

## How to Select a Marketing Consultant



by Kevin W. Brown, M.B.A.

For any profession, perceived competence is due to a combination of elements, which typically include education, breadth of experience, technical capabilities, work habits, client service skills, business and administrative structure. The bottom-line is whether they were able to complete the job satisfactorily.

To help screen out consultants who may not be the best match for your firm's marketing needs, here are five tips:

### (1) Ask them to define marketing.

Many people call themselves marketing consultants but cannot even properly explain the term. Marketing, in its simplest form, is actually everything your organization does in order to identify and satisfy the needs and wants of your "market" (actual and potential buyers of your product or service). Subsets of marketing include strategic planning, marketing research, public relations, advertising, and sales. If you need help in more than one area of marketing, especially in strategy development, you should consider hiring a true marketing consultant.

### (2) Ask about their credentials and experience.

Are they truly marketing consultants or are they no more than a public relations firm or advertising agency? Most qualified marketing consultants have degrees in marketing, not communications, and many have graduate degrees such as an M.B.A.. They should also have experience in all areas of marketing, which enables them to select and integrate those marketing components that will work best for your needs.

### (3) Choose a specialist in law firm or professional services marketing.

Why pay for a generalist when you can have someone who truly understands your market and how to motivate

buyers? Ask them what they have done for similar law firms, including strategies and results. Then check with these clients and ask for their impressions.

### (4) Seek someone with a business background.

Business professionals understand the need for cost-effectiveness and return on investment. They also understand the dynamics of business and market forces. Many of the best marketing consultants have a base education and experience in business, supplementing it with an excellent understanding of marketing management and how to generate name recognition and sales.

### (5) Ask whether they create strategies, implement them, or both.

Singular marketing activities are most effective when they are part of an overall strategic plan. Yet a great plan is less useful unless a knowledgeable person actively implements it. The most valuable consultants are able to properly analyze your business and market, develop an appropriate plan with objectives and strategies, and work with you to its successful completion.

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