

Do you have a working process or prolapse? Methods for resource management and efficiency

Have you ever had one of those fights with your partner that starts with something fairly innocuous like “who didn’t put the dishes away” but somehow escalates to dredging up those suspicions of an affair 5 years ago and a complete character assassination?

Having a poor working process between client and agency is just like the “putting dishes away” part of this story. Something so inherent in the every day that it is rarely examined, but when it starts to dysfunction, can rapidly open the door to total relationship break down.

Further, when a good working process is developed, both sides win. Marketers who develop ‘efficiency skills’ find that their agencies are more motivated to work with them, produce better ideas faster, and agencies can get more passionate about the work rather than bogged down in process and politics – so ultimately the best outcome is achieved.

Some fundamentals for Process Improvement

- 1. Mindset and Behaviour change**
The secret to process improvement is a mindset change and a behaviour change in the marketing department. It is recognition that the communications process is not something that can be ‘outsourced’ to a third party – rather it is an engaged, collaborative experience where both sides invest time together to develop an outcome, both bringing their individual skills and expertise to the task.
- 2. Key stakeholders are engaged immediately**
If the marketing director or functional head and the agency CEO need to be involved in a piece of communication, then they need to be involved upfront – not three or four weeks into the process. They need to show leadership and give clear direction – as well as be there for the first creative development direction.
- 3. Start with concepts - reduce agency costs and time on creative**
If the brief from the client is for an integrated campaign involving mailers , education, print, etc – the agency should not come back with all elements in the first meeting. The cost of development of all this is too great – the risks of failure too high.

The starting point should be a concept that reflects the brief. This could be a mood board, it could be one element of the campaign, it could be a line or

core idea. Whatever it is, it needs to be enough to first align that the communications brief is heading in the right direction to being answered.

Following that alignment, having the agency's creative teams develop and extend all the elements becomes far more cost efficient – the core platform is already agreed, the move is now an adaptation of that, not risking several items design where there is no upfront buy-in and alignment.

4. Treat revisions seriously

Because of the different levels of internal approval and in many cases regulatory approval, getting alignment on work is never easy. Both sides need to treat each round of revisions seriously with the mindset it will be the last, collecting all possible changes so they can be consolidated appropriately. Rushing through feedback and giving sloppy revisions instructions in an effort to save time will only amount to delays when another round of corrections is required.

5. Track (even incentivize) process times

In the best relationships, the time it takes to complete tasks is measured as a KPI for both sides going forward. Some agencies can even help construct incentives relating to completion on time or ahead of time.

6. Share best practice

For many clients, there are many individual agency relationships being managed – even multiple relationships with the same agency. There should be a facility on all sides to share best practice and learning to drive ongoing process success.

Process breakdowns are probably one of the worse reasons for client-agency disharmony. So work out upfront “who is putting the dishes away” - and how and when it's expected to happen and those niggling issues shouldn't blow out to full scale relationship collapse.

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