at each:



A Aligning the right agency partner to the right assignments:

Commonly referred to as the “search” process or “agency selection,” marketers – in the trenches day in and day out – are the most qualified to match the right agency resources to their projects. They consider several data points including the specific skills and experiences each agency offers before selecting the best match for their assignment.

To master this skill, they often rely on information supplied by the agencies themselves or “agency profiles” maintained by their organization to help them make well-informed decisions.



C Clarifying SOW expectations through comprehensive planning & resource allocation:

Commonly referred to as “planning” or “scope management,” marketers ultimately own the work they expect agencies to take on during the fiscal calendar. They are therefore on point to clarify their expectations for the



T Translating needs into regular and clear input briefs to the agency:

Commonly referred to as “agency briefing” or “client input briefing,” marketers are expected to provide clear direction to the agencies when the work is being kicked off. The input brief and process are the means by which marketers can convey detailed project requirements, which they do throughout the course of the year.

To master this skill, marketers must provide consistent and quality input – marketing and communication objectives, timing, mandatories, and other key considerations – to set the agency up for success.



I Influencing great work with ongoing thoughtful and actionable work input:

Commonly referred to as “creative feedback” or “work feedback” (based on the nature of the

work), marketers are asked to review the work and comment on the initial rounds of work presented to them. This important process ensures that client input is incorporated into the work product before it is finalized.

To master this skill, marketers must learn and practice the art form of providing thoughtful input to the agency about the work. The quality and timeliness of that input will materially affect the quality and, ultimately, the performance of the work.



O Offering practical and constructive feedback about the performance and relationship:

Commonly referred to as “client/agency performance evaluations,” marketers are invited to provide feedback on the performance of the agency across several categories like “collaboration”, “innovation”, “account management”, “strategy,” and so on. They are asked about the quality of the partnership, annually or twice a year. They provide feedback to the agencies (and agencies often provide feedback to the client as well) so the partnership can grow stronger.

To master this skill, marketers must learn what constitutes constructive performance feedback, make it actionable, and take accountability for the input they get from agencies as well.



N Nurturing the partnership by being a great collaborator and facilitator:

Marketers are instrumental in building and improving the relationship with their agencies.

Agencies expect their clients to be great facilitators and collaborators, so they are well equipped to deliver sustained value throughout their engagement.

To master this skill, marketers must be aware of how agencies work, what they need in order to do what they do best, and be willing to commit to delivering against these expectations. For example, the marketer’s ability to share information, make himself/herself available to their agency or treat them as true partners will have a direct relationship on the quality of the partnership and the performance of the work.

In summary, marketers must take immediate ACTION to positively impact the work that they rely on their agencies to

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produce. When they do, they set their agency partners up to be successful at meeting their own marketing objectives. You see, an agency is only as good as their client’s ability to enable them. And that’s what mastering agency relationships is all about.



If you would like to learn how to drive greater value from your client/agency relationships, consider reading best-seller and industry reference Agency Mania:

<https://agencymania.com/book/>

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Bruno Galpois is the co-founder of Agency Mania Solutions, a premier service and technology firm specialized in helping companies realize the transformational value of managed partnerships. Bruno is the author of best-seller “Agency Mania” and the former chair of the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) Client/Agency Committee and a faculty member of the ANA School of Marketing.

Our clients’ continued accomplishments result from cutting-edge practices in the area of client/agency performance evaluations. See how stronger relationships contribute to better marketing.

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