

How to Evaluate a Marketing Professional: 10 Due Diligence Questions to Make Sure You'll Get Help Worth Paying For

If you know you need help marketing your business, you may consider hiring an agency or marketing consultant to advise you and provide professional services. **CAUTION: Not all marketing professionals are alike.** Many people who offer marketing and advertising services don't have the background or track record to justify their fees. Make sure you get the help you need and avoid wasting your money. Use these questions to weed out the poorly qualified practitioners.

1. **What are your credentials?** The marketing/advertising industry abounds with millions of people who provide various promotional services and advice for a fee—including ad agencies, direct marketing companies, graphic and web designers, marketing consultants, etc. The list is endless. Yet surprisingly few have relevant, comprehensive credentials that qualify them to provide you with effective advice that can actually grow your business.

Tip: Consider asking prospective providers to submit written answers detailing the following:

- **Educational background-** do they have a degree in marketing, communications, business or other fields directly related to the services they offer?
- **Relevant experience-** how many years of career experience do they have in directly related fields, and what kinds of positions did they hold?
- **Professional certification-** have they completed any special courses and earned a certification directly related to marketing and advertising?
- **Special training-** have they completed special seminars, workshops, advanced training programs, etc. directly related to marketing?
- **Awards-** have they won any awards for their work in marketing, and what were those awards?
- **Public speaking-** have they formally presented to audiences on marketing related topics?
- **Professional associations-** does their background include involvement in advertising and marketing related professional associations, and what are they?

If the list is scant or they can't provide specific information, keep looking until you find a competent, qualified practitioner.

2. **Do you use a marketing system?** Many marketing practitioners concentrate only on tactics, such as slapping together an ad, direct mail program or media campaign. Good marketing should be based on a comprehensive system that is strategically engineered to touch customers and prospects consistently over time and wherever they encounter your business. Look for evidence of a full-scale marketing system and avoid "one-trick ponies."
3. **How do you work with clients?** They should be able to clearly explain what they do in an organized fashion. This should include a formal checklist of how they provide service so you can evaluate their approach before paying them for help.

4. **How do I know you can get results?** While each company's situation is unique, the practitioner should be able to provide specific case studies and/or testimonials supporting their methods. If they cannot or will not do so, then they probably aren't a good choice.
5. **Can you help me improve my competitive advantage?** Truly successful marketing includes having a better story to tell and telling a better story. Ask how the practitioner plans to help you innovate and improve your company through the marketing process. If they only work with images or messaging, you're missing an important part of the equation.
6. **How long will it take to get results?** An effective, full-scale marketing program that precisely targets your market takes a few months to build. If you need to jumpstart the sales process immediately, they should be able to explain how they will accomplish that. They should also tell you that you are an important factor in how fast results can be obtained. As tempted as you may be to fall for promises of fast results, be wary of anyone who offers you a "magic bullet."
7. **What do you do to minimize my risk of making bad marketing investments?** Any marketer who doesn't test ideas before committing full-scale dollars toward the effort is at risk of wasting ad dollars. If the practitioner doesn't talk about testing, move on. They don't know how or don't care about testing. Find someone who will help you guard your budget.
8. **Can you help me calculate the Return on Investment (ROI)?** After proper market tests have been conducted, the practitioner should be able to help you project the ROI on any proposed advertising. The critical element of this analysis is how many leads will be generated. The second most important element of the ROI analysis is how many of those leads can be converted to sales.
9. **What business associations do you belong to?** A solid, reputable marketing agency should have strong ties to the business community. Look for a current membership in a local chamber of commerce or other business building association.
10. **Will you furnish samples and/or references?** References are important, and you should ask for some. Perhaps an even better way to evaluate a marketing consultant is to examine work they have done for other clients. Ask to see relevant samples.