



Discovering Pearls: How To Find The Perfect Agency Partner

A natural pearl in an oyster is one of nature’s most remarkable and rare achievements. In the turbulent waters of the brand world, an ideal agency partnership can be similarly hard to find—but very rewarding.

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The chances of finding a natural pearl in an oyster are very low. It is estimated that one in 10,000 wild oysters yield a pearl, and the odds are that 1 in 1 million of those contain a pearl of gemstone quality, according to ThePearlSource.com. Obviously, natural pearls are highly prized. In my experience working with numerous

agencies, finding the right agency partner as a brand advertiser is much like the quest for a pearl within an oyster. Both endeavors benefit from patience, planning, discernment and an understanding of intrinsic value. Just as a precious natural pearl forms through a complex process within the oyster, a successful partnership between a brand and an agency tends to emerge through careful selection and nurturing of the relationship. This metaphor underscores the meticulous and strategic effort that can help you discover an agency partner that aligns perfectly with your brand’s vision and goals and ultimately leads to harmonious and productive collaboration. Let’s look into how you can get there.

Well-Established Agency Pearls

Searching for and finding agency partners, and ensuring that the relationship yields exceptional results and stands the test of time, is demanding but possible, as evidenced by well-established gems in the agency world. Some of these gems have been known to win industry awards, represent the lion’s share of the work done on behalf of the world’s largest brands, attract top talent and be identified with many of the most iconic campaigns.

The majority are part of large or midsize holding companies and are traded publicly, like Publicis Groupe, Accenture, WPP, Omnicom Group, Interpublic Group, Havas, Dentsu, Stagwell and S4 Capital (in no particular order); or from independent shops like Wieden+Kennedy (for integrated marketing and creative) and Horizon Media (for media planning and buying). As a brand, choosing a

well-established player often reduces your risk. Well-established firms tend to have proven processes and years of experience servicing the most sophisticated advertisers.

Yet such track records and reputations are no guarantee of success. In my experience, having the right talent and the right skills applied to a specific marketing challenge, supported by the most appropriate engagement framework and agency management practices, are also important ingredients to getting the most value from your agency partners.

New and Upcoming Agency Pearls

Small and specialized agencies are emerging daily around the world. Whether niche players or boutique agencies, these entrepreneurial entities are typically betting on their agility and expertise to help them carve a chunk of brands' marketing budgets. Upstart agencies can be exciting options if your brand is looking for a fresh, original approach to advertising and marketing. Such agencies often land a portion of brands' budgets while also complementing an array of other agencies and operating under retainer, or simply on a project-to-project basis.

The world of agencies is expanding exponentially in terms of breadth

and depth of services. According to IBISWorld, there were over 433,000 advertising agencies worldwide in 2024, including almost 90,000 in the U.S., a 4.1% increase from 2022. Global advertising agencies showed a 2.6% average yearly growth between 2019 and 2024. The industry is exceptionally dynamic, constantly evolving and adapting to trends, technologies and market demands.

How to Best Align Your Project with the Right Agency Pearl

Whether you are choosing from well-established or new and upcoming agencies, the key is to align their talent to your needs. Even the best agencies in the world might be ill-equipped to take on a particular marketing task and deliver great work unless they have the right people and skills. Be aware of your budget, as large agencies may turn out to be too expensive to cost-effectively carry out a given assignment. Finding an agency with the right skills, experience and pricing to support your brand's marketing objective can be something of an art form. There are numerous tools available that can help with your search. For example, some brand advertisers use roster tools that facilitate the search, discovery and alignment processes. (Full disclosure: My company offers these services, as do others.) This can make it easier for

your marketing team to look up agencies and their work history, as well as key people and resources to consider and compare before selecting the best, most qualified option. Remember that working with the best agencies alone doesn't guarantee success; oftentimes, it's knowing how to use your agency's resources that can make the difference.

Natural versus Cultured Agency Pearls

Natural pearls form without human intervention, which makes them much rarer. For context, it is estimated that only [0.005% of the world's pearls](#) are natural (the rest are cultured). I believe agency partnership pearls also need to be meticulously formed and cultivated, with their true value emerging from a process of mutual alignment, accountability and value creation.

I hope my metaphor comparing pearls and the pursuit of the perfect agency partner will be a source of inspiration for you and your organization. We all know the long-term value of a strong agency partnership that repeatedly delivers outstanding work: priceless. Find your agency pearl and hang on to it. We all know the long-term value of a strong agency partnership that repeatedly delivers outstanding work: priceless. Find your agency pearl and hang on to it. ■



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Bruno Gralpois 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 agency management. See how stronger relationships contribute to better marketing.

