

# BRANDWEEK

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## Why A Virtual Marketing Agency? Because they're Hungry, Efficient, And Won't Nickel-and-Dime You

By Gregory J. Pollack

Marketing entrepreneurs ignite your engines. The times have changed. Maybe it's due to the explosion of the Internet. Maybe it's because there are many Gen X and Y leaders making key decisions and running successful companies. Maybe it's even due in part to the national shift to corporate casual. Or maybe it's just a sign of the times.

All of these changes have created a new, bolder niche for smaller marketing firms to compete for business. And because of the sheer strength in a "virtual marketing agency," there is now room for smaller agencies to compete effectively.

Now, more than ever before, clients want people that are hungry for their business. They want to see that you are willing to do whatever it takes, learn every possible inch of their industry, and be right there with them as they grow, expand, or launch that new product in an unproven territory. And through it all, clients want loyalty and cost efficiency.

Supporting those needs, while working in full partnership, virtual agencies are proving to be effective as well as enormously targeted in providing clear, concise marketing solutions to the client. But what does it mean to have a virtual marketing agency and how can one be used correctly?

First, a virtual marketing agency is made up of many different components, usually key individuals or small companies, with

vast experiences that come together to make up one marketing firm. They are formed and designed specifically to meet the ever-changing and demanding needs of clients. So while the name virtual marketing agency may sound fancy, what it really boils down to is: "Do you have the right team to service your client?"

One of the best ways for smaller companies to compete in the fierce marketplace is to pool their collective talents and experiences to form a stronger marketing agency with varied backgrounds, as we at PBM Marketing Solutions have done in assembling strong creative and strategically sound teams that can lend expertise in every aspect of integrated marketing from brand positioning and product marketing to promotions, advertising or public relations.

**The concept allows an agency to secure a significant account while the client secures a "hungry" and dedicated team that will provide the results of a full service agency.**

For example, for a recent new-business opportunity with a global entity, we put together a team that included three separate companies utilizing each of their own strategic strengths. PBM served as the lead and primary client contact, with expertise in marketing, product marketing, event marketing and brand positioning. We brought in Leavitt-Bell Group, a Los Angeles-based strategic communications company with an emphasis in public relations, creative promotions, media relations and special events, and L.A. designer and creative director Juan Ortega from Ortega Design Group, offering expertise in advertising, Web development, graphic design and creative concept. Stronger together and more effective than we could be individually, we were able to provide

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both a one-on-one level of commitment and broad expertise to the client.

Some of the benefits of using a virtual marketing agency should be clear. Rather than just relying on general experience to offer one client, a targeted team approach allows the virtual marketing agency the ability to create a team with expertise specifically relevant to a client's needs.

Further, with a virtual team there is no need to farm out work to vendors, meaning the job can be completed on both a cost-efficient and time-efficient basis for the client. The focused attention on the client's business allows for a reduction in turnaround time to deliver results, marketing plans, marketing flow charts, strategy positioning papers, memos and the like.

And while there are clear reasons and benefits of forming a virtual marketing agency from an entrepreneurial perspective, the client will benefit as well, gaining a wide range of experience and knowledge assembled on one account team. The virtual marketing agency thus can handle a client's immediate needs and then expand its own role based on exposure within various practice groups such as business-to-business, business-to-consumer, healthcare, investor relations, dot.coms, or any given field.

As an example, let's say you are putting the finishing touches on an upcoming promotion for the client, and suddenly another need arises requiring strategic crisis management. Since, in this case, there is already a team of pr professionals on hand, appropriate agency execs can be brought in to supply additional expertise to the virtual marketing agency, expediting a solution to the client's most current challenge. In other words, the virtual marketing agency has become a full-service agency at a moment's notice.

Often the client wants to know, "Who will work on my business?" By assembling a virtual team you provide the client with the key players and senior staff that make up the account team. Basically, there will be one main client contact from the virtual marketing agency and the rest of the team will perform various individual projects to meet the

client's needs for the program, while still supplying the strategic counsel of various senior execs as needed.

One of the best advantages of hiring a virtual marketing agency is drawn from a strategic, yet cost-efficient perspective. On a virtual team, all members, including senior management, participate as needed to get the job done. This can mean everything from a menial task often doled out to lower-level account people, up to senior-level strategic thinking. Billings can be set on a project-by-project basis, rather than an hourly professional fee. While still keeping the business profitable from an agency standpoint, the client is not feeling "nickel and dimed" by hourly fees and has the advantage of working directly with top counsel as needed.

While the concept of a virtual marketing agency is not for everyone, hiring one can be a winning ticket for both agency and client: the agency is able to secure a significant account by tapping into a

diverse and wide amount of agency experience, while the client is able to secure a "hungry" and dedicated team that will meet its every need and provide the same results of a larger, full-service agency.

As corporate brands continue to compete in new channels of distribution against everyone from category leaders to niche products, and as Internet companies shift into higher gear to generate revenue and profits to satisfy venture capitalists and shareholders, now more than ever before there is an opportunity for the creation of virtual marketing agencies. ■

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